

International VIEWPOINT

International Viewpoint—magazine of the Fourth International

IV429 October 2010

PHILIPPINES

The Second Congress of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (Mindanao)

EUROPE

Europe: A continent in crisis, a rising far right

Portugal

Thailand

Brazil

France

China

Italy

Philippines

Europe

Spanish State

Ecuador

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International Viewpoint, 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93100 Montreuil, France · ISSN 0294-2925 ·
www.internationalviewpoint.org

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PORTUGAL

The Left faced with the crisis and the ideological offensive

BRUNO MAIA ·

It is by implementing the stability plan - which introduces more severe sanctions in the event of it not being implemented, authorizes the control of national budgets by the Union and makes aid conditional on drastic measures of wage-cutting and tax increases - that the Socialist Party and the Portuguese Right want to prove and distinguish themselves. To this end, as in the 1930s, the government has begun reducing nominal wages, which are scheduled to fall by 5 per cent by 2013, and tax increases [1] will have the immediate effect of a devaluation of real incomes of 2.5 per cent.

The goal of the European stability plan is clear: it is aimed at encouraging speculation, unlimited financialisation and the plundering of European economies. The 750 billion euros of the euro stabilization fund and the Draconian rules imposed on national economies must serve to save the financial system, because of the almost 7,000 billion euros of public debt over all the countries of the EU, 2,500 euros are owed to the banks. So this is a gigantic rescue operation of the financial system, undoubtedly the most important in the entire history of capitalism.

But even this transfer of value by no means guarantees the success of the rescue. Indeed, this policy option does nothing but worsen the structural problems of the economies of the euro zone, because cutting wages does not automatically lead to gains in competitiveness. The stability of the euro continues to be threatened: if the economies do not grow, all the tax adjustments will reduce demand and will only be recessionary measures; if in the

short or medium term we experience a new recession, the risk of excluding some countries from the euro zone will increase...

Social crisis

The application to Portugal of the European Stability and Growth Pact has two aims: to reduce the budget deficit quickly (by 2013) and in a Draconian fashion (from 9.3 per cent of GDP to 2 per cent). The options chosen are univocal: destruction of public social policies and dismantling of the Welfare State, this time right down to its ideological roots. It is the role of the Sócrates government, which can always count on the proud support of the Social Democratic Party (PSD, a bourgeois party which owes its name only to the climate of rejection of the bourgeoisie after the revolution of 1974, obliging big capital to cover itself with a "social" fig leaf). Although the two parties play to the gallery with their petty politicians' quarrels, they come together when it is choices of society that are at stake. All social security benefits are under attack and are in line to be plundered, from the tax on consumption to unemployment payments. The government has reduced unemployment benefits, limited them in time and modified the rules of their attribution, making them still more inaccessible. It has invented a ceiling on social security benefits that are paid out, in order to limit them, independently of social reality. Benefits thus cease to be a right and are only to be granted in situations of extreme gravity. Whereas unemployment continues to increase, the government is increasing taxes, while promising that there is more to come.

The unemployment rate is approaching 10 per cent. Moreover, even those who have a job are reduced to

poverty; the income from work is not enough to guarantee the essential needs of many families. Already nearly 18 per cent of the population live below the poverty line and, in the regions of the North of the country the threshold of 25 per cent has been crossed, while poverty increases each year. More than one million workers are in precarious employment and among the youngest workers that concerns more than a third. Temporary employment agencies are proliferating, benefiting with Sócrates from a representative in the government. The state itself employs nearly 150,000 workers illegally, whereas its function should be to guarantee employment. These figures outline the portrait of a crisis which is tearing the fabric of society.

Ideological attack against the social state

All that has been accompanied by a fierce ideological attack with the aim of preparing public opinion. As the discourse on the crisis has penetrated the whole of society, as public opinion has increasingly accepted the need to reduce expenditure and to sacrifice itself faced with the financial disaster, the discourse of the liberals has become increasingly ambitious: if the poor are poor, it is because they do not work and do not have ambition, the poor cannot manage their money and so they cannot be entitled to social security benefits... The feeling of fear of impoverishment which currently exists and which is reflected in the difficulty of reacting in the face of the attacks against workers' rights can further increase with the direct pressure that is being exerted on living conditions. Because life is going to get much worse.

During the last decade many factories have closed in Portugal, especially in the region of the North and in the interior of the country, where families and even whole populations have been devastated by unemployment every time a big company has closed in the region. In the face of that we have not seen the trade unions being much present - at the time of the majority of the factory shutdowns there was no resistance or opposition and often, without the intervention of the Left Bloc, they would have

taken place without public opinion even being informed. The trade unions and the Communist Party, contemplating their own navels, continue to mobilize their internal resources and popular indignation through routine strikes and demonstrations which have no effect other than filling the agendas of their central committees, with very few other consequences.

The government bases itself on the idea of the sacrifices that are supposedly necessary for it to conduct its fiscal policy. Its speeches proclaim that taxation makes it possible to distribute sacrifices equitably. This is a triple lie. Initially, workers' incomes will be doubly penalized, through the increase in the rates of income tax and through the increase in VAT. Next, the increase in the rate of income tax on companies is eroded by the relationship between legal taxes and real taxes [2], in particular in the banking sector. Finally, a fair distribution of sacrifices would imply the concentration of the revenues from taxes on the highest incomes, leaving out those who have already been affected by other austerity measures, which is by no means the case.

The PSD, the principal party of the right-wing opposition, whose new leader Passos Coelho makes no secret of his ultraliberalism, has made its priority the modification of the Constitution in order to delete the articles concerning education and health, which characterize them as public services. Passos Coelho knows very well that it is not the Constitution that has obstructed the successive attacks of liberal governments over the last twenty years. His strategy is purely ideological. He aspires to be the Prime Minister who will destroy even the formal roots of the social state and all that remains of social solidarity in a country on the edge of rupture. So the fiercest neo-liberal attacks in the history of Portugal and an ideological debate increasingly distant from what interests workers complement each other to inflict a profound defeat on the workers and to drive back social struggles, the trade union movement and the political Left. At the same time, the discourse of the trade unions, still under the control of the Portuguese Communist Party and

more and more removed from the concerns of the majority of workers, leaves the field free for the Right and the liberals to impose the debate on the end of the social state and the return to social assistance, presented as the only possible form of solidarity!

The response of the Left

The Left can hope for nothing from the institutions of the European Union and cannot place any trust in them to confront the crisis: these institutions are the promoters of the crisis and of the transfer of the value of labour towards capital. As the Left Bloc has argued since its creation, without a re-foundation of Europe, with a pact for employment which would substitute its rules and its institutions for those of the Stability and Growth Pact and the Treaty of Lisbon, there will be no European policy to face up to the crisis, but there will still be European policies which will worsen it as well as the recession.

The role of the Left Bloc of left is to combat these institutions and these policies, which on the pretext of a response to the crisis impose new austerity measures. This combat extends today to the fight against the project of a European directory imposing limits on national budget deficits and entitling the (European) Council of Ministers of Finance to ratify the budgets. We consider in fact that we have to differentiate the domains where we need European solidarity and common policies from those where we need more national freedom in order to protect jobs and solutions that are viable for economies.

But we do not have any illusions about the relationship of forces: none of the existing governments in Europe defends a perspective of reinforcing the role of work in the rebuilding of the economy, and the convergences between liberalism and social democracy are structural (even if, sometimes, some parties take different positions). It is thus fundamental that the Left stresses other dimensions of the fight against financial globalization, in particular the means of action which permit economic choices that are favourable to employment.

Employment contracts, wages, the reduction of precarious work and the defence of social security are the central points of action for a viable alternative strategy. The generalization of employment contracts, the fixing of wages independently of the financial conjuncture and of speculation and the institutionalization of social protection not only have an effect of redistributing wealth that no other policy has ever attained, but they also have an automatic effect of stabilization of the economy because of their effect on demand. If the theoretical framework of the capitalist economy can still take on board such responses, that is no longer the case of the financial capitalism which produced the present crisis (what today makes it a kind of "transitional measure").

The defence of autonomous fiscal policies constitutes another fundamental pillar of a response from the left. The increase in revenues from taxes is the only possible response to the snowballing debt and thus to the financial markets. And it is a crucial question of economic democracy, which goes against one of the most violent forms of accumulation, constituted by tax avoidance and tax incentives. The Left Bloc thus defends, on a European scale, control of the financial system against speculation, starting with authoritarian measures such as the ending of offshore tax havens and the taxation of financial transactions: a tax of 0.1 per cent on financial transactions (already known as the Tobin Tax) would represent revenues of 920 billion euros, that is to say more than the whole of the European stability plan.

In order to oppose the destruction of social services, the Left must support qualified public investments, with clear priorities. The Bloc has proposed that priority is given to urban rehabilitation, which will have effects on the reduction of the debt, the creation of employment and the reduction of the cost of housing. At the same time we have refused and we fight against any reduction of the job-creating investments that are envisaged and we stress that the ideological offensive against public invest-

ments constitutes one of the principal fronts where the Right has gone on to the attack.

The ideological battle is now a fundamental question of the social transformation. We have to recognize that our field of battle is more reduced than it was five or ten years ago. We know that the crisis and the ideology of sacrifice have inflicted many defeats on the Left, in fundamental battles and have had the effect, in Portugal, of making workers' struggles less visible or less ambitious in their still obvious objectives. So the battle for public opinion, in order to prevent workers' struggles from being isolated, constitutes one of the axes of our fight. We must overcome the strategy of fear represented by the propaganda of the PS and the PSD, which aims at the acceptance of all "sacrifices" in the name of the international dangers. If this ideology of sacrifice carries the day, the workers' movement will suffer a defeat. For this reason the Bloc has reinforced its agitation and its propaganda on the subsidies to millionaires, the bonuses, the accumulation of the rising bourgeoisie and the financial operators, because that is the best way of fighting the ideology of sacrifice. We denounce these cases by name, we indicate the transfers that are carried out for speculation and greed.

The generalized struggle requires the accumulation of forces. The difficulties of the recent strikes are in this respect well-known. The Left Bloc will choose in its own time the forms of confrontation with the government. These can consist, on the institutional terrain, in the vote of a motion of censure, the demand for a vote of a motion of confidence, as well as in the presentation of alternative propositions in order to confront the parties - the PS and its alliance with the PSD and even with the CDS-PP [3] - with their electoral promises and the social crisis which the Socialist government has caused. The Left Bloc is also working to strengthen the participation of its members in the trade unions and in the alternative forms of struggle which are appearing (the organizations of precarious workers, which are just beginning to develop), in order to be closer

to the new workers and the new unemployed, with a language that is closer to their reality.

The presidential campaign

The next presidential campaign is approaching [4]. It will oppose Manuel Alegre [5] to the current President of the Republic, Aníbal Cavaco Silva (PSD). Although revolutionary strategy will be absent from this debate and the two orientations involved are within the framework of capitalism, they are diametrically opposed and the stakes are very high.

The outgoing president, Cavaco Silva, has always supported the policy of privatization of public services and cuts in social security benefits of the Socialist government. He was an enthusiastic defender of Prime Minister Sócrates during the preparation of the new Labour Code, which called into question social rights beyond what anyone had dared to propose in Portugal since April 25, 1974. And if he did not support Sócrates, it was only when the latter took some progressive steps: so he was opposed to the revision of the law on divorce and to the approval of gay marriage... In short, he is a ferocious neo-liberal, heir to Thatcher and Reagan, and a Catholic conservative of the old school.

Facing him, Manuel Alegre has a long history of opposition to the worst antisocial policies of the government. Several times he has been among the main adversaries of Sócrates, of the Right and of the policies which have most devastated the social state. Over the last five years he has been, in Parliament, alongside the Left Bloc at the times when tensions were sharpest.

It is for this reason that, for the Left Bloc, there was no other choice: we had to be on the side of the barricade in opposition to Cavaco and we did not hesitate to support the candidature of Manuel Alegre.

These elections will be a moment of intense ideological discussion on the crisis, the recession and the responses of the Left. In this debate Manuel Alegre is not the candidate of the PS, he started out

as a candidate opposed to the PS, opposed to the orientation of its leadership, an independent candidate to whom the Left Bloc was the first party to give its support. Socrates and his men of straw started by rejecting this candidature, because not only had it been announced without the assent of the PS, but especially because in their eyes it was opposed to the government and all that it has represented over the five last years. The support, late

and embarrassed, that the PS finally brought to Alegre has no other aim than to avoid the scenario of the 2006 presidential election, when Manuel Alegre won more than a million votes, surpassing the Socialist governmental candidate, Mario Soares, who was the big loser in these elections.

Lisbon, August 2010

THAILAND

What is at stake in the crisis?

DANIELLE SABAI ·

In its brutality and breadth, this repression amounts to a declaration of war launched by the traditional elites against all the opposition sectors, including those inside the bourgeoisie: no free elections, no compromise!

Thus no response has as yet been given by the government led by Abhisit Vejjajiva to the social, political and institutional problems which are at the origin of the kingdom's crisis. The rejection front constituted – faced with the demand for democratic elections – by the royal family, the military hierarchy, the upper bureaucracy, the other more conservative sectors of the dominant classes and the higher layers of the Bangkok middle classes will however face a difficult period with the predicted death of king Bhumibol.

The future of Thailand now appears highly uncertain and it is very hard for us to predict how the situation will develop, but the stakes are considerable. The country is shaken by several deep intertwining crises which concern both the place of the monarchy and the army, the divisions inside the bourgeoisie, the relations between social classes "from above" and "from below, the institutions and the political system, the dominant "values" or again the country's insertion in the world economy.

The impossible reform?

The current crisis marks the defeat of the attempts at democratic reform begun in 1992. In 1991, the army brutally repressed the democratic demonstrations but, following the protests raised about this bloodbath, it was forced to withdraw to barracks and undertake to "depoliticise" itself. Was it going to effectively withdraw from political life in a country which had essentially lived under military jun-

tas or authoritarian regimes with a parliamentary facade since the Second World War?

The army represented a very significant economic power in the country and its forced withdrawal after the massacre of 1992 allowed businessmen who were not part of the traditional elites to enter politics. Becoming Prime Minister in 2001, Thaksin Shinawatra incarnated the new ambitions of this sector of the wealthy classes. He came up against the alliance between the monarchy, the high bureaucracy and the army, the pillars of the regime. He challenged the balance of power by affirming himself at the national scale as the "protector of the poor" a role devolved to the king. Thaksin was no democrat. He gave authorisation to the Bangkok police to kill suspects freely in the name of the war on drugs, while in the name of the war against Islamist irredentism the army carried out blind repression in the southern provinces. But he financed social programmes and by loosening the grip of the institutions opened a breach which allowed popular aspirations to be expressed.

Unable to compete with Thaksin at the electoral level and to retake the reins of power, the traditional elites responded to this reformist direction with the military coup of September 19, 2006, then in 2008 two judicial coups to unseat two "pro-Thaksin" governments. Having retaken power, they began a veritable counter reform, casting aside the Constitution of 1997, the most democratic that the country had known (everything is relative). The military drew up a new constitution which the junta had ratified by referendum in late 2007. Its drawing up led to numerous debates, the most reactionary forces organised in the People's Alliance for Democracy (PAD- the "Yellow Shirts") demanding the establishment of an income based electoral sys-

tem, allowing the marginalisation of the popular layers at the institutional level.

Since then the army has completely rejoined the political arena, with Prime Minister Abhisit even taking refuge inside a military base to govern during the two and a half months of crisis!

What is at stake in the current crisis goes well beyond the question of repression alone: it concerns first and foremost a redefinition of the political regime. A question all the more crucial in that the monarchy and the army leadership are directly part of the Thai bourgeoisie. The royal family is according to the magazine "Forbes" the richest such family in the world with land, industrial and commercial interests of the first order. The army as an institution is also an economic power of the first level and it ensures the wealth of many retired generals.

Stuck in the past, incapable of self reform, the traditional elites remain powerful. Tokyo and the Western capitals have been careful not to denounce the violations of democracy and human rights committed by Bangkok. But the social immobilism of the élites nonetheless worries international business circles. The latter have not forgotten that it was under Thaksin that neoliberal policies were implemented facilitating the insertion of the country within globalisation. Thailand is also the only country in the region where social inequalities have got worse. Thus, the influential "Economist" magazine has published highly severe editorials and articles on the situation in the kingdom. It was notably the first journal to criticise the current role of the monarchy.

In Thailand fractures can also appear inside the army. The crushing of the Red Shirts in May restored an important weight inside it to generals close to the very influential chief advisor of the king Prem Tinsulanonda and to the queen. The army commander in chief, Anupong Paochinda, was replaced in September following his retirement by general Prayuth Chan-Ocha, a partisan of the hard line, very anti-Thaksin and ultra royalist. Faced with the coming political turbulences, it is however

not impossible that this hegemony is contested in the army by "watermelon" factions, "green on the outside but red within" who do not wish the army to be used to repress the people. Opposition could also come from career soldiers overlooked because they do not belong to the currently dominant circle.

The situation is still more unstable since the king, Bhumibol, is very ill and must die soon, which will open a serious crisis of succession and probably an intensification of factional conflicts inside the elites and the army. The designated heir to the throne, prince Vajiralongkorn, is utterly without the aura of his father.

A renewal on the left?

The rebirth of a militant left in Thailand constitutes a second major stake in the ongoing conflicts. Here again, nothing is settled in advance. The political left has not existed in Thailand for nearly three decades. As to the social left, it was very much weakened at the time of the 2006 coup. That is why the crisis first took the form of a conflict between factions of the dominant classes. But the crisis has deepened and the underlying class contradictions have emerged.

The weakness of the Thai left has old roots. The Communist movement appeared timidly in the late 1920, but not in very favourable conditions. The country had never been colonised and the industrial revolution came late, so Communism was not able to forge itself inside a vast liberation struggle or a developed working class. The (small) working class was ethnically segmented and the Communist movement was above all present among Chinese immigrants. Until the early 1970s, peasants could still establish themselves on new land which helped contain the rural crisis. Each region has its own political and social history: north-east, north, central plain, south... Repression made the survival of legal organisations very uncertain

However, in an explosive international context (Thailand serving as "aircraft carrier" to the US forces fighting in Indochina), the country experi-

enced a "revolutionary" decade, inaugurated in 1973 by the overthrow of the military dictatorship. Several left organisations then formed a common front, but only the Communist Party (CPT) was in a position to coordinate action in the various regions and social milieus. Unhappily, faced with the Sino-Indochinese conflict in 1978 and very dependent on Beijing, it entered into crisis. Its defeat, completed by the early 1980s, and the end of the armed struggle closed this revolutionary decade.

Since the disappearance of the CPT as an active force, there has no longer been a left party in Thailand, whether reformist or revolutionary, which can claim to represent the popular layers. Many activists tried at the end of the 1980s to constitute new political groups. Some made contact with the Fourth International and participated in the activities of the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Amsterdam, but all these attempts failed. There were reasons for this which were specific to Thailand: the CPT was truly a "jungle party", with the great majority of its members living in the guerrilla camps; leaving them, they were without resources or any local organisation to support them. Those who left did so in great numbers but individually, not through structured splits.

In these conditions, clientelism undermined the independence of the social movements and of trades unionism. Numerous former CPT militants joined Thaksin to establish policies in favour of the poorest but remained silent on the democratic questions. Today still, the trade union movement has not overcome this situation of dependency and its weaknesses. No union was in a position to organise support strikes for the Red Shirts during the crisis.

The experience of the 1970s has nonetheless left traces. Activist links were built between towns and villages, between provinces, between (former) students, workers and peasants. While new peasant movements were born with the growth of inequality or in defence of resources which the army or private interests had commandeered (access to water or the forest and so on), this led to the birth of the

Assembly of the Poor in 1995, on December 10, the international day of human rights. It included above all the rural movements of the North and North-East, but also organisations of fishers from the South or workers from the region of Bangkok. The functioning of the Assembly represented both a break with the very centralist tradition of the CTT and with lobbyism or traditional clientelism.

The Assembly of the Poor organised big mobilisations in the capital with massive support from provincial demonstrators. Even if its capacity for action subsequently declined and it was confronted by its own limits, it did in its turn contribute to the profound renewal of the activist "savoir faire" of the popular movements.

What will happen today? Could a new social and political left be born thanks to the experience of the Red Shirts? That is the fear of the élites. It is also what the rapid evolution of this composite movement could lead to.

Evolutions and clarifications

In some years of crisis, the social and democratic issues have clarified, as have the conflicts raging in the dominant classes.

The Yellow Shirts. The "yellows" originally brought together all those who opposed, for various and sometimes contradictory reasons, Prime Minister Thaksin. They benefitted from the support of the media and governments following the coup of 2006. They were thus able to occupy with impunity the two international and domestic airports in Bangkok at the end of November 2008, which led to much more chaos than the much decried occupation of the commercial neighbourhood of Rajaprasong by the "reds".

In essence the Yellow Shirts today support the monarchy and fight for a restricted suffrage. Thus, defending these "ultra" positions they threatened to go back into the street to prevent the Abhisit government from negotiating with the Red Shirts for early elections.

NGOs and associations. Numerous Thai NGOs participated in the demonstrations of 2005 and 2006 which led to the fall of Thaksin and hailed the coup of September 19, 2006. However, more militant movements mobilised against the putsch in the name of democracy, reflecting very significant divisions among NGOs.

Since then some NGOs which had participated in the movement against Thaksin have evolved significantly: pro-"yellow" in the beginning, they became "neutral" when the social force of the "reds" was affirmed ("against violence from wherever it comes"), and now denounce the massive repression suffered by the Red Shirts as the authoritarian features of the regime have been reinforced.

The Red Shirts. Whatever the initial role of Thaksin Shinawatra it would be wrong to see the popular participation in the mobilisations as only the "clientele" of a rich bourgeois. The Red Shirts express in their way all the facets of a global crisis of society, including the crisis of the dominant ideology with the loss of prestige of the royal family (they are often perceived as "anti-monarchy").

Thaksin has conserved a significant influence inside the Red Shirts through his links with the main leaders of the United Front for Democracy Against Dictatorship (UDD) which provides the framework of the movement. Taking account of the non-existence of left wing parties and the weakness of the trade unions, the popular currents have no specific popular representation at the national scale. That is what renders it more difficult to analyse this movement and its internal relations of force.

The Red Shirt movement is not without problems; it is obviously characterised by political cleavages which are more or less formalised. But it has been carried along by three legitimate demands.

A democratic demand. Repeatedly the parties favourable to Thaksin have won elections (very convincingly). Each time they have been struck down military or judicial coups. Thailand is one of the (rare?) countries where the members of the élite, indeed the middle classes of Bangkok, declare

openly that the "ignorant", namely the poor, should not vote, and that politics should be the business of the well-educated only.

A social demand. There is ample evidence as to the sharpened consciousness among the demonstrators of the social inequalities which characterise the kingdom. Just as striking has been the class hatred expressed without reserve by the Bangkok establishment against the "hordes" of the "poor" who "invaded" their capital.

Regional demands. For a long time the élites of Bangkok have had a reputation for draining the wealth of the country to their profit alone, which strengthens regionalist sentiments not only in the Muslim far south but also in the north and north east (the traditions of the left being moreover stronger in this latter region).

All these demands are legitimate and worthy of support.

The crisis of the dominant ideology

Not having been shattered by a colonial conquest, the institutions of the kingdom have known greater continuity than neighbouring countries. But the current crisis challenges the (superficial) image of a Thailand which is consensual, hierarchical, organised around royalty, Buddhism and the nation, where all accept the place allotted to them. The reality of social and political conflict appears in broad daylight – and not, moreover, for the first time.

The "revolution of 1932" imposed a passage from absolute to constitutional monarchy. Immediately after the Second World War, the authority of the royal family fell still further, after the murder of Ananda Mahidol (Rama VIII), before Bhumibol Adulyadej (Rama IX), his brother, acceded to the throne in 1946. This was again the case after the bloody coup of 1976.

An "official" description of the Thai kingdom was imposed in the universities and media. In reality, royal prestige was not something "natural", but was reconstituted very systematically, in particular under the dictatorship of Sarit Thanarat with US aid.

More recently, Bhumibol's authority was strengthened by the role he played during the crisis of 1992. But he has also used his authority to back coups and bloodbaths.

Today, the dominant ideology ("king, religion, nation") seems again contested and the road is open to the affirmation of popular and critical ideologies. This is not the least important aspect of the current crisis.

International solidarity: an urgent need

Given the violence of the repression and what is at stake in the Thai crisis, it is extremely important that the popular movements receive effective international support. To do this it is however necessary to overcome a triple liability. Despite the participation in the global justice movement of some organisations based in Thailand, there is no existing tradition of solidarity in relation to this country, so it must be reconstituted. Many NGOs present in the kingdom have contributed to giving a very negative image of the Red Shirts in their international networks. Many far left currents continue to associate this movement with Thaksin and do not grasp the social polarisation which exists.

Taking account of these problems, the impact of the first solidarity initiatives is encouraging. This is notably the case for the Appeal published on June 20, 2010. It has now received nearly 700 signatures. Among them are many Thais who we had not expected to sign, given the risks. We also note the

presence of some renowned experts on South East Asia and the large number of countries represented (around fifty) thanks notably to Thai emigration, but also to the activist networks which have often served as relays to spread this appeal.

There are also a number of signatories who are absent, notably among elected representatives, which poses problems. But it is the first time for several decades that Thailand has featured as a subject of international solidarity. A first step has been taken. Now it is necessary to keep up the pressure so that the regime cannot pursue its repression with indifference and to make this solidarity lasting. It is not only about bringing our support to the victims of repression punctually, but also in the long term.

The Thai elites wish to smother the rebirth of a democratic and popular movement in the cradle. They use all means to do this: prolongation of the state of emergency in numerous provinces, arrests in the hundreds, censorship and recourse to laws like the "crime" of *lèse-majesté* (punishable by 3 to 15 years in prison) or computing "crime" (which allows the blocking of thousands of Internet sites), institutional counter-reforms, reactivation of far right royalist militias, extra-judicial killings and so on. The regime benefits from the support given by the USA and to a lesser extent Europe which show little concern over the violation of human rights in the kingdom. The Thai activists, the Red Shirts, deserve our solidarity.

BRAZIL

Resolution of the national directorate of the PSOL on the 2nd round

The Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL) won the confidence of more than one million Brazilians who voted in the elections of 2010. Our bold militancy was decisive in defending our proposals for the country, and it delivered a victorious result.

We are honoured because we had Plinio Arruda Sampaio and Hamilton Assis as candidates for the Presidency and Vice Presidency of the Republic, who in a dignified manner were spokespersons for our project of social transformation for Brazil. We welcome the election of three federal MEPs (Ivan Valente/SP, Chico Alencar/RJ and Jean Wyllys/RJ), four state deputies (Marcelo Freixo/RJ, Janira Rocha/RJ, Carlos Giannazi/SP and Edmilson Rodrigues/PA) and two senators (Randolfe Rodrigues/AP and Marinor Brito/PA). We regret Heloísa Helena's non-election to the Senate in Alagoas and the non-reelection of our federal deputy Luciana Genro in Rio Grande do Sul, as well as comrade Raul Marcelo, current state deputy of the PSOL.

In 2010, the people face again a second round between PSDB and PT. Our position of independence supporting neither of the two candidacies is founded on the fact that neither of them has any engagement with the programmatic points defended by the PSOL. This being so, independent of whoever the next government is, we will be a left and programmatic opposition, defending the following agenda: an audit of the public debt, a change of economic policy, priority for health and education, reduction of the working day to 40 hours a week, defence of the environment, defence of human rights according to the proposals of the Human Rights Commission, land and urban ecological reform and a broad political reform - the end of pri-

vate financing in favour of exclusive public funding, as a way of combating corruption in politics.

However, the PSOL is concerned about the growing conservative direction introduced by the PSDB DEM alliance, wishing to reduce the debate to religious and false moralist themes, thus blocking the big topics of interest of the country. On the other hand, this direction leads the candidacy of Dilma to assume a more conservative position, renouncing the progressive points of her programme of government and reacting inside the field of conservative ideas and not against them. For the PSOL the only way to combat the retrogression is to stand firm in the defence of banners which raise the consciousness of our people and the level of political debate in Brazilian society.

The elections of 2002 which led to the Lula victory brought a message from the people in favour of profound changes. Today we know that Lula did not honour it, failed in his campaign promises and governed for the bankers, in alliance with reactionary oligarchs like Sarney, Collor and Renan Calheiros. But the popular sentiment for change in 2002 was also a rejection of neo-liberal policies with their consequential privatisations and criminalisation of social movements, which continued in the Lula Government- and revocation of labour and social rights.

For this reason, the PSOL reaffirms its commitment to the demands of the social movements and the needs of the Brazilian people. We are an independent party and we will form a programmatic opposition to whatever is to come. In this second round, we maintain a strong opposition to the candidacy of Serra, declaring unitarily "NO VOTE FOR SERRA", because we consider that he represents the return to a right wing, conservative neoliberal

offensive in the country. At the same time, we do not support the campaign of Dilma who rejected systematically in the first round the positions defended by the candidacy of the PSOL and maintained commitments to the bankers and neo-liberal policies. Before the second round and in the current conjuncture, two positions are recognized by the national directorate of our party as legitimate

options existing in our militancy: a spoiled ballot or a critical vote for Dilma.

The most important thing, therefore is that we prepare for the struggles that are coming in the next period to defend the rights of the workers and oppressed people of our country.

National Directorate of the PSOL – October 15, 2010.

FRANCE

An unprecedented movement which is far from over.

SANDRA DEMARCO

That is why the demonstrations, although repetitive, are not shrinking and are even beating records, in particular those on October 12 and 19 when 3.5 million people were on the streets. The gatherings are increasingly combative and radical. The private sector is highly mobilised and now youth (at this stage essentially high school students) have also entered into mobilisation. Because the youth have understood that their access to a job in the short term and to a pension at full rate in good health were highly compromised by this reform.

Little by little the environment has changed, many of us, very many, think that victory is possible, that we can defeat Sarkozy. Already, at this stage of the mobilisation, the government has lost the battle of public opinion. 70% of the population support the mobilisations and oppose this reform. Today, the majority of the workers, those in precarious jobs, and youth know that the question of pensions is neither a demographic question nor one of financing as the government has tried to have us believe for some months.

The strike has little by little become a feature of the landscape. With each day of strikes and demonstrations, it has appeared increasingly obviously to numerous sectors that staggered days were not enough to defeat the government. In fact, ongoing strike action has never been so much discussed in all sectors of activity as in recent weeks, to the point that 61% of those polled favour prolonged strikes. The problem is precisely the leaderships of the trade union confederations who, even if they are pushed by the rank and file to continue, make sure they avoid calling for a general strike. Since the beginning of the movement, trade union unity has undoubtedly been a gain, a point of support in

the success of the days of strikes and demonstrations. But the inter union coordination has not called for a major social confrontation with this government, and no longer demands the withdrawal of the draft legislation, instead proposing new negotiations and amendments.

The key sectors of the economy have however decided to launch or broaden prolonged strikes. This is the case for example with the rail workers, EDF centres and refineries. In the latter sector this has not been seen since May 68. Since October 14, the 13 refineries are taking ongoing strike action with a total halt to the installation and shipping of fuel to service stations and depots. The strike is huge, renewed with virtual unanimity.

This movement is on the move everywhere, with every day new initiatives, blockade actions (toll points, roads, airports, industrial zones and so on), and local demonstrations taking place in a unitary and inter-professional fashion. Mass meetings of the different mobilised sectors are also taking place every day, small at the beginning, they are increasingly significant now. But it should also be noted that if there are numerous strikes here and there in the public as in the private sector, ongoing action remains still too scattered and a minority phenomenon and the rate of strikes during the national strike days is high but not extraordinary.

For some days and in particular since the day of strikes and demonstrations on October 19, young people have participated fully in the mobilisation, with very significant and dynamic contingents and many high schools blockaded. There is a determination and politicisation here that was not there in previous mobilisations. The more they are said to be manipulated and the more their right to demonstrate is contested, the more their determination grows. The mobilisation in the universities is taking

off, little by little. It is the big issue in the coming day, on the eve of the high school holidays.

Faced with this situation, the right, the employers, the government and Sarkozy remain determined to defend this unjust reform. Sarkozy is intent on a test of strength. The use of force is patent as shown by the police intervention against the refinery strikers or against the high school students, strong-arm tactics in parliament and the rejection of any discussion even with the most moderate union leaders. Their determination is understandable since this reform is for them at the heart of their austerity policy to ensure the crisis is paid for by those who are not responsible for it. Success with this reform will boost the financial markets but it is also the opportunity in France to change the relationship of forces and the distribution of wealth in favour of the richest. It is also a chance to get rid of the "social and fiscal burden" which is the legacy of old struggles and to bring the most resistant sectors to their knees. The key element for Sarkozy is also to rally his own camp some months prior to the presidential election. However, he is still far from victory and he has not broken or silenced the resistance.

The breadth of this mobilisation indicates the possibility of defeating the government. That is why the overall unity of the social and political left in this struggle is imperative. That is the meaning of the commitment of the NPA [Nouveau parti anti-capitaliste – New Anti-capitalist Party] in all the unitary and political initiatives allowing regroupment of our forces and in particular through the national collective initiated by the Fondation

Copernic and Attac. But this unity around the slogan "pensions at 60 and withdrawal of the draft law" does not hide certain disagreements on the basis and on the strategy of 'action in particular with the Socialist Party. The latter defends the pension at 60 but voted with the deputies of the right on increasing the number of annuities to 41.5, which in fact destroys the idea of defending the pension at 60. Also faced with the growing mobilisation, we prepare for the 2012 presidential election. When there are divergences with the left of the left, in particular with the Parti de Gauche of Jean-Luc Melechon, they concern essentially action strategy. The latter defends the immediate perspective of a referendum which would shift the mobilisation from the street to the institutional level at a time when the social test of forces is still before us!

The NPA has appeared since the beginning of the mobilisation as a party organising struggle, seeking unity around political objectives and demands: the withdrawal and undoubtedly now the abrogation of the law and the resignation of those responsible for the social crisis, Sarkozy and Woerth. We also develop anti-capitalist perspectives though an emergency social and political plan to beat the crisis.

The coming days will be decisive. The law will be voted through but that will not silence or halt this mobilisation because for all those who are today on the streets, on strike, this regime is illegitimate. Also, we know that a law which is enacted can be withdrawn in this country - this has already happened with the First Employment Contract [Contrat Première embauche] in 2007.

One to watch, then...

CHINA

A workers' spring in the heart of "the workshop of the world"

DANIELLE SABAI ·

Honda Foshan, an exemplary strike

The strike wave began in the Honda Foshan factory. Despite the dismissal of the strike leaders and attempts to divide the leadership, Honda workers remained united during the two-week conflict. In this factory, 80% of workers are students at technical schools under a "house" contract of employment. They are not protected by the labour laws in force and their wages are very much lower than those of regular workers.

The conflict was initiated by these students who were born after 1980 and who have never experienced the Maoist era. Their strike showed their commitment to upholding their human dignity by starting to impose decent working conditions. There was no longer any question of sacrificing one's life and accepting the worst injustices in the name of the interests of the company and the sense of hierarchy. They have not hesitated to expose a growth model based on cheap labour and fierce exploitation of labour power but also the lack of any sense of decency of the corporations, who pay very low wages while making exorbitant profits. At the same time, the wave of suicides at the Taiwanese factory Foxconn, an electronics giant, which supplies components to Dell, Apple and Hewlett Packard, highlighted the trials experienced by workers in these factories organized as prisons

It is this iron discipline combined with low wages which has seduced the multinationals and contributed to making China the "workshop of the world". A workshop that resembles a penal colony. In an unprecedented event, Honda's young workers

did not mobilize for the payment of wages or enforcement of their rights, as is generally the case in labour conflicts in China, but to get a real wage increase. They demanded an immediate substantial increase of 800 Yuan on the basic wage, i.e. prior to overtime, and a minimum annual increase of 15%. This strike forced Honda to stop production in the country for several days because of the shortage of spare parts caused by the conflict. Honda had to hold negotiations with the representatives designated by the strikers and accept significant increases in wages and improved working conditions.

The victory of the Honda Foshan workers was a formidable example of working-class combativity. In the aftermath, subsidiaries of Honda, Toyota, Mitsumi Electric, Nippon Sheet Glass, Atsumitec and others were affected by labour conflicts and were forced to concede wage increases, the main demand of the various conflicts. The press reported that some companies and even the provincial authorities have not waited for possible conflicts to increase the wages of their employees!

The grapes of wrath

These wage demands are not a surprise. At the lowest level of the workforce there is a population of approximately 130 million migrants fleeing rural poverty. This population provides the majority of the unskilled labour for the corporations and multinationals that are installed in the big Chinese manufacturing cities such as Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Suzhou or in the big urban centres like Shanghai and Beijing where they supply the construction sector. With the Hukou (certificate of residence) system, migrant workers are not recognized by the authorities as urban workers. As a result, they are vul-

nerable because they are "undocumented" in their own country. They do not have access to public services and therefore have no minimum social protection. Their children are not entitled to attend state schools. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, they currently earn an average of 1,348 Yuan per month, i.e. just under \$200. This is not sufficient to cover inflation and despite annual increases of 10-15%, wages remain particularly low.

Chinese workers have witnessed the explosion in the number of luxurious shopping malls to satisfy the conspicuous consumption of a middle class of around 300 million people, not to mention the nouveaux riches and bureaucrats. However, workers have benefited little from this huge economic growth. Social inequalities have increased, in particular between the cities and the countryside. An economic study suggests that between 1995 and 2004, the "cost" of labour increased threefold in the big companies but that at the same time productivity had increased fivefold, leading to a fall in unit labour costs of 43% [1]. To further illustrate the point, we note that the share of income taken by labour fell by 10% in 15 years leading to a fall in household consumption. The current wage increases are therefore only a beginning in rebalancing the share of national income in favour of the workers.

Workshop of the world versus supermarket

From the viewpoint of the authorities, these wage increases are welcome for two reasons. Firstly, the Government wants a revival of domestic consumption to offset the slowdown in exports. In addition, wage increases are also synonymous with the improvement of living conditions, which is not insignificant for the maintenance of political stability. The workers' struggles of recent months have developed in foreign, mainly Japanese, companies. This has allowed the government to suggest that foreign companies are responsible for working-class anger while strengthening nationalist sentiments.

Indeed, the Government has more to gain in obtaining concessions from big multinationals than

by repressing workers' struggles. It does not really fear that conflicts and wage increases will render the country less attractive. Wage costs in China, though decisive for highly export oriented companies, are not the only argument justifying the investment of foreign companies. The average monthly wage in Thailand, Philippines, Viet Nam and Indonesia is now less than the monthly Chinese wage [2]. But the reservoir of labour in these countries is incomparably more restricted. In addition, all companies can relocate easily. This is for example the case with care, steel and chemical companies. For most companies, the main argument for investment lies in the immense nature of the growing domestic market while consumption stagnates in Western countries experiencing crisis. With an increase in wages, the market should be even more lucrative. No investor will be unaware of the fact.

More than relocations abroad, the increased "cost" of labour and increased conflicts incline the big multinationals towards "relocation" of factories within the Chinese territory. Companies prefer to leave the coast to relocate in the interior of the country where land and wages are much cheaper. This industrial reorganization could allow them to overcome the depletion of labour in the coastal industrial areas, the result of the geographical fragmentation of the labour market. According to Deng Quheng of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and Li Shi of Beijing Normal University, there are still 70 million rural Chinese workers liable to work in industry. But the Hukou system and the fear of losing their plot of land if they do not maintain it prevents them seeking work in the coastal cities. In addition the Chinese population is aging. One-sixth of non migrants say they are too old to leave even if they are under 40 [3].

Workers' rights strengthened

Renewed working-class combativity, reinforced by the victories in the spring struggles, is probably also powered by the new labour law. Introduced on January 1, 2008, the "law on work contracts in the

People's Republic of China" is "one of the most important elements of labour legislation drawn up for more than ten years". [4]. One of the main objectives is to limit abuse of employees through dismissals and the non-payment of wages. The government is aware that the dynamic of workers' struggles around these issues can be dangerous for it. The government would also hope for better protection for workers allowing a fall in the high turnover in the enterprises. In the 1980s and 1990s, employees left a company when they were not satisfied by their wages or working conditions and went to look for work elsewhere. They had no other choice because state repression prevented any collective organization in the workplace. The official trade union federation avoided struggles. With the decrease in the labour force working in the coastal areas and the ageing of the population, as well as a more qualified workforce, authorities and businesses need to stabilize a labour force whose demands are also more far-reaching.

It is the young migrants who have benefited most from the new law, probably because they have access to more information from the Internet. To find them in the struggles that have affected the Japanese companies is not surprising. These young people are better educated and are assigned to more skilled jobs that require greater skills. A world separates them from their parents who remained in the countryside. These young workers, all single children, aspire to a decent life in large urban centres that it is impossible to achieve with their wages. This is why the workers' victories in recent months will probably have important consequences on the social situation. The government is gambling that higher wages will ease social tensions. But it is not unlikely that the strikes of spring and summer could spread.

All the more so in that one of the most striking facts concerning the struggles in the Honda factories was the clear rejection by the strikers of the official union, controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, the "All Chinese Federation of Trade Unions" (ACFTU). These representatives were widely discredited by their violent actions against workers in struggle, appearing as strike breakers alongside the management. In at least three Honda plants, striking workers requested the right to elect their own representatives and the reorganization of the trade union, an affront to the representatives of the ACFTU. On the contrary, these "trade unionists" systematically took the side of the bosses and proved to be zealous auxiliaries of the police. In these particularly difficult circumstances, the ability of the Honda workers to self-organise is a remarkable feat. These forms of self-organization have fostered the development of a new working class consciousness.

The proliferation of conflicts has been concentrated in the economic field, but the authorities remain attentive to the possibility that this could be transformed into a widespread political challenge. The experience of strikes in the Honda plant shows that it will be more difficult in the future for the government to control struggles through a largely discredited single trade union federation. New generations of workers have shown that they are ready to organize collectively and to claim a real part of the fruits of growth. The Chinese working class is not docile, it has been able to show its strength and its fighting spirit. It is also remarkable to note that in Bangladesh, Viet Nam and Cambodia similar struggles for wage increases have developed in recent months. Poverty is not then inevitable.

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FRANCE

An explosive situation

SANDRA DEMARCO ·

The mobilization has been growing since the start of the mobilizations in May and the first day of action in June. Since the beginning of September three days of strikes and demonstrations (the 7th and 23rd of September and the 2nd of October) have brought out 3 million people on each occasion. The CGT estimates that 5 million people have participated in the strikes and demonstrations since the start.

On each day of action, we have seen that there are more private sector workers, more young people – even high school students are beginning to mobilise and block their schools – and more radical demands.

Popular rejection of Sarkozy's policies

The battle against the draft law on pensions also shows a massive rejection of the whole politics of Sarkozy. There is not only the question of the pension, numerous sectors are extremely mobilized, on strike on various topics: post offices, in hospitals, the nurse-anaesthetists, the dockers...

Faced with this resistance, the government is more and more unpopular. These accumulated difficulties are provoking a crisis within the right.

To try to reassert his control, Sarkozy has stressed his racist and security policies, in relation to the Roms in particular. But also in the last few weeks, the government has tried to make people forget the social question by advancing the terrorist danger. But without much success.

Dissatisfaction is growing and the situation is "explosive". Faced with the success of the demonstrations and strike days, the government has not

moved and says that nothing will be changed in its proposal. The crisis and the debt are poor excuses to justify the reform.

Sarkozy and his government want their reform. Faced with the determination of the government, many workers know that to win it's necessary to impose social determination.

Today, in numerous sectors, it is time for an all-out strike. For example in the RATP (Paris public transport system), the SNCF (French national railway company), but also in the chemical and engineering industries there is a possibility of a continuing strike from Tuesday. [1]

We know that the next day of strikes and demonstrations, on Tuesday 12th October, will be a success. And today, the idea that we can win is increasing.

The state of the movement

– It is, at the moment, a very political movement. The strike rates are strong but not exceptional. The self-organization of the movement today, is very low. General assemblies in the various sectors have very low participation.

– It is a unitarian movement. There is an inter-union coordinating committee [2], which gives the calendar of mobilisations but which is pushed by the intransigence of the government and by the very radical militant teams.

This movement is characterized by a massive refusal of the reform, a spectacular mistrust against the power, against Sarkozy but we don't know what will be the end result of this confrontation. Everything is possible.

On the political level

The NPA participates with the whole French left including the PS, but without LO, in a unitarian campaign against the pensions reform .

This unitarian campaign, launched by Attac and the Copernic Foundation, is based on the demand of a pension at 60 years for all and the withdrawal of the law.

Although all the left agrees on these two demands, there are several disagreements.

The disagreement over demands is in particular with the Socialist Party. They agree with the demand of 60 years old as retirement age but they defend the idea that workers must work longer to get a full pension. And so they voted with the rightwing deputies for the increase of years worked to qualify for the full pension.

There are also disagreements about the strategy for winning against the government and obtaining the withdrawal of the draft law. There are disagreements with the Socialist Party but also with the Communist Party and Parti de gauche (Left Party).

The Socialist Party ask us to wait for the next presidential elections in 2012 and the other political forces demand a referendum, turning the class struggle into an institutional question. They are all refusing the social confrontation necessary to win.

The NPA's profile

Since the beginning of the mobilization, the NPA has worked in two directions:

– The first : to be completely in the unitarian campaign, defending retirement at 60 years old with full pension. We also demand the withdrawal of the law. Olivier is the party spokesperson who has participated at the most unitarian meetings around the country.

– For us, the main demand is the redistribution of wealth and the sharing of work. Our profile is clear, since last May we have been working for a massive social and political confrontation.

As the government is very unpopular, one of our demands is to sack Woerth, the labour minister, and president Sarkozy.

11th October 2010

ITALY

Crisis of "Berlusconism" with a left that's out of the game

SALVATORE CANNAVÒ ·

The analyses of this shock and crisis by the Italian press stress especially the "characters" of these two individuals and their personal conflict, concealing the structural aspects. Yet the ubiquitous and structural economic crisis has had a heavy impact on the political equilibria, transforming itself into a political crisis, and sometimes even into an institutional crisis. Just look at the difficulties of President Obama who, after an electoral triumph two years ago, risks losing the majority in Congress. Or again the French case with a similar evolution: triumphantly elected in 2007, Nicolas Sarkozy is now at his lowest level of popularity. For sure, economic crisis gives rise to political crises.

The Berlusconi Government won the elections of 2008 primarily due to the bankruptcy of the centre-left. In absolute terms its score in 2008 could not be compared to that of 2001, the highest point reached by Berlusconism. But, thanks to the fraudulent electoral law, Berlusconi enjoys a large parliamentary majority that he has used effectively to attack the workers' movement at its roots, by undermining its fundamental victories (the Labour Code), reducing real wages (reform of public employment contracts), and redistributing resources in favour of sectors favourable to the centre-right (small and medium-sized businesses, liberal professions, tax fraudsters, big wealth, banks and finance) and by launching, with fiscal federalism, a policy of subversion of the social pact that has dominated the country since the end of the war. The crisis has put this project in question, emphasizing the

differences in projects, different interests and political conflicts. The distancing of Fini from Berlusconi is not about questions of justice, but the economy. Fini has defended the civil service (in particular the security forces and education), the South of Italy and an industrial policy based on the compromise between "capital and labour", criticizing the manoeuvres of the Minister for the Economy, Giulio Tremonti. The analysis of the crisis and the way to exit from it constitute the background of the battle.

In this battle the centre-right has revealed its limits and unveiled its crisis. If, in his fifteen years in politics, Berlusconi has managed to compose a kind of "social bloc" - small and medium-sized enterprises in the North, the illegal economy in the South, traders, the liberal professions, tax fraudsters, but also the assisted lumpenproletariat, youth in temporary work and the old electorate - he has not done so around a common social, and economic vision but by juxtaposing different interests and different sectors in a perimeter bound only by rhetoric and propaganda, i.e. by the ideological strength of the media personality. Eroded by the crisis, Berlusconism - this glue which is keeping the social bloc together - strips this propaganda and rhetoric bare. Today, Fini is the candidate to represent a part of these sectors around a political project going beyond Berlusconi and aimed at redefining a new centre-right political project. The hypothesis of the third pole, more than a strategic project, is a passage towards rebuilding a conservative force, a neoliberal alternative to the centre-left, which is adapted to the needs of the dominant classes.

The crisis weighs obviously even on the dominant classes, the Confindustria (the Italian employers'

federation) and on the banks and financial capital. Today they no longer know whether to bet again on the Berlusconi government, which offers its determination to shred the labour movement - as shown in the conflict at Fiat - or begin the construction of a different equilibrium. If Emma Marcegaglia, the current President of Confindustria, continues to play on the current equilibria, the former President, Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, seeks a new solution. The difference between two is emblematic of this uncertainty. The problem is that despite its crisis and erosion - and the crisis highlights the fact that Berlusconism actually has nothing to offer - Berlusconi still enjoys a strong social consensus and his alliance with the Northern League preserves for him the possibility of victory. All this makes for a very uncertain situation. In any case, despite this uncertainty, the offensive against workers has continued without hesitation. Fiat thus benefitted from this phase of the crisis and the fears of workers to end national collective agreements and the need to negotiate conditions of employment with the unions. The Government supports this policy and is considering reform of the Statute of Workers while the attack on the civil service - particularly in public education - continues. This sheds light on the political situation: the crisis of the government, which can only be welcomed, is not accompanied by a crisis of the dominant layers which, instead, tend to strengthen.

Obviously in this situation the parliamentary - but also extra-parliamentary - opposition appears completely inadequate. The confusion and uncertainty in the Democratic Party are not only the expression of its irreversible internal divisions, but the fruit of its complete integration in the framework of the crisis. It should not be forgotten that at the time of the vote in parliament on the European plan of "rescue" of Greece - the most severe attack ever experienced by workers in this country - the Democratic Party was the party most committed to it. A pro-European, pro-austerity and pro-employer stance which is now included in its DNA and allows us to understand why, despite the difficulties of

Berlusconi, this party does not find a voice and has no propulsive role in the country.

To the inability of the "democratic" opposition we must add the complicity with the employer's offensive of a large part of the trade union movement. Fiat is trying to wriggle out of national collective agreements to disorient the workers' movement, leaving employers with their hands untied by reducing rights at work to the level of before 1968-1969. It does so because its international dimension, since the alliance with Chrysler, imposes on it action to reduce labour costs in the absence of anything else. In this offense it leads all the Italian employers. The government actively supports this policy, but the two minority unions, the ICFTU and the UIL - which, together, have approximately six million members - actively support it. The CGIL, which alone has more than five million members, is opposed to date, but with great hesitation, and its resistance is based on that of the metalworkers' union, the IMF, in which the trade union left is in the majority. And it was the FIOM which took the initiative for the largest mobilization of this autumn, the national demonstration of October 16, which all the radical left supports.

The central issue of the current phase is the construction of resistance to the crisis by unity of struggles and a process of social recomposition: the unification of the struggles against the crisis is our current task. In the months ahead we must work to strengthen and coordinate the struggles, build on the experiences of the constructed mobilizations built from below ("autoconvocate"), build unitary committee against the crisis, facilitate unitary relations between trade union lefts and other social actors, such as students, and precarious workers. The demonstration of October 16 will be a step in this direction.

Unfortunately this potential has no immediate strictly political openings. Once again the centre-left here demonstrates its inadequate and 'residual' character on the political field. The Democratic Party once again offers a "new Olive Tree", as the motor force of a coalition that would comprise not

only the Christian Democratic Union led by Casini, but even Fini's new party. A perspective which is completely defensive and whose social content represents continuity with the disastrous experience of the centre-left government.

However, the majority forces of the radical left have already chosen alliance with the Democratic Party. These are, firstly, Sinistra e Libertà (Left and Freedom), whose leader, Nichi Vendola, has become a popular leader, and hopes to win the nomination for the Presidency of the Council, and then what remains of the Party of Communist Refoundation, which seeks an electoral alliance only with the hope of returning to Parliament. This is because the Italian electoral system requires it to support the governmental project of the Democratic Party, i.e. remove its own political orientation. This could only produce a kind of Democratic Alliance whose contours are still obscure.

In our opinion, the perspective that remains pertinent but fragile is instead a class conscious left which is able to represent an option other than the Democratic Party and the centre-left. An anti-capi-

talist left defined by a few simple details: being outside the "democratic" coalition under the hegemony of the Democratic Party; a radical program of exit from the crisis; a perspective oriented to the future, resolutely turning its back on conservatism (including that of the "left") and nostalgia (which still characterizes much of the Italian left), but on the contrary, delivers an innovative political solution; with a capacity to attract social movements and committees of struggle, especially among the new generations more open to social resistance and an alternative hypothesis. In the event of early elections but also the local elections next spring, we intend to work on the formation of an anti-capitalist list with these characteristics. We are not interested in planting the flag of the Sinistra Critica or announcing "urbi et orbi" our autonomous electoral presence. We want to build a "process" that can lead to a proposal which is attractive, innovative, useful for the struggles and animated by them and by the younger generations. With this proposal we look to the political and above all social forces available to reaffirm once again that our lives are worth more than their profits.

PHILIPPINES

The Second Congress of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (Mindanao)

PIERRE ROUSSET ·

Historical note by Pierre ROUSSET

Let us go a little further back in time. In September 1987, the Communist Party re-organized its forces in Mindanao, creating five regions, including the CMR. The particularity of this region was to be responsible for work towards the Moros and Lumads - solidarity between the "three peoples" of the big southernmost island of the archipelago. Three communities do indeed live side by side in Mindanao. The "majority nationality", made up of the descendants of Christian settlers who had come in the framework of a recent process of "internal" colonization: during the twentieth century, the Filipino government pushed inhabitants from the North and South of the archipelago (often peasants) to migrate and settle in Mindanao. The Moros: Muslim populations which were converted to Islam before the Spanish (and Christian) colonization in the sixteenth century. The Lumads: mountain tribes, indigenous peoples, which were not Islamized.

The process of "internal" colonization and the arrival of big enterprises (transnational and Filipino) has created many economic, social and territorial conflicts which can easily take an inter-clan (within a community) or inter-community form. The historical resistance of the Moros gave rise to important armed movements: the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF), then the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF). The resistance of the

Lumad tribes, on the other hand, remained localised.

The principal territorial bases of the CMR (and today of the RPM-M) are in the provinces of Lanao (Northern and Southern), part of Eastern Misamis, North Cotabato and Maguindanao. They include urban centres like Iligan and Marawi. But its networks extended everywhere where there are Moro or Lumad populations, to Sultan Kudarat, to Zamboanga and the southernmost islands. Further afield, the CMR also had the responsibility for work towards the Moro and Lumad communities established in the Visayas (in the centre of the archipelago) and in Manila.

Within the Filipino Left, the experiment of the CMR is thus extremely particular, located in the principal zone of military conflicts of the archipelago, in constant contact with the MILF, with a limited implantation in the Moro milieu but much more important among the Lumad mountain tribes in its provincial bastions, even though many of its members belong to the "majority nationality".

After the split in 1993, the CMR went well beyond its original borders. Wanting to take part in the constitution of a new revolutionary organization on the level of the archipelago, it founded the Revolutionary Workers' Party by fusing with other structures produced by the crisis of the CPP, in the Visayas and in Manila. Unfortunately, this attempt fell through, giving rise on the one hand to a "Filipino" RWP (RPM-P) and on the other to the "Mindanao" RWP (RPM-M).

Since then, the RPM-M has extended its implantation in Mindanao, in particular towards the East, to Davao, but it has not succeeded, for the moment, in consolidating an organization in the capital (Manila).

la-Quezon City), in Luzon in the North or in the Visayas in the centre of the archipelago. The RPM-M remains a formation with a very "Mindanoan" identity. More generally, all the Filipino revolutionary parties resulting from the crisis of the CPP have a very unequal implantation according to regions or social sectors.

Although its members are often engaged in legal activities, the RPM-M remains a clandestine organization. All the older cadres of the RPM-M were members of the Maoist party. In the same way, its politico-military cadres of the Revolutionary People's Army (RPA) came from the New People's Army (NPA) of the CPP. But since 1993, many members have joined the RPM-M who never belonged to the Maoist movement.

The rejuvenation of the RPM-M is striking.

The RPM-M has joined the Fourth International, of which it is the Filipino section.

Pierre Rousset

Report from the Congress

Get up: 3 a.m. Departure: 3.30. Stop for coffee: 4.15 in a village at the foot of the mountains. Then a night march to reach Camp Usman where the Second Congress of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (Mindanao), (RPM-M) is to be held.

At least that was the plan.

In fact, the car which was supposed to be for us had to urgently take a woman to the hospital. At 2 o'clock in the morning, we had to look for a new vehicle. It was pretty much a wreck. It no longer had any headlights. We drove at dead of night with, to light our way, a flashlight held out of the window of the front door. It was a big first for me! So of course we arrived late, with the dawn, and we could not fully benefit from the protection of the night to reach the guerrilla camp. Time pressed and we no longer had the right to the promised coffee!

Although engaged in peace talks with the government, the RPM-M is a clandestine party.

Mindanao, the big island in the South of the archipelago, is the most militarized area in the Philippines, where the army is opposed to the MILF in particular. The RPM-M must protect itself from many hostile armed groups: governmental forces and the civil units that they have created (CAFGU), the "vigilantes" and other far-right militias, the armed bands of the landlords and the private armies of the warlords, gangsters and kidnapers... The saddest thing is that one of the principal threats comes from former comrades, namely the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) and its New People's Army (NPA) who have been embarked on an ultra-sectarian course for the last twenty years.

It is impossible under these conditions to hold a congress in a town, in an ordinary meeting room, more especially as many cadres of the party are still officially wanted and, more serious still, they are named in the order of battle of the NPA: authorization is given to assassinate them if the opportunity arises...

So the congress must meet in the mountains, in a zone where the RPM-M has a lot of popular support. The chosen place is quite easy to reach. The regional delegations arrive one by one, often bringing food with them. The work of getting the camp ready for the congress is not finished yet. Camp Usman – which takes its name from a veteran of the revolutionary combat who died in 2008 - is not used to accommodating so many people. Under the foliage and big green waterproof covers, a huge kitchen, wooden houses often built on piles and the meeting room have already been built. We still have to assemble a micro-clinic (extremely rudimentary) for the doctor-acupuncturist, dig the toilets, set up the "shower" corners, lay the pipes to bring water, cut out steps on dangerously slippery paths, reinforce bamboo ramps, improve the camouflage...

We are at the bottom of a small ravine. Everything is on a slope; and it's a steep slope. To put up the smallest tent (the European guests each have the right to a small individual tent), requires digging a flat space. Digging, cutting down trees, cutting off

the branches, assembling structures, marking out the paths, digging again... All that represents a great deal of work, done by the unit of the Revolutionary People's Army (RPA) which is accommodating us and which must in addition ensure our protection. When we reach the camp, the combatants are exhausted and are only hanging on thanks to coffee! Fortunately, fresh reinforcements arrive and they can take a little rest.

The construction of the camp and the supplying of the kitchen with firewood every day means cutting down quite a few trees; the comrades replant systematically, to replace what they have used.

At the bottom of the ravine, everything becomes terribly slippery as soon as it rains. The ground is muddy clay. The Filipinos look out of the corner of their eye at this European who has trouble keeping his balance: will he fall or won't he? Sympathizing with me, they cut me a walking-stick; and I am very proud to announce that I did not fall! [1] I point out to one of my companions that it is not necessarily an excellent idea to organize the congress when the monsoon rains have started. He replies that otherwise, it would be difficult to find an adequate place with a sufficient supply of water...

Electricity is provided by a small generator and some solar panels. Delegates are regularly reminded that priority must be given to the radios (which particularly enable communication between military units) and to the computers, rather than to recharging individual cellphones. Filipinos are famous for the immoderate use which they make of SMS, but their sending is regulated here for security reasons.

The congress is opened by the two oldest participants (a man and a woman) and will in a few days be closed by the youngest participant - a nice idea, full of symbolism as to passing the baton between generations. Everyone is asked to choose a pseudonym for the occasion, which often leads to fantastic names which thoroughly perplex the comrade responsible for taking them down on a large sheet of white paper. There is a moment of confusion.

One of the participants has chosen the name of someone who is being actively sought by the local police. They are asked to change it.

The congress, at last!

The RPM-M was founded in 2001 and the statutes stipulate that its congress must meet every three years – so the second should have been held in 2004. But the last few years have been extremely agitated; the prevailing conditions in Mindanao make it difficult to organize the congress and the preparatory discussions. You sense a great feeling of relief: we've finally done it!

To hold a congress with debates and preparatory local assemblies, serious reflexion, collective political decisions, the election of a national leadership, has nothing routine about it, and not only because of the conditions of clandestinity in a militarized environment. It is a break with one of the worst aspects of the revolutionary tradition of the Philippines, dominated in the 1970s and 80s by a party - the CPP - which, once established, never held a congress, nor even made a pretence of holding one [2]. The break is all the more significant in that the historical cadres of the RPM-M themselves come from the CPP and Maoism.

The congress is being held seventeen years after the break with the Maoist CPP. It is the occasion to measure the political distance that has been travelled. The first sessions resemble seminars and don't give rise to big discussions, recapitulating the evolution of the theoretical and strategic conceptions, an evolution already registered in 2001 at the time of the foundation of the RPM-M: Filipino society is no longer considered to be "semi-feudal, semi-colonial", but capitalist, even though subordinated to imperialism. The armed struggle is no longer necessarily considered as the principal form of struggle, whatever the characteristics of the period. All the sectors of activity are no longer placed under the watchful authority of underground cadres. The relationship of subordination in which the Lumad were kept is abandoned in favour of a relationship that is respectful of their right of self-

determination. Democracy - in the party, in the relations between party and movements, in struggles - has become a major concern...

The congress also takes the measure of the social transformations in progress. The majority of the factories where the RPM-M was implanted have closed. The tribal communities are besieged by the commercial order. The peasantry is undermined, weakened by the rural exodus. The country massively exports its labour and it is the migrants who carry the economy on their shoulders, but the families suffer the shock of this human haemorrhage. How to respond to such brutal upheavals? This feeling of instability, of things coming apart, is probably accentuated in Mindanao by the recurring effects of the natural disasters and the military conflicts with their train of displaced populations, of "internal refugees".

In recapitulating the experience of the last few years, the Second Congress must go back over the fundamental documents adopted during the First Congress and amend them, define the tasks for the coming period and elect a new leadership.

Security measures, military protection

The atmosphere is good-natured and will remain so throughout the congress. But those in charge of the camp fear that the arrival of the participants in this isolated area has not gone unnoticed, in spite of the precautions taken. In the evening, instructions are given as to what to do in the event of an attack: a whistle to sound the alarm and indicate where the danger is coming from, regroupment points for a rapid evacuation of the camp, in several groups... I did not know about this point on the agenda and I had gone to bed early so as to be able to have a wash shortly after dawn in order to avoid queuing in front of the men's "shower". So the instructions were repeated to me the following day and I learned that I had the right - if anything happened - to a small personal escort.

The congress is placed under the protection of a few dozen combatants stationed on higher ground

and surveying the surrounding area. The network of activists in the nearby villages is on the alert and must warn of any suspect movements. Moreover, quite a few of the people taking part in the congress are also armed. The instructions are clearly given: to avoid any risk of an accident; in the area of the meeting-place all bullets must remain in the loading-clip, none should be in the barrel of the gun.

We see the classic armament of mobile guerrillas in the Philippines, almost always of American origin to facilitate the supply of ammunition: the M1 rifle, 30- calibre ("the weapon of Che, as I remember). The M16, standard attack rifle of the US forces, or the M14, more powerful, developed from the M1 Garand. The M203, grenade launcher combined, here, with the M16. An exotic touch with the Ultimax, a Singaporean light machine gun with a sensitive trigger... Not to mention the handguns worn strapped at the waist.

The congress is meeting in a zone where the situation is relatively calm. No open conflict with a warlord. Because of the peace talks engaged with the government, the army must not (in theory...) attack the RPM-M. I have difficulty in imagining the NPA concentrating the considerable resources necessary to mount such a risky operation so far from its bases... An attack is very improbable, but in Mindanao, nothing is ever certain. The election of a new president implies that the negotiating procedures at the national level must be re-validated. Locally, a mayor can take matters into his own hands, eager to make the front pages of the media. In this area where so many armed groups operate, an event that has absolutely nothing to do with the congress can cause troop movements that are dangerous for our safety... So we can't lower our guard, but the improbable event isn't going to happen.

Fragments of daily life

How does a day at the congress start? With a shower, in the river, protected from being seen by covers. Water is collected in a large plastic dustbin; we collect it with a tabo - a kind of pitcher with a long handle which makes it possible for it to be sprin-

kled (very effective). Then breakfast (rice-based). Finally a daily gathering in front of the red flag with, in yellow, the traditional hammer and sickle and three stars symbolizing the three peoples of Mindanao [3] as well as the three great regions of the Philippines, with Luzon in the North, the Visayas in the centre and Mindanao (plus some other islands) in the South.

For a moment I am afraid that it's going to be a little too solemn for my taste but it's more like a family gathering. The unit of the RPA obviously has not had time to perfect how to present arms and everyone laughs. We sing the International and a revolutionary version of the national anthem. The Filipinos like to sing and, throughout our stay, the essential instrument is the guitar. It even accompanies the songs sung by a Lumad: we will not be entitled to the ritual gongs...

I forgot: the very first question which arises when you get up in the morning is: what to put on your feet? If the weather is dry, everything is fine. But if the rain has turned the ground into mud? And if my sports shoes are still sodden from having walked for a long time in a river to reach the camp? It's not a good idea good to have wet feet all day... Flip-flops? I see with satisfaction a Filipino, his foot raised, his flip-flop stuck on the ground behind him: I am not the only one to have problems on that score!

But others impress me: in all situations, they get along easily in flip-flops. I ask them to reveal the secret of their success: muscles! Their toes and their calves are so muscular that they impose their will on the rebellious flip-flops. I already liked the idea of these free, agile, mobile toes, which have not been precociously corseted by shoes; now I have a lot of respect for them. For my part, having always been a town-dweller, I get by as I can while waiting for the return of dry weather: bare feet, sandals...

The kitchen is a good size - it is also used as a dining room - and a lot of men are busy there. Interesting. But a woman seems to rule the roost.

There are few vegetables, little fruit. As much rice as you want, three times a day (and on good days rice cake in the afternoon!)... Fish, sometimes dry, sometimes fresh (in this case, rather a small slice than a whole fish). A cow is ritually slaughtered in our honour. It is not very big, but it still provides a lot to eat. So, for a while, we are treated to beef and rice morning, midday and evening...Some participants, adepts of "organic" agriculture and a balanced diet, grumble. But on the whole I found the food to my taste. Thanks to the kitchen team.

The delegates are organized into teams which are responsible, each in its turn, for collecting wood, for bringing when necessary water to the toilets and the showers, cleaning the site every day... Hammocks are suspended here and there (with sometimes, the *nec plus ultra*, a mosquito net attached). The benches of the meeting room consist of simple boards, narrow, on which some people manage to sleep at night. I envy the Asians who are at ease at ease sitting cross-legged or squatting on their heels. Nothing to lean your back against, neither sofa nor grass to rest my body – all that's left for me is the groundsheet of the tent, not very appealing. [4]

We are right in the middle of nature. Even though it is not possible for us to go for a walk in the area around the camp, when we have a break, we can contemplate it from the bottom of our ravine as we sip our coffee. The vegetation is ordinary (it is not unfortunately a primal forest!), but there are splendid butterflies and dragonflies which I could not name. A large green lizard prudently makes its way down the trunk of a tree. The birds are mostly common ones, like the Yellow-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus goiavier*). But with a little patience, you are lucky enough to see endemic species [5], specific to the Philippines, like this pair of White-eared Brown-Doves (*Phapitreron leucotis brevirostris*), perched on a branch or this Blue Fantail (*Rhipidura supercilialis*, a passerine) which you only find in the South of the archipelago.

A wealth of political experience

The debates open up when it is a question of systematizing the "framework of reference" of the RPM-M in the form of a diagram connecting basic principles, political organization and tasks. What comes first: the theory or the concrete situation? A small "war of diagrams" excites the assembly, until a synthesis (or a compromise?) is found. The reporter insists: all the sectors of intervention are legitimate, we do not treat them on a hierarchical basis, they must dynamise each other...

You get the feeling that the young generations who organize legal associations are at ease handling the computer which projects the disputed images on a cloth that serves as a screen.

The urban youth, both women and men, are voluble. They often have hundreds of "friends" on Facebook. The delegates of the more rural zones have especially spoken in the preparatory assemblies for the congress. They are more discreet and the idea of putting their photograph on Internet would not occur to them! A mixture of political worlds. The use of these computer "social networks" poses a problem: extremely dangerous for security, they are also extremely effective in mobilizing a certain section of youth. As someone who is neither young nor on Facebook, I hope that these ways of making contact that are so popular today do not turn out to be riskier than they are useful.

Reports and discussions show that the RPM-M is confronted with the same challenges as the other organizations of the Left: how, in particular, to mobilize faced with a new president, Benigno "Noy" Aquino, who belongs to the traditional elites but benefits from broad popular support, from recognized electoral legitimacy? But they also show to what extent the situation in Mindanao exacerbates the most problematic features of the political life of the country with, in addition, the Moro question.

Mindanao is the region where the big political families from all over the country come to buy the votes that they need to ensure their success in the national elections; where the conflicts between rival clans

are most murderous; where the threat of armed reprisals is greatest; where the state of war is permanent; where the corruption of the administration is astronomic (although this cancer corrodes the archipelago from north to south); where the interpenetration of socio-economic and intercommunity tensions leads to situations that are particularly difficult to solve; where the people displaced when there are humanitarian disasters are most numerous...

Moreover, the historical bases of the RPM-M are in the regions where the "three peoples" of the island encounter each other directly, in particular where the ancestral domains of the Lumads are within the Bangsa Moro territory [6]. Where it is necessary to build solidarity between the three populations, to prevent political demarcations from corresponding to ethnic frontiers, to conduct a common struggle against exploitation and to simultaneously defend two rights of self-determination: that of the Moros and that of the Lumads.

The party is engaged in peace talks with the government, judging that in the present context, it is not through the armed struggle that the revolutionary combat can develop in the Philippines. The RPM-M directly involves the popular communities of the zones concerned in these talks, so that they are actors and not hostages of the negotiations (a very innovative conception in the Philippines). But the ultra-militarized environment that characterises the region makes the outcome of this process quite uncertain: how can you disarm when you are surrounded by hostile armed groups? What risks should you take to enable the talks to advance and so that the populations derive real benefits from them, without having to wait for uncertain results in the future? The answer to such questions has not been immediately unanimous over the last period. The party learns from experience.

For the time being, the RPM-M/RPA has adopted a purely defensive military posture and is discussing the ways of organizing the combatants that are best adapted to the situation (militia, regular forces...).

The electoral field is one of the new terrains of struggle on which the RPM-M embarked after its foundation. In spite of temporary successes, it is however in this field that it experienced one of its most expensive failures, running up against the wall of corruption and the weight of family clans: for the *trapos* (traditional politicians), the elections are an investment which must be profitable; they do not accept a progressive movement coming along to change the rules of their games. This is true all over the country, but it is particularly true in Mindanao. So the delegates started to reflect on these first failures in order to be better prepared to face the snares of the Filipino institutions. Here again, it is necessary to learn from a sometimes bitter experience.

Aid to the internal refugees and responses to humanitarian catastrophes, reciprocal solidarity between communities and organization of the popular communities, a unitary anti-war movement and social struggles, peace talks, modification of the military policy, electoral front... As one of the messages presented by the foreign guests underlined, because the situation in Mindanao is particularly complex, the experience of the RPM-M is particularly rich - and it is a real pity that it is not very well known on the international level [7].

A rejuvenated organization

The organisational balance sheet of the RPM-M is not without black spots. In particular, the break with the congressman whose election it had supported had detrimental repercussions in certain provinces for its implantation in the Moro milieu, as well as for the construction of its organization in the capital, Manila-Quezon City.

But the congress also shows that the RPM-M has recruited among young people. The average age of the delegates is quite low, the percentage of women much higher than in many other countries. It has diversified its intervention considerably, including by dealing with LGBT rights, whereas it is in contact with communities which are often conservative on the question. It has projected itself onto the

world arena, joined the Fourth International and has been involved in the global justice movement, developing links with a growing number of organizations in Asia and Europe.

The congress is joyful. Techniques of group animation, inherited from NGOs, are sometimes used to "break the ice" or to facilitate the intervention of delegates - which Filipino culture makes possible; but I have difficulty in seeing us doing the same in France.

That does not prevent serious, even fastidious, debates, when it is a question of amending the documents of the founding congress, and in particular the statutes.

The election of the new national leadership is done in two stages: first of all the election of the president, vice-president, general secretary and assistant general secretary. Then the election of the central committee. Several candidatures are presented, followed by a secret ballot vote.

The election of the national leadership is a bit like squaring the circle. It is necessary to represent the communities ("majority", Moro and Lumad), the regions (provinces, cities), the social sectors, the generations, the sexes... No list is presented; just some recommendations are given concerning the equilibriums to be respected. The result appears a bit random, but finally rather satisfactory. In particular, many young people and many women were elected.

On the last day, the debate on the amendments and the counting of the votes after the secret ballot took a lot of time. It was well after dark when the congress finished in good humour. It was necessary to prepare the departures and to abandon the "solidarity evening" that we were ready for. Too bad.

The departures take place at night, by successive groups. Once again, our feet are in the water of a river. A vehicle awaits us in the valley and a small armed escort still accompanies us for a few kilometres. Look-outs along the road check that the road is free and wave to us as we pass. Then we find our-

selves on the ordinary roads of Mindanao, that is to say, frequently cut by "checkpoints": road blocks maintained by the police or the army (most of them are deserted, but they oblige us to drive very slowly).

An uneventful return journey, following a very enjoyable experience.

Joel FRENCHMAN

PHILIPPINES

Message to the RPM-M Second Party Congress

ROMAN ·

Dear comrades,

Magandang hapon.

I am very happy to be here with you and I wish to bring you three salutes in one:

Being a member of its bureau, a salute from the Fourth International, which is very proud of its Philippine section.

As well, a salute of my French organization, the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NAP) – in French, the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste or... NPA! I am very sorry for the confusion the French acronym can provoke in the Philippines! Many links have already been tied between the RPM-M and the NPA, especially through the youth.

And I would like to add a more personal salute to these two official ones, as the Philippines became part of my own political history.

I first came to the Philippines in 1977 – quite a while ago already! I went to Mindanao (Davao) the following year. I then traveled through above ground Nat-Dem networks and could also exchange with a woman from the (Philippine) NPA. My great sin that year was not to meet anyone from what would become the CMR – the Central Mindanao Region of the CPP, which is the ancestor of the present RPM-M. For sure, I should have stayed a long time in Mindanao to ever have a chance to reach Central Mindanao comrades...

The many following years, I related with several trends of the Philippine Left and developed solidarity activities to the Philippine people's struggle (which was unfortunately disapproved by some CPP dark lords, a sectarian attitude which did not help the strengthening of the solidarity movement in Europe).

It is only after the great splits of the early 1990s that I eventually met you. The FI had and keeps good political, solidarity, relations with several trends in the Philippine Left. But it happens that the latest contact to be established went the furthest, became the closest when you decided to join the FI (is this what we call dialectics?). I must say that we are very happy that you did take such a decision, and I would like to explain here why.

I learnt, we learnt a lot from the Philippine Left, and especially from you – because you are a Mindanaoan organization and Mindanao is one region where many issues are expressed in a very acute form – it constitutes both a quite dangerous and a very rich background for revolutionary activities and thought. Also because you have undergone an in depth work of programmatic and political re-evaluation since your CPP times and you have opened the party to new generations of cadres as the composition and the debates of this congress show.

As many activists of my generation the world around, you had to reassess the articulation of various forms and fields of struggles with changing times, periods and situations. I appreciate the way you did it in a non-sectarian and inventive way. I would especially like to underline how much your multifaceted experience is of international significance and of importance for the FI.

Because of your history and roots in Central Mindanao, you always squarely addressed the issue of the Tripeople, majority nationality, Moros and Lumads, with a constant aim: to build crossed solidarities allowing the people of these three communities to live in peace and fight for common aims. This experience is especially precious nowadays when, under capitalist globalization, the powers that be use the "divide and rule" policy even more

thoroughly than in the past. To a large extent, our success or failure in the future will depend on our capacity to oppose cross solidarities to the divide and rule policy of the capitalists and imperialists.

The divide and rule policy not only try to pit a majority nationality against minorities. It also intends to pit oppressed communities one against other ones. You have in Central Mindanao a very concrete experience in dealing with such an issue, because while thoroughly defending the right of self-determination of the Moro, you also enhance the rights of the Lumads over their ancestral domains located within Bangsa Moro boundaries. You defend both self-determination rights, while a large part of the Philippine Left only addresses the Bangsa Moro one and overlooks the Lumads'. That's one of your qualities, and one of the many reasons for which your experience is so interesting to us.

With the global ecological crisis, the indigenous people struggle has taken an especially important international significance. Many of them are people of the forest and the forest is a vital but threatened component of the common goods of humanity. Here again, we can learn a lot from your own experience, for example from how your brake with the old CPP-NPA "commandantist" policies of ruling above these communities. How you recognize that the right of self-organization and of political self-determination of Lumad communities have to be respected and implemented now, and not be postponed into a far away future, after the victory of revolution.

At a time of military globalization, of "preventive" imperialist wars and of the Bush legacy of "war in permanence", the struggle for peace, the building of antiwar movements, have become key international tasks for progressives. For long, you have been fully involved in such activities in Mindanao – a land of wars! –, together with other groups, and you are probably one of the sections of the FI with the richer experience in this field. In addition, engaging in peace talks with the government, the RPMM/RPA has elaborated new concepts and practices: the

concerned local communities and people's movements have to be direct actors of the peace process and not simply spectators or hostages of negotiations restricted to armed and governmental forces.

Because of the global ecological crisis, human disasters are becoming even more frequent and geographically more widespread than before. For very unfortunate reasons, Mindanao is a territory known for its human disasters provoked by natural calamities, government incompetence, ruling classes corruptions and wars. For many years now, RPM-M members have been facing such calamities, mobilizing social networks and people's organization to rescue Internal Displaced People (IDPs) and to defend their rights in times of economic reconstructions. Here again, there is much to learn for us, in the FI, and for other progressive movements.

I have one regret: that you do not write on these issues to transmit internationally your experience and thought – or you write so little. On such matters, you are of an oral tradition, hindi ba? But that does not help much for international collectivization of experiences and elaborations. Beyond the general principles, we have to reflect on concrete experiences: what did we aim at, how did we do, what worked, what did not work, why, what lessons we have drawn from each of these experiences on building solidarities, building peace, facing disasters...

One more word concerning armed struggle. Unlike the previous points, it is today less of universal application: we are not going to establish a camp Usman in the French Central Mountains and we are not going to ask you to send us an International Brigade! But it does not mean that the in depth reflection you have engaged on the changing role of armed struggle in the Philippine context is not of interest for outsiders. We need to revive our thought on strategy. This can be done only by comparing various situations – and various concrete answers given to these various situations. We do learn of course from movements which are not FI. But within the FI nowadays, unlike in the past, you

have a unique role in bringing this type of experience into our collective political elaboration.

Speaking of armed forces, I take the chance to thank the RPA units for the heavy work done for camp Usman to be able to receive the many delegates of the RPM-M congress, and to insure our security. This is very much, greatly appreciated. Maraming salamat.

We know that you are living in Mindanao in a situation of permanent threats, with so many unfriendly armed groups around: army and police, vigilante and extreme right militias, CAFGU, goons and private armies of warlords, bandits, kidnappers... name it, you have it! The very sad reality is that one of the main threat is now coming from former comrades – the CPP-NPA, which engaged in a deadly sectarian drive after the 90s crisis. We have actively contributed to impulse an international solidarity campaign against its policy of assassination and death threats, with some results. But the pressure has to be maintained and more solidarity has to be offered, while you are facing so many armed enemies.

We appreciate very much the lessons you have drawn from the CPP times on the importance of democracy (our democracy, people's democracy) in the revolutionary struggle, as well as the importance given to the gender question and women's right, the openness the LGBT issue, the place given

to the younger generations, and the growing role you are playing in the FI (clearly reflected during the recent world congress).

In times of imperialist globalization, global ecological crisis and capitalist crisis, internationalism is more needed than ever. With the birth of the Global Justice Movement the world around, it has begun to revive. FI organizations have been very much involved in this broad and multifaceted process. It is our common responsibility to contribute actively to this new wave of internationalism, to root it deeply in the struggles of people's movements.

Asia is one of the parts of the world where there are presently many possibilities to extend links between radical and revolutionary left forces, in an open and non sectarian spirit. In collaboration with other organizations, like in Pakistan, you are playing a growing role in building such links. It is essential to consolidate progressive and revolutionary networks in the Asia-Pacific region. We, in the FI, are very conscious of the importance of this task and we know how much you do to fulfill your responsibilities in this regard.

Thank you for what you have achieved and thank you for what you will achieve.

Mabuhay ang internacionalismo!

Roman

Camp Usman, Mindanao, August 2010

EUROPE

Europe: A continent in crisis, a rising far right

MIGUEL URBÁN CRESPO ·

What about the right? The crisis occurred at a time of retreat of the left virtually across the continent, with honourable exceptions, while at the same time, for two decades we have seen the emergence of neo-populist options of a totalitarian and xenophobic nature, starting with the emergence of the Front National (FN) in France in the European elections of 1983. Since then it has been confirmed that the case of the FN was not an exception but rather the model around which a new far right in Europe has been built. In the heat of the crisis, the far right is not only appearing "electorally" in new countries and parliaments but also growing and consolidating where it was already present

An overview of the far right and its latest results seems to indicate that it has been more able than other options to connect with the vote of protest against the crisis and the current model of construction of the EU. In the elections to the European Parliament it was the ideological spectrum which grew most, reaching 37 MEPs, and in various elections from 2009 onwards it has continued to grow: in the Hungarian elections the far right and anti-Semitic party Jobbik scored 17% of the votes; in France the Front National has managed to recover electorally, after the setback of the 2007 parliamentary elections (4.29%), scoring 11.6% in the latest regional elections; in Austria the FPÖ won 16% in the presidential elections, becoming the second biggest electoral force; the Northern League was the most popular party electorally in the north of Italy in the last regional and municipal elections, with 2.7 million votes; in the Netherlands, the Party of Freedom has consolidat-

ed its good electoral results in the European elections, reaching 17% of the vote in the parliamentary elections and increasing its parliamentary representation from 9 to 24 members, becoming the third force in Parliament; and in the last parliamentary elections the far right Vlaams Belang obtained 12.5% of the vote in Flanders.

Thus a review of recent election results cannot but bring us a strong feeling of anxiety, not only because they seem to mark a trend consolidated across much of Europe, capitalizing on an anti-establishment protest vote with processes of social, labour and economic insecurity, but also because this upward trend of the European far right is not countered socially and politically by the growth of political options of an anti-capitalist character. And the success of the extreme right is not restricted to elections; it is also capable of generating a structuring and unifying discourse capable of marking the "agenda" and permeating the discourse and policies of the big European conservative and social liberal formations. A process which in France was referred to as the "Lepenization of the spirit" which was defined by the academic Raimundo Viejo as "the capacity to permeate the discourse of the centre-right, if not the centre-left (...) the ability to counterpose an articulated discourse, a generator of feeling for its audiences" (Diagonal 105, June 25 to July 8, 2009).

These organizations, while maintaining significant differences, the product of their disparate political, social and economic contexts, also maintain common features that allow us to speak of a break with the classic paradigms of inter-war fascism and which constitute a totalitarian neopopulism of a xenophobic stripe, a 21st century far right. In the forty years that separated the defeat of fascism and the electoral emergence of the first formations of

the new far right, there has been an important re-formulation and reconstruction of a common identity adapted to new times and with a structuring discourse which is an important axis of its electoral success. In these pages I will try to point out the key elements of this discourse.

Immigration and xenophobia

One of the main defining features of the new far right is the exaltation of xenophobia, fear of the poor foreigner, of what is different. National-populism, a key element of the new configurations of the far right, has been described as a schematic and Manichaeian reading of reality, of easy circulation, which is dominated by the figure of one or more scapegoats, "anti-popular" agents deemed to be at the root of the ills suffered by the national community. While the old fascisms built a discourse based to a great extent on the exploitation of the scapegoat of the Jewish-Masonic and Communist conspiracies, the new far right organizations have built a new scapegoat for all the ills of our society, immigration.

The meeting between national populism and xenophobia has been transformed into a political recipe for success by virtue of a number of favourable conditions. The general increase in unemployment and the growth of immigration in Europe in the late 1970s and especially during the 1980s and 90s generated a climate conducive to the extension of the xenophobic discourse. Competition rather than co-operation between workers, native or foreign, for increasingly scarce resources (work, housing, social benefits and so on) in a climate of economic recession and dismantling of the so-called welfare state, favoured the right organizations, given the generalized crisis of the left, in submitting easy answers to complex problems. In this way the traditional foreign enemy, Communism, was supplanted by a new enemy, internal this time, immigration, which was much more socially and electorally profitable.

In this sense, immigrants, provided they are poor, are presented on the far right as the new enemy in Europe in the 21st century. Through the negation of

the universal right of individuals to seek a worthwhile future, immigrants are represented as "parasites" coming to steal our wealth and take the meagre social benefits from a shrinking welfare state. The far-right populist form exploits the fear of the foreign and the different, exalting the alleged national primacy of the native against the foreign invasion. In this way far right organizations present themselves as the only ones who advocate and work for the interests of "national" citizens, while the rest of the parties favour immigrants. In this sense they orient to the motto of the FN at the presidential elections of 1992; "They prefer foreigners. We prefer the French. Vote French".

The big victory of the far right can be measured not only by the significant electoral returns that this policy has brought them, with access to the Italian, Austrian, Romanian, Polish and Swiss governments. But, above all, in that they have managed to include immigration, citizenship and insecurity on the European political agenda as fundamental problems, beyond their electoral success in each country.

In this form, as the political scientist Piero Ignazi says, skilful exploitation

of the immigration issue has allowed the "post-industrial" far right to reach a broad consensus among heterogeneous social sectors, addressing the population in terms of "values and identity, rather than economic or class interests". This strategy has enabled them to overcome social boundaries that hardly two decades ago seemed insurmountable and in recent years they have had success in permeating these ideas into the classical conservative parties, undergoing a process of adaptation to the xenophobic discourse. Meanwhile, the social democratic parties which have converted to social liberalism seem to have also caved in on this matter, applying regressive policies with regard to fundamental rights that only succeed in paving the way to the consolidation and expansion of far right political options.

Islamophobia

There are also differences of accent in the xenophobic discourse against immigration. In fact it is producing a major outbreak of Islamophobia; and not all immigrants are hated "equally" by the extreme right. At the end of the Cold War, the Western powers led by the US needed a new enemy to replace Communism, and Islam was chosen. Thus a discourse was prepared presenting the Islamic world as atavistic and unable to progress into modernity, as opposed to the claims that the West, or a part of the Western world, was a single and maximum representative of "civilization". Theories such as the "clash of civilizations" advanced by Samuel P. Huntington, influential among the US neocons, defined Islamic culture in this way: "In all these places, the relations between Muslims and peoples of other civilizations... have been generally antagonistic; most of these relations have been violent at some point in the past, many have been violent in the 1990s. Wherever one looks along the perimeter of Islam, Muslims have problems living in peace with their neighbours... Islam has bloody borders (Huntington, "The Clash of Civilisations")

The configuration of Islam as the new world enemy, especially starting from the attacks of September 11th, has generated a fertile climate for organizations of the right promoting an Islamophobic discourse. In this sense the new extreme right justifies its aversion to Islam not in racist terms of superiority of one race over another, but in terms of cultural differences and identity. The "national preference" applies not only in the areas of work and the economy, but is also extended to the cultural field. In this way the Muslim religion is considered as radically incompatible with Europe because it subverts its traditions, culture and roots. In addition common arguments are used with a "progressive" content in discussions on the veil or niqab or directly assimilating Islam with terrorism, as did Geert Wilders, leader of the Islamophobic Party of Freedom, in his famous documentary *Fitna*. Most of these parties also often link the Muslim population with the rise in crime and public insecurity. This is the case with the

Vlaams Belang, whose rejection of immigration is concentrated primarily on Muslims, accused of trafficking in drugs and being responsible for citizen insecurity.

(In) security

Public insecurity is one of the strong points of the xenophobic discourse against immigration, tiresomely reproduced by all the extreme right parties, assimilating crime, civil insecurity and immigration. In this way the ultra-right parties have sought to show, as if a mathematical formula is involved, that an increase in immigration leads to a rise in crime, in an attempt to present themselves as parties of law and order and defend tough policies against immigration and crime.

This is an old slogan, inherited from the interwar fascisms which used

labour conflicts and the rise of Communism to mobilize sectors of the small and medium bourgeoisie in their interests, presenting themselves as the antidote to "chaos and revolution" and the party of "law and order". The enemy of Communism has been supplanted in the discourse and the imagination of the new extreme right by immigration and crime. An enemy that allows you to better mobilize a constituency in times of economic and social crisis before the accelerated changes of capitalist globalization.

This discourse has also been taken on by the conservative and social liberal parties in recent election; in fact one of the reasons for the success of Le Pen in the presidential election of 2002 was not merely to

obtain 16.86% of votes in the first round, which allowed him to go on to the second round for the first time in the history of France; but to get the French election campaign to pivot around his two favourite issues, immigration and insecurity. In this context the two major parties, the PS and the UDP, sought to show French voters that they could propose measures as harsh as the FN in these areas.

A circumstance which, among other things, favoured the success of the FN, allowing their candidate to advance to the second round, and proved to be disastrous for the PS that failed to do so. The theme of insecurity and its relationship with immigration has also been used in election campaigns in which the right wing was not present, as it is the case in the Spanish state, where the PP has made statements and proposals which Le Pen himself has signed. This shows a very dangerous trend: the adaptation of part of the discourse of the major parties to far right xenophobic parameters. Including, as in the Spanish case, without electoral competition from extreme right parties.

This type of approach, aimed primarily at capturing the protest vote, has helped fuel xenophobic outbreaks across Europe. In May rumours of the kidnapping of a baby by a gypsy woman in Naples caused an orgy of racist violence against gypsy camps orchestrated by the local mafia, the Camorra. The Italian case is of particular concern, not only because of the proliferation of attacks but also by the reaction of the Berlusconi Government to them. "This is what happens when gypsies steal babies" said Interior Minister Maroni, while his colleague in the Cabinet and head of the Northern League, Umberto Bossi, declared: "The people do what the political class cannot do."

An "internal" nationalism: national preference

The new right-wing nationalism does not have a foreign mission, motivated by the desire to build an empire or annex the territories of neighbouring states, a factor that proved decisive in the inter-war fascisms. Almost all the old antagonisms and conflicts over territorial disputes in Western Europe, which involved countries such as Germany and France for many years, have now ceased to be relevant. In this new context the ultra-right has had to renew their nationalist discourse, something inherent to these formations, especially when one of their major mobilizing fetishes, the "Communist threat", is no longer effective.

This new right-wing nationalism is structured essentially around the exaltation and preservation of a "national identity" allegedly threatened by the accelerated process of globalization of the economy, culture and communications. It posits a defence of national identity against processes of "global uniformity", trying to capitalize on the uncertainties of this process, such as the breakdown of the welfare state, outsourcing, the crisis of the old model of labour market and fear of the challenge of immigration.

Therefore the new nationalist discourse of the European right occurs

as a phenomenon with an internal focus which aims to safeguard national identity against the foreign enemies of immigration, the economic uncertainty of globalization and the cultural colonialism of a single thought exported from the United States.

This program seeks to mobilize an important spectrum of society based on the fears and insecurities that "national primacy" is not only not being applied in the areas of labour and the economy but also in the "cultural" field, with an accelerated process of neoliberalism taking place among the European public, and provide simple identity based solutions to real and complex problems that the parties of the "system" do not know how to or do not want to respond to. In this sense the far right parties try to "overcome" the traditional right-left dichotomy to mobilize their constituencies on the basis of criteria of identity and not of class. Filip Dewinter, a leader of the Vlaams Belang, stated that his party owed its success to the fact of being able of "replace the old division of capital and labour with a new axis which opposed the people and identity to multiculturalism (Casals, X. (2003) "Ultrapatriotas. Extrema derecha y nacionalismo de la guerra fría a la era de la globalización". Barcelona: Crítica: 47).

"Partidocracy" and the protest vote. The keys to a new populism

The growth and consolidation of a part of the new formations of the far right has played an important role in the ability of these formations to absorb what has been considered as the so-called "protest vote". This acquisition of the protest vote has played a key role in a number of circumstances that the extreme right has skilfully exploited. The first of these has been the process, widely extended in Europe in recent decades, in which both the traditional parties and the structures of government have accentuated the role and place of the leader versus the old forms of more collegiate leaderships, especially in parliamentary systems where the charisma of the head of the government was not indispensable. This can be seen in France where the presidential model was strengthened by the Fifth Republic, and in Germany and in Italy.

This process of strengthening of the figure of the leader at the expense of ideology, an Americanization of European politics, has created a situation favourable to the traditional figure of the leader in the populist formations.

All of the extreme right European formations have built a great part of their success on the popularization of the strong, charismatic leadership of their main leader. The most paradigmatic cases have been that of the French FN with the figure of Le Pen and the Fortuyn list built exclusively around the popularity and image of its leader, Pim Fortuyn. This gradual de-ideologization of European electoral politics has favoured the flourishing of a renewed national populism based on strong leadership. Populist political discourse is affirmed in the idea of the betrayal of the people by the political, cultural and economic elites, concerned exclusively with their caste interests. That is why people need to be organized so that the community can recover the common good. The ideological key of populism lies in the political use of the term people as a political community. An idealized people formed by a majority of ordinary men endowed with an instinct and innate political wisdom who cannot develop because the corrupt governing elites have betrayed them. The organization of the

people must be realised though a movement that stands above party and class.

This conception of organization has determined that the majority of organizations of the new right have not taken the name of party but have favoured appellations such as front, bloc, movement, alliance and so on. In addition this conception of the organization stems from the idea of breaking with class conflict as the motor of political debate and collective aggregation, in favour of an inter class union conceived around the idea that the far right accords the people and its interests as national community.

The "people" was the term most repeated by inter-war fascism. Nazism

constantly invoked the people and its ideology was inseparable from the idea of the Volksgemeinschaft, the "popular community". The new far right also constantly appeals to the people, but this now has a double meaning: the people is the "national community", but, and this is a fundamental difference with regard to interwar fascism, it is also the custodian of national sovereignty, allegedly confiscated by the political oligarchy and supranational institutions.

While in fascism there is a contempt for democracy, in the post-industrial far right we find a demand for "hyper-democracy". This invocation to recover a democracy taken hostage by a corrupt political oligarchy, which the far right call a "partidocracy", has been one of the fundamental mobilising electoral factors of the extreme right. The electoral success under the banner of genuine democracy of the far right cannot be understood without assessing the democratic deficit of the societies emerging from the systemic transformation of a globalized society and the delegitimization of policy and politics that has occurred in its midst before the devaluation of ideologies. In this context the decline of the traditional left (official Communism), and social democracy transformed into social liberalism and the weakness of the far left, has meant that protest votes faced with the increase in the democratic deficit have gone primarily to the far right.

In short, the national populisms have incarnated a rejection of politics from a purported representation of the democratic system based on the popular interest, which they claim to represent. For the political scientist Ralf Dahrendorf, populism stimulates voluntarily the loss of a proactive role for parliaments and their weakness. The new populism is not intended to introduce political totalitarianism; instead it wants to "take decisions without too many controls, in the presence of an essentially uninterested and apathetic people". And in many countries "the temporary popularity of a leader is combined with collective indifference to politics, a trend considered long-term and worrying as it generates societies that will increasingly be characterised as democracies without democrats". (Casals, X. op. cit.: 43).

The leap to the mass media

One of the main barriers preventing the extreme right from completing and strengthening its social and electoral niche has been the media. Their limited presence in the media, especially on the small screen, has acted as a firewall in the Spanish state so far. In fact, most of the successes of the European far right have been preceded by its entry, either as a group or by any of its leaders, in the mass media circus. The political scientists Yves Mény and Yves Surel point out that the leaders of the new right-wing populism "have been able to use the Achilles heel of media society wonderfully, namely its almost pathological interest in scandal". In the end, national populisms, as Moreau notes, are agencies of symbolic mobilization and require a media presence. They enter into crisis when they have no place or function, but the role of the communications media in developing the creation and eventual erosion of these new political actors (Casals 2003: 53) European reality has shown that once a certain public notoriety and level of social support have been attained by the far right it is almost impossible to remove them from the media

scene. The most paradigmatic cases of this tendency are represented by Le Pen and the Front National in France, and Pim Fortuyn in Holland.

In conclusion

The far right has had a long process of emergence, over at least two and a half decades, a radical right distinct from the interwar fascisms and the associated nostalgic ideas, but at the same time preserving a good part of their worldview and identity. A right-wing that has been able to exploit the contradictions of the system of globalizing neoliberalism of recent decades, providing a unifying discourse, simple but sufficiently complete to set up a specific social and political paradigm, and consolidate a diverse social spectrum. A context of systemic economic crisis, social cutbacks and layoffs, of various forms of unrest, insecurity about the future and the present creates situations capable of connecting with simple answers to complex problems, with scapegoats and neo-populist leaderships of a totalitarian nature, with a far right questioning the system but within its own parameters.

We must be attentive to the processes that are gestating in Europe, not only the anti-capitalist options which are timidly emerging, but also looking sideways to our extreme right, because until now in our state we have not had any far right organization with parliamentary representation, in what some analysts have called the Spanish "exception". It seems that this situation will not last long. The emergence of Platform Per Catalunya, with a real potential to achieve a good result in the coming Catalan elections, could launch a dangerous path of transit for a radical right that has remained underground at the social level and inside the Partido Popular, but that could get its own vehicle to express itself politically. Analyzing the speeches and the key elements in the success of the European far right is urgent and essential to the challenges posed by the crisis.

The return of the social question

MIGUEL ROMERO ·

To contribute to this objective, particularly in the Spanish State, there has been the aptly named "social dialogue". That is, the building of a consensus based on the systematic search for a mutual interest between employers and trade unions. This "social dialogue" has become a fundamental standard to manage relations between capital and labour. The result has been economically devastating: a reduction of the share of wages in GDP and record and sustained growth of corporate profits. With respect to the trade union and associative fabric, the disaster has been similar: a decline in membership of the majority of employees in unions and a parallel decline in militant practice. In political terms, this has led to a consolidation of a bipartisan PSOE-PP governance and the hegemony of the PSOE in terms of votes considered as those obtained by the left.

1. The general strike of September 29, 2010 seems to have succeeded in ensuring the return and the visibility of the "social question". I say "seems". Indeed, there is no doubt that as of September 30 we are still too close to the event to draw general conclusions. There is a clear risk, in this context, of confusing expectations with reality. What the general strike has achieved is still embryonic and fragile. The results of this strike have more to do with opportunities and expectations than with effective and consolidated conquests. However, there are concrete, reasoned, facts which allow us to establish with some degree of certainty that this necessary and vital revival of the "social question", so vital in this period of systemic capitalist crisis, is taking place.

2. The general strike has been a political success through the opportunities it opens more than by what it has actually conquered. It would be criminal not to appreciate this fact. But it is also important to recognize the weaknesses, what remains to be done so that, resting on this first step, it is possible to move forward. And, this, so as to approach objectives which, although certainly distant, are absolutely necessary for radical change at both the economic and political levels.

For example:

- We need to review in detail the results of the strike of September 29 both in the economic branches and according to region, especially where the strike was unable to reach a sufficient level to be effective as such: banks, healthcare, education and, moreover, as usual, the commerce sector specifically in supermarkets.
- It will be necessary to debate the slogans used whose content was to say the least ambiguous: "rectify [the reform]", "not in this way", or claims regarding the need for the renewal of "social dialogue".
- It will be necessary to be wary of the "monopoly" of the Workers' Commissions (CC.OO) and the UGT over the strikes. There have been other unions who have worked in favour of the strike and with recognized results, as evidenced by the mobilisation initiated and directed in Madrid by the CGT [a minority but very active, class conscious union advocating self-management, and originating from a split in the libertarian CNT]; which was the broadest demonstration that this union has ever called. This is one more reason to feel that its participation in the mobilization of the UGT and the CC.OO would have had a greater impact than the call to a parallel demonstration. However, there were original, effective contributions that can be used as ex-

amples for the future: unitary platforms in the regions, bicycle demonstrations, actions in the world of culture (although, in this case, less broad than other types of mobilization).

– And, finally, we should consider something more serious: ELA and LAB [two trade union organizations in the Basque country - Euskadi] rejected the appeal and, moreover, impeded actions and strike pickets. This is not a question that can be dealt with in a few lines. It stems from much more general and older problems, and it is hard to see how it would be possible to overcome such obstacles.

In summary, the term "political victory" has an intrinsic meaning: a demonstration of collective force, a feeling of having defeated those who predicted with determination that the strike would be a failure; the ability to change the "common sense" of those at the bottom who were, until now, marked by scepticism and resignation. Therefore, a beginning of the recovery of a trade union activist base among the majority unions in many places. And in addition, beyond the trade union sphere. In the future, it will not be possible to conduct economic and social policy in closed meetings with the "agents of the market" and in the corridors of Parliament. Now it is necessary to take account of the street, whose presence has destabilized the established government line of march.

3. A breach was opened, but only a breach. The optimistic discourse of those who convened the strike ("all the general strikes have experienced success", "sooner or later, Zapatero will change" and so on) can be understood if we place it in the perspective of organising the preparation of a strike. But, today, we must face reality, admittedly with hope, but without illusions.

Because it is not true that "all general strikes" have ended in triumph. They have achieved partial results, of unequal importance, but no substantive changes in socio-economic policies. If you want, they have won the "rectifications" of which union leaders speak, but this in a perspective of very partial changes of very unequal magnitude (withdraw-

al of a law that goes out the door, but comes back through the window).

But this time, we have not only legislation but also an economic policy that would require a very significant margin of "rectifications". We are faced with a policy of iron, a "structural adjustment" subject to standards, such as the dictates of the markets, like those cemented within the EU to which the Zapatero government has subordinated itself as a vassal.

The only rectification that makes sense is to change the foundations of the economy and of politics, to free ourselves from the "markets" and, therefore, confront their attacks. This still lacks an effective social fabric, a subject which, is constructed from below, inside the depths of society. In other words, the formation of an alliance where the social and political converge, over a prolonged period of resistance and experience of new forms of action and organization. Progress on this path involves strengthening a "left of the lefts", which puts an end to the current political configuration of the institutional left, one of the worst legacies of the Transition [from Francoism].

4. Has a new political cycle opened? As of now, the possibility exists. And, therefore, we need to open it.

All of us who placed our confidence in this strike and did everything for it have won. Some more than others certainly. However, it would be highly advisable that those who emerge from this strike strengthened and with the attributes of political authority, primarily the CC.OO, look around them and remember that they were not alone, least of all on the picket lines. And also remember that on the picket lines coexistence between people from different currents was much easier than what might be implied by confrontation between organizations. In all cases, September 29 also represents a possibility, a novelty in the past twenty years, of developing a plural, radical and unitary trade union left linked to the social movements on a daily basis.

There is also a new space effectively won by the anti-capitalist left together with many other activists, organized and unorganized. Currently, it has moved into action with ambition and humility. The key to the future resides in knowing how to struggle for unity and action and doing so through a linkage with anti-capitalist objectives specific to the current daily struggles.

And, among other things, the decisive elements of the present phase reside in the ability to link all those who, during the mobilizations that crowned the strike, have become convinced that we need new strikes, that will take work to be well prepared, well led and that that will, certainly, be still stronger than that of September 29, 2010.

Miguel Romero, September 30, 2010.

ECUADOR

CADTM denounces the attempted coup in Ecuador

CADTM ·

A sector of the armed forces, including air force personnel, together with police, took control of the country's main airports. Former president Lucio Gutierrez, who stood down in 2005 in the wake of public protests, and speaking from Brasilia, declared his support for the coup and an end to Rafael Correa's mandate.

Along with many other bodies and associations CADTM insists that President Rafael Correa is a democratic president. He was elected to office twice (in 2006 and 2010) in democratic presidential elections. Since the beginning of his mandate, his government has implemented a series of positive measures: a democratic process of political reform which led to a new constitution for the country in 2008; a newly affirmed declaration of independence resulting in an end to the US army's occupation of the Manta base; an audit of the public debt (in which CADTM actively collaborated) which led to suspension of repayments, which in turn enabled the volume of debt to be significantly reduced; an increase in social spending; the promotion of Latin-American integration; an environmental initiative to end oil drilling in the Amazonian rain forest on the Yasuni reservation; the creation of public service television and radio in a country where the mass media was until then entirely controlled by

big private corporations, and more specifically by the country's private banks. These advances have been enabled through strong popular mobilization over the last 15 years. Though these advances may be modest and certainly insufficient in scope, the various democratic changes brought about since Rafael Correa's election at the end of 2006 have engendered fierce opposition from the conservative sectors who are accustomed to use government as a medium for defending their interests.

As the attempted coup d'état progressed, citizens and organizations massed in Ecuador to demand the release of Rafael Correa, who was being held in a police hospital in Quito.

While CADTM has never failed to take a critical stand on Rafael Correa's government when it considered its actions contrary to the ongoing process of emancipation, it firmly denounces the attempted coup of 30 September. Constitutional order must be respected, democracy must be reaffirmed, and Rafael Correa must enjoy full freedom to pursue his mandate. CADTM calls for international support of the popular movement to defend democracy. The democratic process currently underway in Ecuador must be achieved through thorough-going economic and social reforms.

CADTM

| ECUADOR

Stop the coup attempt in Ecuador against the Correa government

So far, the coup leaders have not achieved their objective. While appearing as a police protest against government decisions, the dynamics of that protest – in which Correa himself was wounded and detained – are the dynamics of a coup. The response of many social organizations, unions, political groups, feminists, peasants and indigenous people in Ecuador – even though some of them put their criticisms of the government first, have been echoed around the world and many voices have been raised in protest against this coup attempt that seeks to seize the moment of confusion to advance the right-wing offensive sponsored by imperialism and remove one of the progressive governments of Latin America.

In Mexico various organizations immediately called for demonstrations of support and solidarity. Today and tomorrow, in front of the Ecuadorean embassy in Mexico City, there have been called, especially by the MMSC, protest vigils against the attempted coup.

For our party, the PRT, it is clear that this coup attempt coincides with the imperialist strategy that seeks to curb the social struggles which have developed in recent years in Ecuador and Latin America and have led to significant gains, even in the midst of the contradictions of this process and the justified criticisms that may exist among the population. In spite of these criticisms from the popular movement of the limitations or inconsistencies of the Correa government, it is clear that a coup by the

police, and possibly by the military, it will not favour the people's interests, but on the contrary will seek not only to overthrow Correa but also to sweep aside the conquests and rights of the people. That is why we must oppose this coup attempt by the police.

In this right-wing, reactionary and profoundly undemocratic action, the role of imperialism and the forces of the bourgeoisie and the oligarchy has undoubtedly been present, as it was before in Honduras, and just as it threatened the processes in Bolivia from a racist stance, and in Venezuela with the use of all the media apparatus, but without achieving their objective.

Our support for the Ecuadorean people at this time means first denouncing the coup attempt. There will be time later to discuss the best alternatives. But little progress can be achieved if we allow the bayonets again to silence the liberties of a people such as that of Ecuador. There are many examples in history that have shown us how the installation of the worst military dictatorships in Latin America has begun with military coups aimed at smothering the people's aspirations to freedom and justice.

We call on all to join the demonstrations of protest against this attempted coup d'etat in Ecuador, with all the strength that we the peoples of the world can muster.

Mexico, D. F. on September 30, 2010.

International Committee of the Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT)

Mexican Section of the Fourth International