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**THE INTERNATIONAL
SITUATION
AND THE TASKS OF
REVOLUTIONARY
MARXISTS TODAY**

INTRODUCTION

The last decades have been characterised by a bourgeois offensive against workers in semi-colonial countries and the ex-bureaucratic workers' states. This was the response of capital to the convulsive period opened by the 70s, a decade that was marked by a crisis of capitalist accumulation after the post-war boom, the emergence of sharp competition between powers such as Germany and Japan, and uprisings by workers and the popular masses (1968-81) in the metropolitan countries and, in a more aggravated form, in the developing world, that undermined the relative stability of the Yalta order and questioned US hegemony. This period marked the end of the so-called 'benevolent hegemony' of American imperialism and forced it to go on the counter-offensive in order to prevent a rapid erosion of its power, both economic and military.

As a result, the United States managed to slow down the pace of its own decay, achieving a relative recovery of its dominance. This policy, started by Reagan in the 80s, reached its highest point in the 90s, when the collapse of the USSR and the US's reaffirmation as the dominant side in the Cold War, allowed it to create an illusion of indisputable dominance over the world, hiding its contradictions. The reinforcement of the neo-liberal offensive and the penetration of capital into geographical areas closed to it in the past led to a heightened sense of triumph on the part of the bourgeoisie, opening a decade of prosperity and restored capitalist confidence.

The end of the 90s represented a turning point – the opening of a new period in the international situation as a result of the following factors:

1) The end of the boom in the American economy and, at a more general level, the development of contradictions inherent in the major internationalisation of capital, and an important imbalance of the world economy, which was forecast by the Asiatic crisis of 1997-99.

2) The adoption of a more aggressive foreign policy post 9/11 with the aim of generating the conditions to reaffirm American dominance of the world, leading to international institutions like the UN being weakened and the role of NATO being redefined, putting into question the system of international relations that has reigned since the end of the Second World War.

3) As a consequence, we are witnessing a development of tension unprecedented in recent years between the big powers – mainly the USA on one side and France and Germany on the other. This tension reached a high level before the Iraq war, signifying a breakdown in international relations that will continue to exist regardless of the state of cooperation or confrontation between them. In the short term, the crisis which opened up in the EU after the 'no' vote in the referenda on the European Constitution in France and Holland is a point that favours the USA.

4) A slow but steady recovery of the mass movement after two decades of holding back due to the neo-liberal offensive, the impact of the ongoing capitalist restoration, and the decline in class consciousness and ability to organise independently. The strike of the French public sector in 1995 marked a turning point in a process of

ideological and political reversal of the defeats of previous years. The emergence of sectors allied to the working class, like the anticapitalist youth movement in the metropolitan countries, was followed by examples of direct action in Latin America and a growing intervention by the working class. This slow recovery by advanced elements among the masses is taking place in the context of an increased social and political polarisation, which could be an anticipation of more radical developments in places where the contradictions are sharpest, as happened during the revolutionary process in Bolivia in October 2003 and June 2005.

Looking at the international situation, the most dynamic element is the decline of American dominance, and the attempt by the Bush administration to reshape the world order according to its national interests.

Although the decline of American hegemony is an ongoing historical process that started in the 70s during the Vietnam War, it has accelerated after 9/11 with Bush's turn towards a more unilateral and warmongering policy. The opposition to the war in Iraq by powers like Germany and France, by semi-colonial governments and by the masses worldwide, is a vivid expression of the polarisation that this policy has generated.

We are living through a period in which the USA is still the main imperialist power, but in which its dominance is no longer passively accepted, but, on the contrary, is increasingly challenged by different social forces that have emerged during the last decade. Its growing militarism is proof of its weakness, not of its dominance; it reveals a loss of consensus and the need to look for more brutal methods to sustain its hegemony at the international level.

This is the main element which, in our view, has given rise to a new stage in which, as opposed to previous years of unstoppable bourgeois offensive and a series of defeats of the working class and masses, there is a combination of reactionary blows (like the war in Iraq) with a tendency for increased resistance by the mass movement and an incipient recovery of working class political consciousness – although the class struggle is not in the forefront.

The decay of American hegemony, conflicts between the imperialist powers, increasing militarism, social polarisation and the slow emergence of the mass movements poses the need for a revolutionary programme to assist the masses in the struggles to come.

PART I

FOUNDATIONS

I. PERSPECTIVES FOR THE WORLD ECONOMY

Globalisation and imperialism

In the last few decades there has been a significant advance in the internationalisation of the economy. Capital has expanded into new geographical areas that were previously inaccessible to it, such as the ex-USSR and Eastern Europe. And the restoration of capitalism has advanced in China. This process, which was accompanied by “free market” triumphalism after the fall of “real socialism”, produced a new ideological vogue, which preached that through “globalisation” capital had in its own way overcome the contradictions of the imperialist period. Also it had overcome the rivalries between the major powers that in the 20th century led to two world wars, and the contradiction between the internationalisation of the productive forces and the nation states – at the expense of the latter.

If we compare imperialism’s configuration at the beginning of the 20th century with the current situation we can see the big changes that have taken place. These briefly have been as follows: a) that the large monopolies and corporations have increased their power enormously in the last thirty years through ever-increasing fusions and acquisitions – meaning greater concentration and centralisation of capital in most sectors of production; b) that they have conquered new territorial markets and put new spheres of

human activity under their domination in a process of general commodification that has also absorbed education, culture, pensions and medicine (to name just a few significant areas); c) that the dominant powers have tended to try to express the economic control that they exercise in the “global” market in supranational legal and political institutions; d) that this has led to a weakening of the “sovereignty” of nation states – although this varies in degree from country to country; e) that scientific and technical developments have sharpened the contradiction between increasingly socialised and complex production and the imposition of a measure enabling it to be valorised and traded; f) that there has been the development of a new global division of labour in which some (central) countries tend to concentrate the complex jobs and basic science, and another group (basically in Asia and particularly in China) the intensive exploitation of workers thanks to the strong development of manufacturing in the countries on the periphery – something without comparison in the 20th century. There is also another sector of the periphery that plays the role of provider of raw materials and has suffered a relative de-industrialisation, such as South America; and a fourth, of countries that essentially operate as reservoirs of labour that has been denied any chance of incorporation in the production process, such as much of Africa; g) the faster

growth of world trade compared to world production, particularly in intra-company trade and due to the growing importance of foreign direct investment in the central and peripheral countries; h) the swelling of finance, which has created a truly globalised world market; i) lastly, and as a result of all of these changes, globally there has been a fall in the rate of value. The transnationals' increased influence, particularly in the field of the production of tradable goods but increasingly in other areas of capital valorisation such as services, has tended towards the formation of global prices in more and more branches of the economy.

All of these elements mark a difference with "classical imperialism" – where the countries on the periphery of capitalism were integrated into the world economy as producers and suppliers of raw materials for the metropolitan centres. It is also a different situation from the early years of the boom in multinationals and their entry through subsidiaries into protected markets. What is new is that peripheral countries' primary "specialisation" as raw-material producers has been combined with the integration of an important number of such nations into global manufacturing circuits administered by transnationals – a process made possible by the significant cheapening of transport and communication costs.

But these transformations – far from creating the homogeneous and harmonious economic space proclaimed by the proponents of "globalisation" or producing a "change in era" – have exacerbated the basic features of capitalism. There has been greater inequality in terms of the development of countries, regions and economic sectors. This has increased the contradiction between the social production of wealth and internationalisation of the productive forces on the one hand, and their appropriation by a small number of corporations and imperialists states on the other.

At the same time, the growing financial nature of the economy with the boom in speculative investments in the share and real-estate markets, public-debt premiums, and others, has left exposed the parasitical nature of capitalism and considerably increased the economy's volatility – as was seen during the spread of the 1997 crisis that spread from Asia to hit Russia, Brazil and Argentina.

Today production and world trade are directed by 500 industrial, banking and agricultural and food-industry super-monopolies, whose parent companies are in a handful of countries making up a select group of imperialist powers – such as the US, Germany, Japan, France, Britain and Italy.

The US economy is still the biggest economy in the world, but its relative weight has decreased – with its economy falling from being 50% of gross world product at the end of the Second World War to 25% at present. Although its monopolies still lead the world table, they have lost ground to Japanese and Euro-

pean transnationals.

Unlike the common-sense theory that assumes capitalist competition to be dead as a result of the formation of mega-corporations – centrally as a result of mergers and takeovers – the struggle to grab significant shares of the market has intensified. This has led to the creation of economic blocks involving the imperialist powers and their areas of influence. These include the North-American Free Trade Agreement between the US, Canada and Mexico; the European Union; and the Asian ASEAN.

These economic blocks have confronted each other in small "trade wars" in the World Trade Organisation – in respect of agricultural subsidies, commercial airline standards and other issues. There they have defended the interests of their monopolies, caused summits to collapse and allowed important semi-colonial countries such as Brazil and India take advantage of their differences during negotiations.

Plundering the semi-colonies

During the 90s, the "Washington consensus" was imposed on the semi-colonial world. This was based on opening up economies to penetration by foreign capital and the deregulation of markets, privatisation of public services, commercialisation of human-activity areas (such as education, culture and medicine), and promoting 'flexible' employment – all of which strengthened imperialist plunder.

The picture was completed with the double burden of the oppressive debt and the deterioration in the exchange value of raw materials, which led to the impoverishment of large parts of the periphery.

Capital's paid propagandists gave neo-liberalism a "modernising" role which would supposedly allow incorporating the semi-colonial countries into the "first world". Quite the opposite has happened: the process of globalising industrial production and the incorporation into this process of some backwards countries has allowed the trans-national corporations to obtain extraordinary profits. This is as a result of the cheapening of the workforce and of the fact that to attract capital the governments of the peripheral countries have practically wiped out tax duties for capital, and social welfare and almost all legal regulations to defend environmental and quality standards.

The local bourgeoisies opted to turn themselves into junior partners of imperialist plunder. Keen-to-surrender governments wiped out national wealth and natural resources. The Menem government in Argentina went as far as handing over the country's petrol reserves to the Spanish firm Repsol.

Millions of workers lost their jobs thanks to the privatisation and restructuring of firms. Latin America became the continent with the biggest social inequalities, which fuelled mass direct action in coun-

tries such as Argentina, Bolivia, Peru and Ecuador.

Contradictions of the capitalist restoration process in China and Russia and their full incorporation in the global capitalist economy

The fall of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and – even more – the disintegration of the USSR and the capitalist-restoration route followed by China have led to a geographic and social extension of capital's reign across wide areas of the planet. This has extended the possibility of exploiting to hundreds of millions of new workers, as cheap labour. And it has increased the perspectives for the goods and services markets through access to millions of new consumers.

However, fundamentally it has sharpened competition between monopolies and imperialist powers to conquer new areas of influence, markets and raw materials, within the narrow framework of the world capitalist market. Thus while the European Union has tried to reaffirm its dominance in the Eastern European states, making them its backyard, incorporating them into political Union, the United States has tried to have greater influence over these countries. This was shown by the support the super-power received from some of these, such as Poland, for the war on Iraq. Nevertheless these disputes are merely a foretaste of a bigger struggle to see who benefits strategically from restoration in the Russian and Chinese giants. This has been shown by the differences over raising the EU arms embargo against China – opposed by Washington – and the policy differences between the US and the EU – in particular Germany – with regards to Russia.

The dismantling of the planned economy in Russia has meant a brutal destruction of productive forces and an enormous economic, social and cultural step backwards. The predatory nature of privatisation has led to the emergence of a new layer of oligarchs – closely linked to the West. These appropriated natural resources such as gas and oil, and without capital to compete on the world market they thus transferred ownership of their shares to international oil capital – particularly US capital. This has forced the confiscating of properties by the Russian state, which thus set itself up as arbitrator between international capital and the appropriation of Russian natural resources. Only after this action took place did the US government start up a propaganda campaign against the authoritarian nature of the Putin government – a nature that the US itself helped to consolidate during the previous decade – seeking to create openly pro-US imperialist forces inside Russia. This has taken place within the framework of an ever-greater loss of geo-political influence for the former superpower: not just in Eastern Europe and the Baltic states – which have recently become incorporated into NATO – but even in its own backyard. The most recent example was the Russian setback in Caucasasia and Central Asia,

after the uprising in Kyrgyzstan, which was taken advantage of by the US. The situation in the Ukraine after the triumph of the “orange revolution” is even more serious for Putin, due to the key role this country plays in Russia's national security. The Russian pro-restoration bureaucracy is paying the price of the pro-capitalist turn that Russian leaders – from Gorbachev to Putin – have been carrying out over the last twenty years. Their hope was to establish themselves as the new bourgeois class of a capitalist power by appealing to international capital to modernise its industrial and technological base. However this has led to the opposite: a loss of status for them in the international big league and a territorial disintegration that threatens the survival of the Russian federation itself. Its increasingly disastrous geopolitical results and the hostility of the population to market reforms, firstly, and US pressure, secondly, are eroding the base that sustains Putin's Bonapartism. This situation has unleashed an alternative medium-term prospect: there will either be a big step forward for imperialist penetration in Russia itself – and the transformation of the country into a semi-colonial one, like Brazil – or the Russian working class will react, taking advantage of its ruling class's weakness and the division between the different imperialist powers. This class will be able to prevent such an ominous perspective and reverse all of the disasters caused by capitalist restoration, putting into question the power of the pro-restoration bureaucracy and new rich.

China has benefited in a contradictory way from the “advantages of backwardness” –i.e., from its weaker industrial development and enormous reserve of cheap labour – and has experienced 9% growth for over a decade. This situation has led many to describe China as the “new power” of the 21st century, underestimating the consequences of the unequal and dependent nature of this development on its economic perspectives. Domestically, penetration by foreign capital has exacerbated an unsustainable inequality between the coastal areas – where investment is concentrated – and the areas where employment is dependent on the old bankrupt state factories or farms. Chinese development thus has an explosive and unilateral character whose consequences from a social point of view are deeper polarisation, concentration of wealth and protests caused by the dismantling of the still-dominant state industries and the agrarian crisis.

The long-term future growth of China and its successful integration into the world economy will depend on the health of world capitalism. For some time China has benefited far more than has been the case in other countries from its vast pool of cheap labour. It has also benefited from the tendency for the imperialist economies and multinationals to fight tooth and nail to lower costs to recover profitability after the crisis of the 70s – which was when the main economies' profit rate began to fall. This tendency is still

a reality of the world economy and has deepened as a result of over-investment in the 90s – not just in terms of quantity but also in terms of the new sectors involved (services). However, it is being counteracted by a counter-tendency emerging from the same capitalist restructuring and de-localisation process of the last few decades: a lack of markets for the levels of profits that the changes in the production process allow being valorised and realised.

The route taken, despite having recovered profitability, has led to a new narrowing of the world capitalist economy. This has led not to expansion – such as during the post-war boom – but a savage fight for markets. Out of this iron logic comes the never-ending quest for cheap-labour sources. This has been particularly beneficial to China – the “new capitalist miracle” – but puts a big question mark over the sustainability of this new global division of labour, unless one is content to believe the corporations’ baseless dream of China turning into a big consumer power. This is something that, due to reasons of an internal and external nature, is either unlikely to happen at all, or only at a pace that avoids potential economic cataclysms in the next decade or so. The West’s hope – that the Chinese market becomes not just a “large assembly plant for the world” but a new market enabling balance to be regained by the world economy (which has been maintained throughout these years due to the over-reaching growth of US consumption) – doesn’t stand up to the slightest test.

In other words, the geographical expansion of capital, as well as being a temporary solution for world capitalism in previous decades – particularly in the 90s – has meant an intensification of market-seeking inter-monopolist competition, which in the long and medium term will tend to worsen the capitalist crisis.

Imbalances in the world economy

The increased globalisation of the economy – which was one of the responses to the capital accumulation crisis that began in the 70s – shows itself in the strong volatility of world capitalism. Despite its appearance of invincibility, there have been in the last eleven years five regional crises affecting the central countries – although thanks to governmental and central-bank intervention they could be contained. This means a crisis has taken place every two years, or less if we include the 2001/02 US crisis. Such was the case with the 1994 “tequila” crisis – which sank US Treasury bonds and forced the Clinton government to perform a salvage operation – and the crisis that began in Asia in 1997 and spread to Russia in 1998, causing the country to default on its debt payments – which hit Wall Street hard, encouraging the US Federal Reserve Bank to bail out the LTCM investment fund to avoid its fall sparking an international financial crisis. In 1999 Brazil became the next victim, although it

managed to ride the storm. Not so Argentina, which ended up in 2001 producing the biggest sovereign debt default in history. Lastly, after the plummeting of the “dot com” shares, the US economy went into recession – which despite being small, as a result of the measures adopted, saw the biggest bankruptcies and business frauds in history, such as with Enron and WorldCom. All of these elements show that – despite the increased capital expansion into new geographical and other areas in recent decades – the global economy has not achieved lasting stability.

It is within such a framework that we should see the strong recovery of the world economy in 2003-04, driven by US consumption and Chinese investment. The unequal nature of this recovery, from which the US has benefited, while the major EU countries are suffering stagnation with almost zero perspectives for growth, is another expression of the deep imbalances in the world economy.

The United States’s recovery since the 2000-02 recession has been based essentially on three elements: 1) a rise in defence expenditure linked to the militarist policy of the Bush administration; 2) a spectacular lowering of taxes for the richer sectors of US society; and 3) a very low interest-rate level, that has enabled the domestic market to be sustained, with real-estate investment being particularly promoted.

Nevertheless, these policies, while they have allowed economic dynamism to be maintained and the business climate to be improved, have deepened the imbalances of the world economy – particularly that of the US: the world’s strongest economy.

Firstly, the lowering in taxes has led to a new national deficit being produced. Secondly, sustaining consumer demand has led to an unprecedented level of debt for US households and a drastic reduction in the national savings rate. Lastly, the US trade-balance deficit reached in mid-2004 a record figure of \$665,000 million: 5.7% of GDP. Never in world history has there been financing of a deficit of this magnitude, which has meant that the US absorbs over 80% of available savings globally. At the same time, this deficit must indicate a structural deterioration of the US’s manufacturing base, an indicator sensitive to loss of competitiveness in key sectors – which is one of the clearest signs of US hegemonic decline.

At enormous domestic cost, the US economy continues to act as a final consumer – attracting exports particularly from Asia and to a lesser extent Europe. Meanwhile, the Asian central banks are buying up reserves worth millions of dollars. By investing their savings in US treasury bonds and other financial assets they are thus financing the US trade deficit. The process produces a vicious circle by which countries that export to the United States are subsidising the low interest rates maintained by the Federal Reserve, encouraging debt among US consumers so that they keep buying imported goods from China or Japan.

In this context there is an increased probability of financial turbulence. A drastic turn by the Federal Reserve towards a more restrictive policy, or the mere announcement that an Asian central bank has decided to convert part of its reserves from dollars into euros could spark panic in the markets. A severe financial crisis could put into question the role of the dollar as the international reserve currency. This shows the relative precariousness of US growth and puts into question the long-term sustainability of the imbalanced functioning of the world economy.

The medium-term perspectives are thus of grea-

ter economic tensions. And such would take place just at a time in which the worsening of political relations between the major powers has put a question mark over the effectiveness of international coordination measures. These played a really important role in re-establishing temporary capitalist equilibrium after the 70s crisis.

Bearing in mind that the weak growth of domestic demand in Europe and Japan prevents them from acting as an alternative to the US, world economic perspectives could be bleak in the event of a serious change in the US economy.

2. THE IRAQ WAR, THE US OFFENSIVE AND GROWING IMPERIALIST TENSIONS

The attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon on 11th September 2001 showed the vulnerability of the US to the outside and accelerated the aggressive direction of the Bush government's foreign policy. The loss of consensus allowing it to dominate its allies and friends has led the US to resort to increasing levels of coercion, which is reflected in its unilateralism and a growing militarist tendency in the international political field.

US strategy aims to drastically transform the international relations and institutions that have formed the cornerstone of the post-war new world order. This is in order for it to create the necessary conditions for US world dominance to be re-affirmed over the following decades.

During Bush's first presidency, this strategy was expressed mostly in terms of the "war on terror" and the "pre-emptive strike", while his second mandate adopted a discourse centred on "spreading democracy and freedom" against "tyrants". The latter produced a policy that combined the use of military might with democratic reaction as the way to impose "regime change".

The basis of US unilateralism

The United States's "unilateralism" has deep economic roots. So called "globalisation" – which meant a leap in terms of imperialist penetration in the periphery by means of the deregulation of markets, privatisations and the exploitation of cheap labour – unleashed US capital's most predatory tendencies and created a social base favouring a return to the most barbarous forms of imperialism. Bush's first government and his re-election are a clear expression of these sectors. His aggressive foreign policy was accompanied domestically by a brutal rolling back of important conquests achieved by years of struggle by the US proletariat and masses.

During Bush's first presidency, the employers took advantage of the recession and the 9-11 attacks to ca-

rry out sackings and increase the flexibilisation of job conditions – to the point that even economic recovery was not matched by a significant reduction in unemployment. His second presidency announced a qualitative step forward in privatising health and social-insurance systems – aiming to save millions of dollars for the state at the expense of social welfare, and promoting private pension funds and other private services.

The current administration's strategy is to try and legitimise, naturalise and consolidate on these advances. This involves deepening and extending the change not just in the socio-economic area but also in the political and cultural, rooting out all traces of egalitarianism, and promoting an unprecedented attack on democratic freedoms – strengthening the cabinet's authority, and control over the three branches of state power, by the most right-wing elements of the political establishment. Bush's new discourse, as well as its strong religious tone, aims to build an "ownership society".

In synthesis, if Fordism, Americanism and Wilsonism were the programmes of a rising US capitalism – in order to establish its hegemony over labour domestically (and after the Second World War consolidate itself as a hegemonic power, shaping the institutions of the world order in its image) – the current offensive is more like its opposite. So the weakening of "multilateralism" in foreign policy has been accompanied by the attempt at destroying and replacing the elements of "persuasion" that made possible the cooption and submission of the working class in boom periods. These are being replaced by a new combination involving a growing authoritarianism and/or Bonapartism and a strengthening of traditional moral values. It is a genuine product of the crisis and decline of US capitalism.

Inter-imperialist rivalries

This policy by the United States of pursuing its national

interest so openly, of trying to gain strategic advantage in order to maintain its global hegemony, is the main source of tension that has riddled the international system since the build up to the Iraq war. This has produced a rivalry between the imperialist powers that has been without precedent in the last few decades. With the “communist threat” out of the way – after the fall of the Yalta Order – US dominance stopped being an automatic requirement for the maintenance of the world status quo. This led to an increase in competition and different policies between the imperialist powers. The “threat of Islamic terrorism” has not been enough in itself to pull the rest of the Western world behind the US, as it must be taken into account that the European powers have other systems of alliances, relations and commercial interests in the Middle East that are different to those of the US.

The clearest sign of this has been the growing rivalry between Europe and the US which has deepened in the last four years and reached its peak with the opposition by France and Germany, accompanied by Russia, to the war on Iraq.

US unilateralism is at the heart of this increase in inter-imperialist tension, as its decision to impose its interests regardless of the circumstances threatens the vital interests of other powers.

The European Union project clearly responds to the need to counterbalance US military might and improve the perspectives for European capital on the international playing field. However, US policy in Iraq caused a serious division between the EU powers. While France and Germany led the opposition, showing they advocated a more multilateral order administered by institutions such as the UN, Britain made clear its strategic choice of being an ally of the United States. It was followed in this by Italy and Spain; and key Eastern European countries such as Poland were dragged along too. The list of differences between the US and Europe is long and varied: the Iraq war and the current relationship with the Iraqi government; the treatment of prisoners in Guantánamo; the policy to be applied regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (beyond giving support to the Abbas government); the approach to take regarding nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea; whether to maintain the weapons embargo over China; the Cuba embargo; whether NATO should remain the central structure to discuss relations between the US and the EU; the Galileo system versus the GPS system for satellite-navigation systems; the urgency of climate change and the Kyoto agreement; support for the International Criminal Court; mutual complaints (and threats of sanctions) regarding industrial subsidies; genetically modified seeds; rivalry between Boeing and Airbus; and, last but not least, the growth of the Euro as a potential global reserve currency.

Does this mean that the EU has become a progressive alternative pole to the US – as some sectors of

the anti-globalisation movement that defend the creation of an anti-hegemonic front between the countries of the periphery and the EU against the US would claim? Not at all: the EU and the US share significant interests. They agree on maintaining the stability of the world capitalist system; they are united in the face of growing demands by countries in the periphery when negotiations involving imperialist powers take place in the World Trade Organisation.

This interest in preventing any triumph by the oppressed against imperialism is what explains the times when there is a relative strengthening of ties and cooperation over issues such as the “orange revolution” in the Ukraine or the joint pressure put on Syria for its withdrawal from Lebanon.

Nevertheless, the profound differences that came out into the open over the Iraq war have persisted – as they are not the result of merely the conjuncture but a strategic dispute involving different economic, social, political and military elements. Within such a framework, the EU project’s advance has suffered a serious blow after the rejection of its Constitution by France and Holland. The Franco-German bloc – the engine of European construction – has entered a critical phase: divided over the constitution and with its leaders in electoral free fall. It will take a long time to rebuild their “irreplaceable” alliance. The chaos that the European Union is going through is shown by the fall of the euro – demonstrating the nervousness of the financial markets faced with the unsure political direction of the “old continent”. The future expansion of the EU, such as the incorporation of Turkey, remains in limbo; while it is likely that tougher conditions will be applied to the newly incorporated countries of Eastern Europe – such as the Czech Republic or Poland. Faced with such a scenario, new divisions and clashes may arise between the European countries, which will defend their interests more fiercely – as with the future discussion on the EC budget. This may lead to gaps emerging. In other words, the growing division between the states and, particularly, the categorical rejection by the population to the offensive that the advance of the EU entails, in the short term puts a limit on the development of Europe as a counter-hegemonic pole.

The Iraq test

US unilateralism and the resort to militarism as the way of imposing control are up against their first serious trial in the policy towards Iraq – whose outcome cannot be predicted.

The war on Iraq had as its aim to transform the country into a platform for imperialist might in the Middle East which would allow the region’s political map to be re-drawn. This would strengthen the position of the US and its ally Israel at the expense of the region’s semi-colonial bourgeoisie and regimes that object to automatic alignments with the US – such as

the Syrians.

Concentrated in the Middle East are the world's main oil reserves, which represent the main source of crude oil for the EU – which is on good terms with regimes such as Iran, a country that the US considers to be in the “axis of evil”. Thus, US re-positioning in the region represents a direct threat to competing power interests, fundamentally those of Europe and Russia.

The US went to war practically on its own, challenging historic allies and almost completely ignoring an unprecedented anti-Americanism that produced mobilisations of millions of people against US policy and President Bush.

Although the US troops won a quick military victory against Saddam Hussein's regime – which disintegrated almost without a fight – the occupation of Iraq proved to be a more complicated venture than envisaged by its Pentagon planners and the neo-conservatives, the ideologues of “regime change”.

The US offensive has deepened the profound anti-US feeling in the region. In Iraq the attempt at establishing a puppet government for imperialism has led to the emergence of armed resistance. This has a wide social base in the Sunni section of the Iraqi people which is geographically concentrated in the centre of the country – particularly in Baghdad and Fallujah.

Despite having the strongest army in the world, the United States has not managed to smash the resistance, which continues plaguing its troops and increasing its number of losses. The most critical moment for imperialism was when it had to tackle two uprisings – in the cities of Fallujah and Najaf (led by the Shia cleric Al Sadr) – in April 2004. After that was over, the US started to implement complex political engineering to establish a still-unformed Iraqi government. In order to get to this and the elections, collaboration by Shia leaders – and in particular Ali Al-Sistani – was essential.

The US benefits from the Iraqi resistance's handicap that until now it has remained confined to the Sunni region and has not managed to generalise into a mass national-liberation movement expressing rejection of military occupation and the struggle to expel foreign troops and against their local collaborators.

Until now the result of the US operation in Iraq has been provisional. The Middle East remains an area of political instability within the framework of a mass anti-Americanism. This is despite Bush having re-launched a political offensive in the region after the Iraqi elections were held on 30th January 2005 and his victory in the presidential elections (despite the low level of domestic popularity for the Iraq war). In this offensive he adopted the discourse of democratic reaction to move towards a resolution of the Palestinian conflict and strengthen Syria's international isolation.

The situation in Lebanon shows the deep polarisation produced by US policy. Such a polarisation

generally follows the religious and ethnic lines of division in the region and the sides that fought each other in fifteen years of civil war. The country has literally been split in two between a sector led by a pro-imperialist and Israel-friendly opposition – which is mainly Maronite Christian, Sunni and Druze – and another mainly Shia, led by Hezbollah, which seeks to resist the imperialist offensive and could fuel action by other anti-US forces in the Palestinian territories and Iran and Iraq.

The United States still has to wrestle militarily in a counter-insurgency campaign with a guerrilla movement that is far weaker from a weapons point of view but with a serious social base which it can depend on for local military and intelligence collaboration. This could mean that other similar forces in the region and beyond that which are taking on US military could be encouraged to apply the irregular-resistance model.

The occupation of Iraq has also revealed the military limitations of the biggest world power. The permanence of roughly 150,000 soldiers in Iraq, alongside continued missions and military bases in large parts of the world – from Western Europe to Japan and Afghanistan – is stretching the available troop capacity as the US army eliminated compulsory conscription after the Vietnam defeat and now is made up of professional and reservist soldiers.

It is true that the US offensive could not be sustained exclusively by means of military intervention – which would lead to a kind of “permanent war” of police operations in all parts of the world. Nevertheless it is also true that the policy of democratic reaction expressed in the rhetoric of “regime change” and “democratic reforms” would not be effective without US military might.

The weak coalition that went to war with the United States suffered some serious blows. The alliance with Bush has cost British prime minister Tony Blair the most significant crisis of his period in government. Spain left the coalition after the Madrid bombings on 11th March 2004 – which led to the defeat of the Aznar government and the victory of the PSOE. The Berlusconi government – another Bush ally – has come up against serious difficulties in maintaining support for the war after US soldiers shot at the vehicle that carried a journalist who had been taken hostage and freed – severely injuring her and killing the Italian secret serviceman that had freed her.

The Middle Eastern puzzle is still far from being resolved. US intervention is seeking to increase the pace of profound change aimed at strengthening the position of the US and Israel, realigning countries that have historic links with Europe, obtaining new local agents to take on the role of wiping out mass resistance and disarming its most radical organisations. This is the idea behind the agreements between Mahmoud Abbas's new Palestinian leadership and Ariel Sharon to liquidate the Palestinian national struggle, the at-

tempt in Iraq to form a national government with the capacity to reconstruct a repressive apparatus able to tackle the resistance, or the support to mobilisations driven by the pro-imperialist wing of local elites as a

way of promoting “regime change”. The growing turbulence across the region shows that the Middle East will be one of the conflict zones where the US’s ability to dominate will continue to be put to the test.

PART II

KEY PROGRAMMATIC POINTS

1. THE ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT AND THE IRAQ WAR/OCCUPATION

The emergence of the anti-war movement was an enormously progressive event. In the midst of the preparations for the military invasion of Iraq, the mobilisation of millions of people across five continents was the biggest opposition to Bush's attempt at reshaping the Middle East and the rest of the world to his advantage. Since then, despite enormous ups and downs, the movement has remained a factor in our global reality. This was shown by its actions after the M-11 bombings in Spain – which forced the country's troops to withdraw from the pro-US coalition – or the significant loss of votes by Tony Blair in the recent elections in Great Britain (despite his electoral victory).

However, in Europe, where this movement has been the strongest, both the union leaderships – including the “alternative” and “militant” unions such as the IGM, SUD and COBAS – and the key organisations in the anti-globalisation movement, such as ATTAC and the autonomists, prevented the movement from being an effective tool to stop the US military machinery. Before the war began these leaderships had already given the movement its character: essentially pacifist and sowing illusions in the UN and the European powers opposing the war.

The only chance of stopping the war outside the theatre of conflict was by stopping the military machine that made it possible. The “war machine” fun-

damentally depends on the states and governments that apply it plus the imperialist bourgeoisies that finance and hope to obtain profits from it. Only with a big struggle against the aggressor governments would it have been possible to stop the imperialist attack or turn it into a social struggle against the imperialist governments. But, apart from the odd isolated action, the leaderships of the anti-war movement prevented the working class from being the centre of gravity of the struggle against the war through general strikes, boycotts and the sabotage of the production and transport of military equipment. For this reason, revolutionary Marxists' anti-war policy combines two elements. Firstly it involves revolutionary defeatism in the imperialist-aggressor countries – for which the anti-war movement is an important starting point (but needing to develop from its current pacifism, which is objectively progressive in the imperialist-aggressor countries, to an all-out struggle against imperialist governments such as those of Bush, Blair and Berlusconi). The experience of the Algerian struggle against the French empire or the heroic Vietnamese people against the US army shows that the combination of resistance by oppressed peoples and protests in imperialist-aggressor countries can defeat the world's most powerful armies –although, thanks to the leaderships, this was achieved at a high cost in terms of lives or years of war.

A revolutionary policy of this kind could only emerge from directly combating the leaderships and the pacifist ideology they advocate, which condemns as a matter of principle all war as “immoral”, leading counter-revolutionary violence by oppressors to be equated with the legitimate struggle by the oppressed. Thus a starting point for the revolutionary programme is to define the Iraq war as a clear war of imperialist aggression against an oppressed nation. Under the mask of “democracy”, the Bush government is seeking to wipe out all national sovereignty in order to subjugate the Iraqi people and plunder their wealth. Any defensive war for the liberation of an oppressed nation is for revolutionaries a just and legitimate war. This was the case with – for example – the Algerian national liberation struggle against the French colonialists or the Vietnam war. In this kind of war revolutionaries put themselves in the military camp of the semi-colonial countries regardless of the character of their governing regime. This is because the triumph of the imperialist country will mean twice as many chains for the people of the semi-colonial nation and even worse suffering than under their domestic dictatorship. In the case of Iraq we are for the military defeat of US imperialism and its coalition, despite the reactionary and dictatorial nature of Saddam Hussein. We follow here the teachings of revolutionary Marxism, whose principles were outlined in total clarity by Trotsky when faced with a possible war between the semi-fascist Brazilian regime of Vargas and imperialist Britain in the 30s. In such a context, he said, “in this case I will be on the side of ‘fascist’ Brazil against ‘democratic’ Great Britain. Why? Because in the conflict between them it will not be a question of democracy or fascism. If England should be victorious, she will put another fascist in Rio de Janeiro and will place double chains on Brazil. If Brazil on the contrary should be victorious, it will give a mighty impulse to national and democratic consciousness of the country and will lead to the overthrow of the Vargas dictatorship. The defeat of England will at the same time deliver a blow to British imperialism and will give an impulse to the revolutionary movement of the British proletariat”. Therefore the first point of our revolutionary programme regarding the Iraq war was that of the defeat of the imperialist troops. But being in the camp of the oppressed nation does not mean, as populist tendencies do, confusing the just defence of the oppressed nation with its particular leadership. As the whole history of the 20th Century showed – most recently the Argentine military dictatorship in the Malvinas/Falklands war against British imperialism or Saddam Hussein in the two Gulf wars – the bourgeoisie of the oppressed nation is incapable of implementing the military and political measures that would lead to the defeat of imperialism. Their fear of the class struggle and of a generalised arming of the population for self-defence mean that when attacked by imperialism they would prefer

national defeat to the unleashing of the social forces that might question their class domination. Consequently, revolutionaries put forward a programme from the trenches of the oppressed nation’s military camp that combines the tasks of national liberation and the method and aims of the proletarian revolution as a way of competing over leadership of the war with the bourgeoisie – which will sooner or later end up capitulating and allowing the most demoralising national defeats. The proletariat is the only class that can unite and lead all of the exploited layers of society in a struggle to the last against imperialism, as part of a revolutionary and internationalist strategy.

In the case of Iraq, only independent action by the Iraqi working class and masses could have defeated the invader. This would have left the Iraqi people in better conditions to be able to free themselves from the Hussein regime; while their national triumph could have become an extraordinary spur for the struggle against exploitation and for freedom by all of the world’s oppressed people.

This very logic continues today with Iraq under military occupation and in the face of the rise of the resistance. Many sectors that opposed the war yesterday because it was considered an unjustified action by the Bush government, now refuse to fight for the triumph of the occupied country’s masses because of the Islamic nature of the Iraqi resistance. This is a mistaken reasoning that does not see the defeat of imperialism as the central issue. A triumph by the Iraqi masses would give a push to the masses across the whole of the Middle East. And it would undermine imperialist domination of this strategic part of the planet – where the main oil sources are concentrated – and threaten the power of the region’s bourgeoisies. At the same time, defeat for the imperialists would strengthen the struggle by the central countries’ proletariat and masses as the warring governments are weakened. This was the case with the US defeat in Vietnam. Only from such a position is it possible to fight for a clearly anti-imperialist orientation and programme that could take the oppressed nation to victory. This means firstly denouncing the collaboration, despite their different interests, between the Shia clergy, in particular its leading figure Al-Sistani, and the US troops. Secondly it means questioning the way the Sunni resistance is being run, which is giving the struggle a tribal character. This is particularly the case with the minority Islamic-fundamentalist wing that uses brutal methods such as bombings against the Shia population that only strengthen the imperialist occupation. Only a leadership that seeks to turn the working class – the only class that can take the struggle against imperialism and its agents to the very end – into the ruling class of the oppressed nation will be able to achieve effective unity against the imperialist invader and become a source of inspiration for the oppressed peoples of the rest of region and the world.

A new boom in religion

Historically the dominant classes have used religion to strengthen the subjection of the exploited classes, preaching among the dispossessed masses patience and submission in the face of misery and oppression. They justified suffering using the illusion of the afterlife, while on Earth institutions such as the Catholic or Protestant churches accumulated material wealth and political power. These clerical double standards have been seen in all areas. We have seen it in Argentina, for example, in the involvement of the church with state terrorism. Particularly obscene is the repressive preaching in favour of chastity and discrimination while priests and bishops form part of child-abuse networks.

For this reason Marx defined religion as the “opium of the people”. Revolutionary Marxists are irreconcilable atheists and we struggle against religious interference in public life, defending and fighting to conquer democratic rights such as abortion and free choice over sexuality. However we know we must also differentiate between denouncing and combating the religious institutions and hierarchies playing the reactionary role of maintaining the status quo and the patient task of persuading the working and popular masses of our materialist vision of the world and the social relations that make up a given historic period. This position has consequences in terms of programme: for example the policy by the Bolsheviks towards the eastern peoples of the ex-Tsarist empire. To these people the Soviet Union gave full rights of national self-determination and respected their cultural traditions. Although in the “Western world” the churches and religious hierarchies do not govern directly in any country, in recent years we have witnessed a considerable increase in the power of the church and its influence on political life. There are many examples:

In the US the Christian right has a strong influence on George Bush’s government. Furthermore, they have promoted a reactionary climate and attacks on democratic liberties – with campaigns against the right to abortion, against the secular nature of education and against sexual freedoms (such as marriage between people of the same sex). This offensive has been repeated for example in the policy of the Catholic Church in the Spanish State, which was promoted by the previous government of Aznar. Bush himself feels “inspired by God” and justifies his imperialist policies using terms such as “crusade” and the “axis of evil” that bring to mind the wars of religion. US ideologists even talk about a “war of civilisations” and point to the Muslim peoples as the “threat” to “Western democracy”.

The Catholic Church remains an important factor in preserving the capitalist order, as was clearly shown by the late Pope John Paul II and his role in restoring capitalism in Poland and the other Eastern European

states.

Zionism, although defined more by its colonial and pro-imperialist character than by being a theocratic movement, emerged with the objective of founding an exclusively Jewish state. In 1948 its attempt culminated in the founding of the State of Israel based on the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people, creating a racist enclave that justifies its expansionist policies and the oppression of the Palestinian people as a “biblical call” to take over all of Palestine. Religious parties have considerable influence and their sympathisers are mostly settlers living in the occupied territories – true shock troops against the Palestinian population.

But religion has also been adopted as a banner for movements that distortedly express the anger of the oppressed – as we can see with the Islamic leaderships intervening, for example, in the Palestinian struggle or the Iraqi resistance against US occupation.

The reactionary nature of the religious leaderships

The historic failure of bourgeois Arab nationalism led to the rise of the phenomenon known as “political Islam”, which using an anti-US and anti-Zionist discourse is gaining an important audience among the most radicalised sections of the Arab and Muslim masses. This is expressed for example in the Palestinian Hamas and Lebanese Hezbollah organisations.

The active utilisation of religion for political purposes increased from the 60s in order to confront nationalist and secular tendencies. This politicisation of religion made a big advance with the triumph of the Iranian revolution in 1979. This, after wiping out its left wing, ended with the creation of a reactionary theocratic regime, headed by Ayatollah Khomeini.

But while the radical Shia politics that emerged from the Iranian revolution attracted the sympathy of the common and disadvantaged youth that tried to turn Islam into an anti-imperialist movement, Saudi Arabia – the other great centre of religious promotion and unconditional ally of the USA – was promoting the spreading in Muslim countries of a conservative Islamic variant – Wahabism – by financing the building of mosques and *madrasas* (religious schools for educating poor children). This was to counteract the shockwaves of the Iranian revolution. In the 80s, this “Petro-Islam” financed the “Afghan jihad” whose cause was to fight against the Soviet Union – which had sent Red Army troops to support a pro-Soviet but unpopular regime in Afghanistan. The US backed and even financed the “jihad” activists, whom it called “freedom fighters”. It took advantage of the profound anti-Communism and reactionary nature of the movement, which after a decade of fighting forced the Red Army to withdraw, which in turn accelerated the fall of the Soviet Union itself. But the armed Islamic groups that acted in Afghanistan under the leadership of Osama Bin Laden developed their own dynamic and would later

evolve into the reactionary Taliban government and Al-Qaeda network. That organisation would become the biggest enemy of the Saudi monarchy and the United States which, now the Soviet Union had disappeared and Arab nationalism been wiped out, no longer needed the services of such Islamist groups.

Organisations such as Al-Qaeda, the Taliban or the Algerian FIS have a completely reactionary nature, as seen in their terrible oppression of women, in the exemplary punishment meted out to those who do not fully obey their religious dictates, and in their terrorist methods which target workers and other civilians – as we saw in the bombings at Atocha station in Madrid. However, there are other organisations such as the Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and Islamic Jihad in Palestine, or sections of the Iraqi resistance that are part of wider national liberation movements, from which they draw legitimacy, including for the use of military terrorist actions as a way of confronting powers which are far stronger from a military point of view.

Revolutionaries defend the members of these radical Islamist organisations against attacks by reactionary forces – whether imperialist or the Israeli State. We defend the right of Iran – as a semi-colonial country – to resist pressure by US and European imperialism. We defend the democratic rights of Muslim communities in the West that suffer attacks at the hands of imperialist governments, such as in

the US – where Arabs are automatically considered as suspect and worthy of arrest and torture in clandestine prisons. We also defend their cultural rights in imperialist countries that pose as “democratic”, such as France, which prohibits Muslim girls from using the veil. As we stated before, we are categorically in favour of the triumph of the Iraqi resistance against the US. We believe that a defeat for imperialism will strengthen the struggle of the oppressed masses.

From such an anti-imperialist position we combat the Islamic leaderships that seek through a reactionary strategy to establish a theocratic estate that would wipe out basic democratic freedoms. This consequently makes such leaderships enemies of the struggle by workers and the exploited and oppressed. The illusion that they promote a “community of believers” aims to hide Islamic societies’ obscene class divisions, and is an enemy of the independent politics of a working class leading the oppressed masses against imperialism and its local servant governments. Each time they have come to office they have shown their true character as agents of the local capitalist class, and kept up the subjection of the great majority by means of repressive regimes. Thus, beyond their social demagoguery or the contradictions that might exist between such leaderships and the United States, they represent in Muslim countries the main obstacle to workers’ and socialist revolution.

2. AGAINST THE EUROPE OF CAPITAL, FOR A UNITED SOCIALIST STATES OF EUROPE

The EU project is based on an inter-state agreement led by the imperialist bourgeoisies of the strongest Western European countries. It is to enable them to be able to compete to dominate the world and its markets, especially against US imperialism in its hegemonic-decline phase. Unlike the old EEC, this inter-state agreement is made up of imperialist countries and countries undergoing different degrees of semi-colonisation in Eastern Europe.

In this first phase of this economic war, the EU’s aim is threefold: to create a customs and tariff bloc through a compact against outside competition favouring regional capitalist concentration; to raise labour productivity and lower labour costs in Europe; to deepen imperialist penetration in its semi-colonial backyard in Africa, Asia and Latin America and to institutionalise its dominance over its ‘internal backyard’, the countries recently incorporated into Europe. At the same time it is putting pressure on the ex-USSR republics and Russia itself.

The nature of this project is entirely reactionary and anti-worker: seeking the cheap skilled labour of East European workers in order to attack the conquests that

are still enjoyed by the workers of imperialist Europe. This can be seen from the continental bourgeoisie’s different schemes such as Schröder’s agenda 2010 or the plan to eliminate the 35-hour week by the Chirac government in France. The neo-liberal and imperialist policies of the member states correspond to “directives” and laws that are agreed in the European Commission and Parliament, giving rise to workers’ hostility and indifference towards the current EU construction process. This led to the victory of the ‘no’ vote in the French plebiscite in May 2005, which was seen by young people and workers as a tool for mass rejection of this anti-worker and anti-popular constitutional project, and a punishment against the hated Raffarin and Chirac government and the Europe of Capital. Although it may have been a heterogeneous ‘no’ from both a social and political point of view, as the call to reject the constitution ranged from Le Pen’s far right to the political and trade-union left (including the Trotskyist LO, LCR and PT and ex Social-Democratic ministers), the ‘no’ vote was essentially working class and progressive – unlike the Dutch ‘no’ where the social-chauvinistic tone was predominant. This defeat for President

Chirac and the French political class sparked an important crisis not just in the government but also in the Socialist Party. The party officially called for support for the 'yes' vote, but most of its voters voted 'no'. This exposed the Socialists' internal divisions and lack of political leadership.

This political crisis in France, one of the pillars of European construction, is taking place in the context of economic stagnation in the strongest EU countries, a social crisis – shown in the increase in unemployment that has already reached 10% – and a cultural and identity crisis faced with the changes that have occurred in Europe in recent years (such as its incorporation of the Eastern European countries). The crisis above can be used by the mass movement in order to go onto the offensive.

The other side to the attack on workers' conquests in the central countries is the incorporation of the Eastern European countries. This betrays the EU's profoundly imperialist content. When Greece, Spain and Portugal joined in the eighties, they had to restructure their economies but were compensated by being allocated large Marshall Plan-like public funds. No such treatment will be given to any Eastern European country. On the contrary, it is predicted that the net amount given to new members as a whole will be much less than the 100,000 million dollars given by Germany to its new *landers* (regions) to minimise social conflicts after unification and the demise of the ex-German Democratic Republic in 1989. It should not come as a surprise that with such a policy, and despite the economic recovery of the last few years, many countries still have a lower production level than in 1989. Worse still has been the burden that people have had to bear as a result of capitalist restoration in the form of rises in electricity rates, rents and transport and agricultural prices; and the privatisation of public services – which used to be free and widely associated with employment in the corporations. All of this has meant a significant social regression. Growth has come from the development of small private firms, which are often precarious, and direct foreign investment. From the point of view of job creation this has not made up for the dismantling of the big companies. There has

consequently been an increase in unemployment (currently 20% in Poland), of precarious working conditions and regional and social inequality, which particularly affects women. This has led to prostitution, working in the black economy, and a retreat to the ownership of small plots of land as a form of 'social security'.

Because of the coexistence of countries with different structures within the EU, there emerge two kinds of revolutionary dynamic: one which is closer to that of the semi-colonial countries where democratic and agrarian slogans are essential, and another where the proletarian revolution would face capitalism of the most advanced variety. If we forget this fact and treat the whole EU as a homogeneous entity – as the anti-globalisation movement does – we can end up making a series of demands that would not serve to develop the revolutionary mobilisation of the masses and in the worst case would undermine the fight against individual imperialist governments, making it more likely that workers would yield to the social-chauvinistic pressures of the trade-union bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy.

Despite the advances of the EU, it is still not a state, nor is it in the process of becoming one; it is as yet a defensive alliance in pursuit of turning into an offensive one in relation to the US and other imperial competitors. For the time being the national contradictions between different member states have taken a back seat in order for the EU to be able to position itself as best as possible between US imperialism and that of other regions. However this does not mean that the imperialist countries of Western Europe do not have fundamentally opposed interests, which makes European bourgeois unity a utopia. This does not mean supporting alternative bourgeois projects to the EU – such as 'national' or 'self-sufficiency' projects – that only serve to beautify the old imperialist states. Our objective is not the Europe of Capital or the old national states! We are for revolutionary workers' governments. For a United Socialist Workers' Europe. The only class capable of genuinely uniting the continent is the working class at the head of its class allies, requiring the revolutionary transformation of the continent.

3. SOUTH AMERICA: THE MOST ADVANCED REGION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CLASS STRUGGLE

Despite “progressive” government changes in several countries, which have allowed the bourgeoisie to hold back the tendency for mass open movements to emerge, South America is still the most advanced region in terms of the international class struggle. Its epicentre is Bolivia, where a revolutionary process is still taking place, after having brought down two governments: that of Sánchez de Lozada in 2003 and Mesa in June 2005.

Despite lagging behind South America, growing mass action and political crisis in Central America – including anti-government protests in Nicaragua and Panama and the imperialist intervention in Haiti – show that structural instability is extending to almost all of Latin America.

The situation is unequal in South America. In the Mercosur countries, and within the framework of significant economic recovery and the political effect of changes in government, there has been a greater “containment” of the class struggle, even though there has been a considerable increase in struggle by significant sections of the working class. This does not mean long-term stabilisation nor resolution of the organic crises of bourgeois domination (whose mechanisms and institutions have been eroded after decades of applying “neo-liberal” programmes in the context of semi-colonial bourgeois democracies), nor the interruption of the rebuilding of mass workers’ movements expressed in the realignment of vanguard groups in the region. In the countries of the Andes, destabilisation continues to reign and there is a growing tendency for direct action and mass-movement intervention, such has been clearly shown in the Bolivian and Ecuadorian processes.

From an economic point of view, after several years of recession and collapse, such as in Argentina with “convertibility”, economic recovery (which averages 5% for the whole region) has increased business for the bourgeoisie as a whole and temporarily reduced unemployment. However this has not meant earnings “redistribution”, as the progressives promised. Nor has it weakened imperialist oppression and much less so the enormous social polarisation and high level of exploitation of workers.

At the same time, there are underlying frictions faced with imperialist pressure on a region it has always considered as its “backyard”. The US has embarked on an offensive to recompose its hegemony globally, with a greater degree of pillage, intervention and war – as shown by Iraq. It has as one of its central goals to discipline and advance in the re-colonisation of Latin America. Nevertheless it has not managed to reverse the erosion of its political and economic hegemony in South America. The US has had to abandon its original FTAA project and some of its most ambitious propo-

sals, such as obtaining “immunity” status for its troops (except for Paraguay) and isolating Venezuela. Also it has lost unconditional agents with the fall of the Bolivian and Ecuadorian governments.

There has been a relative blunting of inter-imperialist competition on Latin American soil. This is due to Europe concentrating on building the EU and expanding into Eastern Europe, while in Latin America it does deals with the United States to defend the multinationals – thus reducing its capacity to be a “friendly alternative” to Washington (although not missing opportunities such as the agreement between Zapatero and Chávez). This way, limits are set to the overall room for manoeuvre by native bourgeoisies in respect of the inter-imperialist contradictions.

The automatic disciplining through US schemes that dominated during the 90s under the “Washington consensus” is a thing of the past. While US dominance is most strongly felt over Mexico and Central America, its position to the south of the Panama Canal has weakened. Such realignments polarised the regional order of states between a more pro-US wing, made up of Chile, Colombia and a few others, and a wing with a demagogically “South-Americanist” discourse around Brazil, which is positioning itself slowly but surely in order to bid for better conditions in its subordination to imperialism, although without forming a united bloc involving shared policies (in fact, there are constant scrapes between the different states of the region).

In different countries, and albeit with varying speed and intensity, “general national crises” are developing. These combine the structural weaknesses of semi-colonial capitalisms, state-political crises (expressions of the organic crises of bourgeois domination) and high levels of class struggle that have turned the relations of more general forces against the dominant class. This is particularly noticeable in the Andean sub-region, which remains the area of greatest political instability and extreme tension in all social antagonisms.

Bolivia combines explosively the criminal character of imperialist plunder, the depth of the “general national crisis” of the weakest and most poverty-stricken capitalism in South America, bourgeois state-political decomposition and the rise of a mass movement with a great tradition of militancy in methods and demands. In the country new mass mobilisations have taken place that have put an end to the Mesa government and prevented the clearest attempt yet by the Santa Cruz oligarchy to take power, allowing the possibility of reawakening the October uprising.

In late April in Ecuador a new uprising defeated the government of Gutiérrez, the ex-leader of the revolt on 21 January 2000. He had entered office as the

person that “would end corruption and win back national sovereignty”, only to realign himself with imperialism and domestic reaction. And he was incapable of imposing a Bonapartist twist to enable him to escape the sea of contradictions he got into: failing to calm the fears of the business right wing and having lost the support of the left and indigenous movement that had brought him to power. His fall illustrates the limits of “progressive politics” in Latin American – where the weakness of local capitalism and extreme political and social crisis puts limits on the room for manoeuvre of this kind of coalition government.

In Peru an ailing Toledo, who rose to power after Fujimori’s fall as the “government of all bloods” and guarantor of the “transition to democracy”, has survived but at enormous discredit, facing daily corruption scandals, the decomposition of his own party and the tireless effervescence of the masses. He is hoping to win the elections thanks to the role of contention and electoral distraction played by the APRA, the regime’s other forces and particularly the aid in holding people back provided by the CGTP, and the different bureaucratic groups: *Apristas*, Stalinists and Maoists.

The rising cycle of class struggle continues on a regional scale. The emergence of a new mass movement with a tendency for direct action, street-fighting, blockades, strikes and continual uprisings that bring down governments elected through universal suffrage, has become a common occurrence since the beginning of the 21st century. The high points of this process has been the independent mass actions in countries such as Argentina, which in 2002 ended the De la Rúa government, the defeat of the coup attempt and oil boycott against the Chávez government in Venezuela, and above all the October 2003 revolutionary rehearsal in Bolivia that overthrew the Sánchez de Lozada government, which posed the question of the insurrection and taking of power by the exploited without the latter resolving such due to its leadership problems. The depth of the Bolivian crisis has led to a new act in this revolutionary process in June 2005, when the Mesa government fell after two weeks of intense mass activity.

The political instability and the “climate of revolt” that has spread across the continent – with mass explosions such as those mentioned and a vast number of workers’, peasants’ and popular struggles – have been encouraged by repeated economic disasters. Such disasters have resulted from two decades of “neo-liberal” foreign capital penetration programmes and the worsening of imperialist domination that have pushed the contradictions of Latin American semi-colonial capitalism to the extreme. They have also been exacerbated by the social antagonisms and political crises that are corroding bourgeois regimes and governments to different degrees. Although in the last two years the region underwent an important raw material-fuelled economic recovery in a context

of global recovery, the tendency toward instability keeps showing itself, as in the new mass revolt that brought down the Bolivian Mesa government.

This new cycle of class struggle in South America has a more urban nature, with notable protagonists among the urban poor and the incipient entrance of the proletariat – as shown by the Huanuni miners in the Bolivian October, the advanced experiences of workers’ control and wages struggles in Argentina and the regroupment of the workers’ vanguard in Brazil. This distinguishes it from the processes of the last decade where the dominant actors were the peasantry and indigenous peoples, such as in the 1994 Zapatista rebellion, the Brazilian MST, the Paraguayan peasants and the high point of the mobilisations that defeated the governments of Bucaram (1997) and Mahuad (2000) in Ecuador. Of course this is not to deny that these strategic allies of the proletariat still play a very important role, as is shown in the Andean countries, in particular Bolivia, which has seen the involvement of the peasants and indigenous peoples from the *Altiplano* (high plain area) and the coca growers of Chapare. However, it does mean, as seen in Argentina and Brazil, that the rebuilding of the mass movement is better expressed by a slow yet sustained recovery of the industrial and service workers’ movement based in the large cities.

The shift to “progressive” governments seeks to respond to this situation by rebuilding bourgeois equilibrium. Faced with generalised crisis and discontent among the mass movement – created by the worsening of imperialist plunder in the region – the local bourgeoisies were forced to resort to a significant change in political personnel. This involved leaving behind its discredited neo-liberal governments and opting for governments of a more reformist nature, with the aim of holding back the trend towards radicalisation where there have been mass outbursts, or avoiding the emergence of such movements in the places where the struggle is less advanced. The Lula, Kirchner and Tabaré governments express different class-conciliation projects aimed at delaying the development of national crises and mass processes. This includes redesigning relations between the different factions of the dominant classes and “tailoring”, by means of minor touches, relations with foreign capital and imperialism.

After the Bolivian October, Carlos Mesa – who boasted of his “independence” from the parties – took over with a government characterised by extreme weakness and which could not resist the huge contradictions facing it. Although with a more preventive character, the change in political personnel was clearer in Brazil, where for the first time an ex-workers’ leader became President of the Republic – albeit as the representative of a class-collaboration front. So too was it clear in the case of the Uruguayan government of Tabaré Vázquez and the Broad Front – which has broken for the first time in decades the old

alternating two-party system. In Argentina the Kirchner government has appeared with a more progressive discourse – although sustained by the traditional Partido Justicialista (PJ) and benefiting from the economic recovery.

For the time being these governments have been successful in holding back the struggle by the exploited. However their stability could be a passing phase, as they have not solved any of the structural problems that affect the region's countries and have led to big economic and social outbursts such as in the Argentinean and later the Uruguayan economy. Nobody has overcome the terrible burden caused by paying the foreign debt – neither the Lula or Tabaré governments that are continuing with IMF programmes in an orthodox way, nor the Kirchner government that boasts of having solved Argentina's indebtedness in a progressive way (after defaulting on the foreign debt, what is effectively a mortgage will hang over the heads of several generations of Argentineans). Despite such leaders claiming to be the spokespeople of a supposed renewed national bourgeoisie, none has altered the regressive semi-colonial economic structure of these countries dominated by penetration from foreign capital in their industrial and service sectors. Nor have they reduced the enormous social inequalities that exist, as shown by the growing income gap between the richer and poorer sectors, or the growing concentration of land in the hands of a few landowners and increased impoverishment of the peasants. And now the Lula government has been shaken by corruption scandals of the most neo-liberal kind. Even the Hugo Chávez government in Venezuela, which is to the left of the above mentioned governments – more populist, basing itself on the liquidation of the old party system and acting as arbiter between the growing mass mobilisations and the reactionary and imperialist forces – still regularly pays its foreign debt and, apart from small concessions, has not resolved the pressing problems of rural and urban misery.

Additionally, in Mexico the recent political crisis in which an attempt was made to ban López Obrador (the candidate for the centre-left PRD) from standing in the next presidential elections, has placed under discussion the true nature of the “transition to democracy” policies. In Mexico the 70-year-old PRI regime was replaced, by means of an “agreed transition”, with a more “multi-party” system accompanied by increased subordination of the national economy to imperialism – through the NAFTA free trade agreement. But with this change there has been the survival of all of the structural evils of backwardness, misery, exploitation and bloody oppression that affect workers, peasants and the country's original inhabitants. “Democracy” thus has been nothing but one more fraud exploiting the basic and legitimate democratic aspirations of working people.

All of these elements reaffirm that there is no solution to the structural evils of semi-colonial capitalism

regarding the masses' important conquests – whether they be socio-economic gains, democratic freedoms or national independence – through reformist, nationalist and progressive projects that involve reconciliation with the dominant class and are adapted to the narrow margins of the semi-colonial “democracies for the rich”, as put forward by Lula, Tabaré Vázquez, Kirchner, Chávez or Evo Morales. Only through the widest radical and generalised mass mobilisation – with the working class leading the alliance of oppressed and exploited masses and taking into its hands the solution to its problems – can the most vital and heartfelt demands of the workers, peasants and poor be met.

This highlights the importance of demands in the Latin American countries such as the non-payment of the foreign debt; the re-nationalisation of privatised companies under workers' control; the struggle for a sliding scale of hours to combat unemployment and automatic wage adjustment to fight inflation in basic goods; and the expropriation of large estates and the distribution of land among peasants. These are essential measures that the left, by shifting to the centre-left – meaning shifting to integrate itself into the bourgeois system – has abandoned. Today they are an irreplaceable part of any programme that wishes coherently to tackle imperialist domination – to which the region's weak national bourgeoisies are tied by a thousand ropes.

Brazil and the “workers' reformism” fraud

The Lula government expresses the fraud of the reformist workers' parties that, by channelling the discontent of the working masses after decades of bourgeois and imperialist offensives, present themselves as a trustworthy alternative to manage capitalism's schemes. Lula's rise is a product of the break-up of the old conservative alliance that backed F.H. Cardoso's neo-liberal government, and of the fears of the Brazilian bourgeoisie of a default and an uprising similar to the revolutionary days in 2001 in Argentina. Thanks to Lula the Brazilian bourgeoisie has avoided the “Argentine scenario” and has guaranteed the continuity of the neo-liberal programme. Thus, the biggest workers' party in Latin America didn't just become a “reformist government without reforms” but became the government of counter-reform – making brutal attacks on the most important conquests that Brazilian workers have won in decades of struggle against the bourgeoisie. After six months in government it had introduced a reform against social welfare that not even the Cardoso government had felt it could apply, and was preparing new reforms affecting labour and the unions. Then it was shaken by corruption scandals that forced the resignation of one of Lula's two main ministers, José Dirceu.

Among wide sections of the mass movement disillusion with Lula and his government has started to

set in. His anti-worker and anti-popular measures have created a process of reorganisation and rupture in significant sectors of the vanguard in both the political and trade union arenas, which could presage bigger movements emerging from among the masses. For the middle classes that hoped that Lula would eradicate corruption among public functionaries, accusations of bribe-taking have hit particularly hard. Initial symptoms of rupture are the emergence of the PSOL, and, in the trade-union movement, the realignment inside the CUT – which has become the guardian of Lula’s plans in the workers’ movement – that has led to the creation of CONLUTAS (a group dominated by the PSTU). But both phenomena run the risk of going along the same reformist route as the PT: of adapting to bourgeois democracy, class conciliation, and an uncritical relationship with the trade-union bureaucracy. This is not a literary affirmation. In its second national meeting the PSOL refused to vote for an amendment to its national resolution proposing that the party declared itself to be against any kind of alliance with bourgeois parties such as the PDT or PSB, with its eyes set on the coming 2006 elections. Additionally in CONLUTAS, the predominant PSTU hides behind its left-wing rhetoric its refusal to fight to expel the trade-union bureaucracy from the CUT and its member unions and win back the unions as tools for fighting for workers’ interests.

Compared to the 48 million waged employees, 22 million workers organised in the CUT and the 53 million that voted for Lula it is very clear that such groups are still small in Brazil. Faced with this it is necessary to overcome ideas of impotence and small-mindedness, fighting in order for millions of workers to advance from their experience of PT politics, by offering transitional mass policies so that processes of rupture permeate deeply among all of the exploited.

The demand for the CUT and its member unions to break with the government is a powerful weapon to overcome the trade-union bureaucracy. It is necessary to get workers’ aspirations to collide with the policy of this rotten bureaucracy. Demanding a break with the government and a debate on the need for an Independent Workers’ Party based on the fighting unions and workers’ organisations will undoubtedly help the masses in their experience with the PT and will be the easiest route to removing the PT from the unions.

The Brazilian vanguard has started to reorganise. It has already fought important battles since the PT came to office. The unions are breaking with the government and the CUT leadership. Consequently it is necessary to fight for an anti-bureaucratic, anti-government and anti-capitalist national grouping that can become a pole of attraction for the new sectors that want to fight. CONLUTAS can and must become this pole of attraction if it is to be capable of leading the struggle for class independence and sweeping

aside the union bureaucracy. Aimed at the millions of workers organised in the CUT and other trade-union federations, its task should be that of promoting revolutionary factions in the unions.

Argentina and the struggle for working-class hegemony

With the backdrop of the economic depression – which later would lead to default on the foreign debt – there were revolutionary days in Argentina in December 2001 that overthrew De la Rúa. This peak in the class struggle was the result of a combination of different struggles. There was the massive struggle by the middle class (part of which had its savings virtually expropriated due to the freezing of bank deposits) against the state of siege and the traditional political leadership – expressed in the slogan “¡que se vayan todos!” (“all of them out!”). There was the fight by tens of thousands of vanguard youth known as the battle of the Plaza de Mayo; and the beginning of an explosion by the urban poor who looted the department stores and supermarkets. As a consequence of these events the bourgeois system underwent a period of nervousness, of weakened state authority and a crisis of governability for the key institutions, expressed in a series of changes in government over a short period of time.

A by-product of these revolutionary events was the emergence and consolidation of new social actors that would form part of the new political panorama ushered in after 2001: the unemployed movement known as the *piqueteros*, which organised a section of the millions of jobless, was strengthened; popular assemblies emerged giving voice to the demands of the impoverished middle classes; and lastly, there was a smaller but significant movement of factory occupations, particularly the Zanon and Brukman factories, which became milestones in the resistance to closures and sackings by taking over direct management of production. The limit to the process was the failure of the majority of the working class to enter into the struggle, due to fear of unemployment and the betrayals of the union bureaucracy. This weakness showed itself when the class alliance between sections of the middle class and the unemployed – expressed in the slogan “*piqueteros* and pot-banging middle classes, the struggle is one and the same” – showed itself incapable of carrying out a serious fight against the bourgeois state. After its initial rise, the movement was re-absorbed through economic recovery for the middle-class sectors, and widespread state subsidies to the unemployed. Once again it was shown that it is essential that the working class plays the hegemonic role in the struggle against capital and the state.

Such an understanding is absent in semi-populist conceptions such as that of the Partido Obrero (PO), which identified the *piqueteros* as the vanguard of the

revolution – a view that wipes out the working class as an entity and dilutes the effective social power of each of its sectors, elevating the unemployed *piqueteros* based in a particular territory above the social power of workers engaged in the production of goods or services. Worse still are those with an outright populist ideology who counterpose “territorialism” to the centrality of the proletariat.

Secondly there is the abandoning, in the name of the “essential revolutionary nature of poverty”, of the struggle to conquer the majority of the working class and above all its leading battalions concentrated in the key centres of capitalist production.

After a period of instability, the arrival of the Kirchner government with its centre-left rhetoric allowed the re-establishing of the state’s authority and the ending of the sharpest aspects of the crisis – although this remains latent. With the economic recovery, the social class that was absent during the revolutionary days has re-emerged: the working class has begun to fight to recover its wage levels, the high point being the victorious strike by the underground railway workers led by a group of shop stewards independent from the bureaucracy. This sector is linking with the most advanced working-class experience of the previous period, such as the Zanon workers and their heroic defence of workers’ self-management – which has been in place for three years and is an example for the national and international workers’ vanguard, and in which the Trotskyists that have written this very manifesto play an important leadership role.

Nevertheless, the new workers’ movement that has emerged has yet to resolve the tasks that 2001 left incomplete. Firstly, the struggle to coordinate the most advanced expressions of working-class resistance, and for these to become a pole of attraction after years of domination by the union bureaucracy over the workers’ movement. Although only locally and intermittently, such coordination has taken place, as in Río Negro’s Alto Valle Coordinating Committee, which has brought together several militant unions and other organisations in the Neuquén province, hegemonised by Zanon and the ceramics union it heads, or the recent underground railway strike, which brought together rail, health, telecommunications and ceramics workers, etc. We need to fight to achieve permanent coordination of the most advanced sections of the vanguard. But this unity is not enough. It is necessary to take a bigger step forward, that is, the struggle for the political independence of workers to be able to hegemonise all of the exploited sectors of the oppressed nation. For this reason, what is on the agenda today is the creation of a mass workers’ party, based on the organisations of working-class struggle: trade unions, shop-stewards’ committees, and, of course, the organisations representing the unemployed that are independent from the government. We are talking about a genuine workers’ party capable of

putting an end to Peronism’s mass influence, a party that can decide the course of events in national political life, and can express the social power of 10 million wage earners and more than 3 million unemployed.

Bolivia and the need for workers’ and popular self-organisation as a counter-power

Bolivia shows a recurrent tendency for mass struggle and direct action. From the Cochabamba “water war” in 2000 onwards, the Bolivian masses have shown a huge capacity for combat and renewed energy. These combats have seen innumerable forms of struggle such as roadblocks (especially by the rural population) laying “siege” to cities; strikes by workers and popular sectors, with the mass struggle coming together to put pressure on the nerve centres of state power; the insurrection on the barricades, as the “struggle of the entire people” for territory and seeking to block operations by the forces of the state; and advanced military actions – the most offensive expression of the insurrection.

The “revolutionary rehearsal” of October 2003 marked a qualitative leap with regards to the prior processes which had peasants and indigenous people as central actors. This time – due to its more urban nature, radical methods and the entering onto the stage of the working class – a more direct confrontation took place between the fundamental social forces in Bolivia. This opened up a revolutionary process, differentiating it from the other processes that have taken place up to now in Latin America. The combination of a planned mass uprising and spontaneous insurrectional processes such as that of El Alto city ended with the fall of the Sánchez de Losada government and the taking office of the Mesa government in the midst of an open revolutionary crisis in which we saw some embryonic elements of dual power. Nevertheless, the main leaderships – particularly Evo Morales and Felipe Quispe – staunchly opposed concretising in any way the united front that the masses were imposing on the streets and highways. Above all they opposed the emergence of higher, democratically organised forms of the united front of the masses that could have set themselves up as organs of workers’ and popular power.

As a consequence of this, the hundreds of thousands that spontaneously went onto the streets to fight with enormous determination and initiative were not adequately represented by existing institutions of the mass movement such as the COB, that only represents a minority of workers, and the neighbourhood committees, which, because of their character, were not the most suitable channels for the uprising. The reformist and bureaucratic leaderships defended at all times different varieties of solutions within the bourgeois-democratic system and supported constitutional change and the taking office of Carlos Mesa,

dismantling the revolutionary attack that was underway.

However, Sánchez de Losada's flight was taken to be an important triumph by the mobilised sectors. The Mesa government was very weak from the start. During the first period he tried to govern with backing from the leaderships of the mass movements – particularly Evo Morales's Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). In this way, the MAS showed its nature as conciliator and defender of the bourgeois democratic regime.

The attempt by Mesa to break the deadlock, pressurised by the reactionary right wing in Santa Cruz de la Sierra, imperialist interests, and the oil and gas multinationals, led to a rupture in the weak consensus that had existed, to renewed tensions between classes in the first few months of 2005, and to Mesa's first resignation in March, which tried to harness the support needed to guarantee "governability". The agreement made from above with the old parliament and backed by the discredited parties that once supported Sánchez de Losada did not last long. A new offensive by the mass movement that called for the "October agenda" to be implemented, involving the demand to nationalise hydrocarbons, put an end to 18 months of Mesa's government, and kept the Santa Cruz oligarchy out of power by preventing the installation of Hormando Vaca Díez as president. Miners and middle-class groups from the city of La Paz fraternised to avoid the consolidation of a government led by the Santa Cruz elite. Unlike in October 2003 when repression played a key role in radicalising the El Alto masses, this time the army did not intervene, as this could have led to a revolutionary rising.

Once again a way out was found within the bourgeois democratic constitutional framework and the "power vacuum" was filled by a provisional take-over by Eduardo Rodríguez – the ex-president of the Supreme Court of Justice and the candidate of the church, Mesa and Evo Morales. But such mechanisms are showing signs of wearing thin. The revolutionary days of June 2005 showed once again that wide sectors of the vanguard and masses feel great resentment towards parliament and the political institutions. The bourgeoisie is also divided and the rich sector of Santa Cruz also wanted to impose its right-wing agenda to promote the region's "autonomy": by becoming partners in the multinationals' plundering of the hydrocarbons.

This new peak in the revolutionary process has been an important experience for wide sections of the mass movement, particularly in El Alto, which clearly has been the vanguard of the process. Firstly, a debate started up around the idea of the Popular Assembly as the united-front organ of the mobilised masses and the expression of dual power. Its creation was proclaimed in El Alto by leaders of the FEJUVE and COB but without a policy for applying it in practice. In the course of the discussion, the idea was widely

promoted of the possibility of meeting the need for coordination, supplies, political leadership and military self-defence by the self-organisation of the masses.

Secondly, 500 neighbourhood councils have met systematically in El Alto with participation from the most radicalised sectors, that in some cases have managed to impose their policies on conciliatory leaders such as Abel Mamani. Lastly, the workers at the Senkhata liquefied-gas plant – which supplies La Paz and El Alto – discussed coordinating with the Neighbourhood Councils over the distribution of gas in the interests of needy sections of the population and against that of speculators.

In this revolutionary crisis, Evo Morales's MAS once again played the role of the regime's saviour, which it had also done in October 2003. It consolidated its position as the main national party (as it had already demonstrated in the municipal elections and later by confirming its influence in the mass movement in the March mobilisations). Nationally, the MAS appeared more consolidated as a political apparatus and more integrated in the bourgeois state. It acted as the left face of the regime, holding back the masses' more revolutionary tendencies. It emerged from the conflict with its parliamentary bench more united and experienced in parliamentary manoeuvres, taking on the bourgeoisie's professional political experts. However, at the same time, it was increasingly challenged by the advanced sections of the masses, and its own rank and file, which forced it to shift its discourse more to the left through more nationalist postures, but without being capable of imposing hegemony among the mobilised sectors (expressed above all in El Alto).

The need to create organs of power for the mass movement is a strategic problem for the future struggles of the present revolutionary process in Bolivia. That is why the call for a Popular Assembly is so important. It is necessary for the El Alto COB, FEJUVE and COR, the Chapare and Yungas settlers' federations and the other organisations in the fight to organise a Popular Assembly urgently so that workers and the rest of the Bolivian people can discuss ideas, establish an independent position and course of action, unifying the struggle against the government and the plans of the reactionaries and imperialism. It is not about making agreements between leaders but coordinating effectively – discussing and organising from the bottom up. It is necessary to call a Popular Assembly with grassroots activists acting under mandate from their assemblies of workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, from the Altiplano and the east, from each factory, mine, popular neighbourhood or community. This would be to discuss a workers' and peasants' action plan against the national crisis and a struggle plan that would end in a political general strike and roadblocks across the country. It would once again

take up the October route – that of fighting for a workers’ and peasants’ government – as the only way to achieve popular demands such as the nationalisation of hydrocarbons under workers’ control and a truly free and sovereign Constituent Assembly.

With such a perspective, the role of the reformist leaderships becomes even more damaging. Since October, Evo Morales’s MAS has positioned itself as the regime’s “left face”, backing Mesa and his policy of “democratic reaction”. Today, Morales is once again serving the interests of the counter-revolution, backing the “institutional solution” and the call for elections, opposing by all possible means the mobilisations that are managing actually to bring about gas nationalisation – meaning the expulsion of the gas companies. All this is done in the name of its “reforms in democracy” strategy, which means by acting within the current system and through reconciliation with employers, landowners and transnationals.

The programmes and methods of its “democratic” reformism with a pro-indigenous discourse betray the most elementary interests of the masses in the countryside, city and the national liberation it claims to represent.

Additionally, Jaime Solares, COB general secretary, and other leaders, despite their “red” speeches, again appealed – faced with the power vacuum that resulted from Mesa’s resignation – to the army’s supposed “patriotism” and a “civilian-military” solution. This disastrous policy (which had already failed in the 21 January 2000 uprising in Ecuador, when all the indigenous, Maoist and other reformist movements supported Lucio Gutiérrez) sowed illusions that the Bolivian armed forces and police – the perpetrators of the October massacres – might “go onto the people’s side”. Such an idea can only bring confusion and disarm workers against any threat of repression or coup. Evo, Solares and others, despite the differences between them, agree on a strategy of class collaboration with bourgeois sections and putting pressure on the regime. They are thus open enemies of the struggle of the working masses to find an independent political solution.

It is necessary to forge in the heat of the current battles a new leadership at the head of our organisations, which fights for a strategy of mass revolutionary mobilisation based on workers’ full political independence and an alliance of the working, peasant, indigenous and popular classes against imperialism and its allies.

A new workers’ and revolutionary leadership is needed at the head of the COB and the unions. The “raw material” for this is starting to be created in the thousands of grassroots activists and leaders that in the course of battles like those of October are gaining great experience of politics and struggle. There is a fight to regroup this vanguard around an independent class policy, so that the working class leads the worker-indigenous-peasant-popular alliance to defeat the

transnationals and their “native” allies and impose through insurrection a workers’ and peasants’ solution. The fight is to build a great workers’ party that feeds off the best traditions of the struggle by the proletariat and the masses, in order to put forward a revolutionary, socialist and internationalist programme.

Venezuela and the need to expropriate the corporations to defeat imperialism

Since the collapse of the old oligarchic political system, Venezuela has undergone an enormous social and political polarisation. The effervescence of the mass movement has occupied the political stage behind the figure of Hugo Chávez. This movement was anxious to realise its demands and expectations, as during decades of neo-liberalism it had seen its living conditions worsen and political rights trampled on. The urban poor and significant sectors of workers thus became the protagonists of a vast social movement which the Venezuelan president depends on, and at the same time tries to contain with some social reforms (aiming to create new institutional forms in the wake of the collapse of the political regime of the traditional parties).

However, taking advantage of the international economic crisis, the oligarchy attempted to recover from its setback by once again going on the offensive. Thus the spokespeople for the old regime, alongside the opposition union bureaucracy of the Confederation of Workers of Venezuela (CTV), the heads of the employers’ organisations, and the middle classes who had seen their living standards fall due to the government’s early economic failures – began a feverish counter-revolutionary activity with the aim of removing Chávez from power.

Once again it would be the mass movement – in particular the urban poor – that poured onto the streets to resist a new onslaught by the pro-imperialist bosses. Throughout 2002 and early 2003, the Venezuelan president had to confront an attempted coup and lock-out that intensified the economic crisis that had been developing. In both events Chávez, his ministers and functionaries were left paralysed and almost completely lacking initiative. It was thanks to the tough mobilisations of the poor that the coup could be defeated, and also to the resistance of workers – who managed to control production in some of the oil-industry facilities and oppose the lock-out – that the general offensive could be rolled back. These two consecutive defeats in the streets for the pro-imperialist opposition and their supporters in the military leadership are what encouraged Chávez to agree in May 2003 to a referendum over his removal with the OAS, the group of “countries friendly with Venezuela” and the Carter Foundation. This vote was held in August 2004, from which he emerged triumphant. Subsequently, the mass movement would again

respond with a massive vote, bringing the Chavista candidates victory in the regional and local elections, where they won in 21 out of 23 regions and 239 out of 332 municipalities – thus giving Chávez electoral legitimacy.

But at no time did Chávez – even after the pro-imperialist opposition’s counter-revolutionary attempts – make any threat of touching the most sensitive interests of the coup-supporting bourgeoisie: its economic power, banks and corporations. It was just the moment to strike a hard blow at the bourgeoisie and imperialism. Quite the opposite happened: instead of applying himself to the defeat of the big bosses and imperialism on Venezuelan soil, Chávez constantly called for reconciliation with those sectors of the bourgeoisie that showed themselves to be “pro-dialogue”, as his aim is to develop a national bourgeoisie in accordance with his political plans. He has never stopped paying the fraudulent foreign debt amassed by the old oligarchic regime, which condemns the country to backwardness and is a mechanism of imperialist plunder. So after the coup, Chávez asked for forgiveness and told the masses that returned him to power to go home, later sitting down “to have a dialogue” with representatives of the opposition but not with representative of the working class or urban or rural poor. The fact of the matter is that the Venezuelan president depends on the masses’ support and their mobilisations but at the same time prevents them from adopting an independent course of action.

We could say that Chávez has been trying to “raise himself” above the social classes and play the role of arbitrator between the interests of foreign and national capital, on the one hand, and all of the exploited masses, on the other – trying to reconcile and harmonise these antagonistic forces. Because he has given some concessions to the mass movement, thanks to high oil revenues, and sought some freedom in relation to foreign capital, we can state that the Chávez regime has some features of a *suis generis* left-wing bonapartist regime. But he is still a long way from having the fundamental characteristics of such regimes – for example of those of Cárdenas or Perón. Unlike the latter, who based himself on the role of the unions and working class in his struggle against US imperialism, Chávez’s support base is the urban poor and, fundamentally, the armed forces, making him even more spineless than Cárdenas and Perón, who at least got to nationalise important pillars of the national economy and had serious clashes with imperialism. It explains the Venezuelan president’s aim of restructuring relations with the US, in order to negotiate from a better vantage point the terms of exchange but without breaking the fundamental chains of national subordination to the imperialist order.

Nevertheless the Venezuelan situation remains open-ended, as the contradictions in it suggest future

clashes between the classes. Imperialism is permanently threatening Venezuela and the only way to defeat it is by expropriating the bourgeoisie and the interests of foreign capital. But such a task can only be performed by the working class hegemonising and leading a revolutionary alliance with the rest of the exploited, something that Chávez will not do due to his class nature. It is thus necessary to fight for the expropriation of the big capitalist leeches and put the whole economy in the hands of workers, peasants and the urban and rural poor, in order to make it function according to the needs of the working majority. Only the working class can give consistent leadership to the struggle of the oppressed nation against imperialism.

For that reason, instead of preaching in favour of workers’ political subordination to Chavism and the lukewarm reform programme of the “Bolivarian revolution”, as most left-wing forces do, it is urgent to develop the struggle for independent working class politics – one that is consistently against domestic reaction and imperialism but explains the need to avoid putting the least political trust in Chávez and his nationalist project.

Internationally, Chávez has raised the need for “Bolivarian unity”. He puts forward this demagogic proposal in all of his encounters with Latin American governments and the mass movement. As revolutionary Marxists, we fight to break the backwardness and slavery imposed on us by imperialism through a powerful federation of Latin American countries. But it will not be the backward Latin American bourgeoisie and its thousand-and-one ties with imperialism that will fulfil this objective. These bourgeoisies cannot and will not develop Latin American unity. In recent decades we have even seen how they have shifted to become agents of foreign capital. At best they try to bargain away the most brutal demands of imperialism, hoping to improve the terms of exchange to their benefit – but not to the benefit of the continent’s exploited masses – and within the framework of imperialist subordination. However, without breaking with such a framework, it is also impossible to break with backwardness, poverty and the other defects of semi-colonial capitalism. Consequently, we state that the struggle against imperialism, which is inseparable from the fight against its local allies, the native bourgeoisies, can only be consistently carried out by the proletariat at the head of all of the national oppressed masses. Against the “Bolivarian” or “South-Americanist” demagoguery of nationalists and reformists, we say that the necessary economic and political unification of Latin America in a powerful federation can only be achieved by the working class, leading the exploited and oppressed in the continental struggle against imperialism. Thus the main slogan in order to achieve such an objective is the struggle for the Confederation of Socialist Republics of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Cuba: a key question for Latin American revolutionaries

Cuba is still a workers' state, although profoundly deformed and weakened. The fundamental conquests of the revolution are being eroded but have not yet been destroyed. The central core of the economy is still in state hands. There are enormous obstacles to the restoration process in the property base inherited from the revolution, in class relations, and in the "egalitarian" and anti-imperialist awareness of the masses.

The US strategy is of tightening the subordination of the semi-colonial world through a policy of force based on military might and the imposition of a more direct political domination – representing a step forward in terms of the re-colonisation of Latin America. This directly clashes with the existence of a workers' state in Cuba, which is considered by the US ruling class as an obstacle to its regional plans. Thus, strangling the Cuban revolution is a strategic priority for the US. And forcing a "democratic transition" is one of the stated aims of imperialism and promoted by right-wing internal "dissidents" to guarantee the most ordered path to the restoration of capitalism. The European Union, for its part, has gone from openly supporting the "transition" to financing and promoting "dissidents". For some years now, Spain and other European powers, working within the framework of inter-imperialist trade rivalries, have distanced themselves from the US blockade policy. They not only conduct wide-ranging trade with Cuba but have encouraged their monopolies to invest in the island. During this time they have called for a "democratic opening up" that allows the internal restorationist forces to organise freely, while maintaining good diplomatic relations with Castro and without, up to now, giving active support to the opposition.

The continuation of the policies adopted by Castro only serves to strengthen the pro-capitalist tendencies, and weaken the reserves of the nationalised economy and the energy and willingness of the masses to resist the imperialist siege. Imperialism is benefiting from Castro's isolation and concessions to step up pressure on him and make a political shift towards a "transition" – necessary to ease open the door to the capitalist re-colonisation of Cuba.

However, far from the re-colonisation of Cuba being inevitable, the fact of the matter is that the revolution is still alive. Its strength has not been destroyed, either through imperialist siege or disastrous bureaucratic mismanagement. The Cuban workers and people have shown over four decades their heroism and extraordinary capacity for resistance. Consequently, the definitive imposition of the imperialist strategy will come up against huge obstacles. The Cuban proletariat – the island's

decisive social force – needs to prepare itself with this strategic perspective in mind. That means being prepared to fight in a revolutionary way to take the fate of Cuba into its hands and defeat the bureaucracy, which capitulates to imperialism and further undermines the conquests of the revolution each day that it retains its power. Faced with imperialist siege – whether blockade or any other kind of attack – the starting point for revolutionary Marxism must be the unconditional defence of the workers' state, despite its serious bureaucratic deformations and its leadership. In the event of a military attack we are unconditionally on Cuba's side and for the defeat of imperialism. But in no case would that mean giving political support to the Castroite leadership, which is bringing ruin to the revolutionary conquests, demoralising the masses and opening the door to capitalist restoration. It is not possible to separate the struggle against imperialism from the tasks of the political revolution, leaving the latter to a "second stage". The defence of the revolution brings to the fore and has as its condition the unbending struggle against domination by the bureaucracy and for a democratic workers' system.

To the extent that the basic conquests of the revolution survive, albeit weakened, the programme for a new revolution will be essentially political, combined with those social tasks that emerge from the need to take on the semi-capitalist and capitalist elements that have developed. The essential elements of our programme will naturally aim to limit the market elements and concessions to what is compatible with the interests of the revolution, the defence and extension of the nationalised economy, and the strengthening of the working class as a politically dominant social class. Only that way will the road be clear to the building of socialism.

A radical review of economic policy is necessary. Workers have the right to review the contracts awarded to foreign capital, in accordance with the interests of the revolution. There should be a reintroduction of the monopoly over foreign trade. Workers, who have had to make all of the sacrifice and effort in the name of the "battle for production", should have the right to control and decide on the vital issues of production and supply, both in the factory and nationally. Workers' wages should be raised and inequalities should be reduced to those strictly compatible with the needs of the transition to socialism. This will be possible at the expense of the incomes of higher-level state functionaries and the "new rich", and by eliminating the unproductive expenditure produced by bureaucratic mismanagement. It is necessary, therefore, to do away with the bureaucracy's privileges. The policy of reforms should be replaced by a new economic policy at the service of urban and rural workers and the strengthening of the nationalised economy – according to the principle of democratically

centralised planning.

A central aspect is the struggle for the legality of the tendencies that defend the revolution and fight for full political freedoms and mass organisation. The restructuring of the Cuban economy requires firstly the widest freedom to organise for workers – beginning with the abolition of all legislation and statutes that establish the “leadership role” of the Communist Party in the unions and other mass organisations. Workers should recover the full right to strike, the autonomy of their unions and the right to create new unions, shop-stewards’ committees or any other structures that they wish. They should fight for the full right to debate, meet and have their own press for Cuban workers. The youth, who are particularly sensitive to the atmosphere of political oppression, should enjoy the widest political, cultural and organisational freedoms.

The political monopoly of the Communist Party and its role as “the state party” should end at once. There will be no true democracy for the working masses without them having the right to organise independently from the Communist Party. Fighting the political oppression of the Castro regime does not mean accepting the demagoguery of “pure”, i.e., bourgeois, democracy – which is acting as the battering ram for imperialism to impose its plans for “transition”, i.e., counter-revolution with a democratic face. Bureaucratic Bonapartism with its institutions such as the National Assembly must be replaced by a genuine revolutionary workers’ democracy based on organs of workers’ power – democratically organised from the bottom up and formed by representatives elected directly by and with the mandate of the grassroots. It should be possible for these representatives to be instantly recalled and not earn more than a qualified worker.

Cuba’s foreign policy should be based on genui-

ne workers’ internationalism and not “co-existence” with imperialism or support from “friendly” Third-World bourgeoisies. Today, more than ever before, the fate of the Cuban revolution is tied to the development of the class struggle in Latin America and the world. Cuban workers and young people need to strengthen ties with those of Latin America and the US in a common struggle against imperialism. The greatest obstacle to this is Castroism and its Stalinist and reformist allies on the continent, which through their strategy of collaboration with the bourgeoisie have prostituted the banner of proletarian internationalism. Today the defence of Cuba requires it being a launching pad for the continental revolution. Economic and political unity with other countries in the region should be the starting point to end its isolation. However, this can only be achieved with working class politics. Workers must take control of the continental struggle to expel imperialism under the slogan of a Confederation of Socialist Republics of Latin America and the Caribbean!

The workers of Cuba need a new leadership. The Communist Party and the regime cannot “reform themselves”; it is necessary to bring down the Castroite bureaucracy. The pro-bourgeois and pro-imperialist sections of the opposition and church use democratic demands to try to capitalise on the weariness felt due to the suffocating political oppression of Castroism and the tough economic situation. In order to combat these attempts and help the Cuban proletariat to take the fate of the revolution into its hands, it is necessary to construct a workers’ opposition which is Marxist and internationalist, that is, a genuine revolutionary workers’ party, armed with the programme of political revolution to seize power from the bureaucracy and impose a system of revolutionary workers’ democracy, on the way to building socialism.

The historical experience of international workers' struggle – from the Paris Commune through to the 1917 Russian revolution and the revolutions of the 20th century – shows that the bourgeoisie will fight tooth and nail to defend its privileges through the repressive medium of the state. Workers will only be able to defeat capitalism by means of a violent insurrection that divides and defeats the army and police and destroys the bourgeois state, establishing on its ruins their own political power: a transitional workers' state based on the organs of self-determination of the proletariat and exploited masses and the arming of the population. Such a workers' state is based on the establishment of new social relations arising from the expropriation and nationalisation of the main means of production, a monopoly over foreign trade, and a planned economy. In the course of the transition to socialism, when the state's functions are extended to the mass of people organised in soviets, the foundation is laid for its future disappearance. The bourgeois state, regardless of its political form (whether parliamentary or dictatorial), is the class dictatorship of the bourgeoisie over the exploited majority, the proletariat and the poor masses. Likewise, the workers' state takes the form of the dictatorship of the proletariat – that is, the political domination by the working class heading an alliance with the rest of the subordinate classes – over the tiny minority of exploiters that have now been stripped of their political and economic power.

Since the collapse of Stalinism, the bourgeoisie – through its political parties, the bureaucratic leaderships of the working class, ideologues and academics – has taken on the role of promoting among the masses the “common sense” view that no other political-social system is possible other than bourgeois democracy, and that every socialist revolution leads to “totalitarianism”, equating the dictatorship of the proletariat with the single-party system. Even theorists that call themselves “anti-capitalist” or “communist” have adapted themselves to this fashion, substituting the strategy of a workers' revolution and the taking of political power with the pseudo “counter power” idea that doesn't aim to destroy state power or capitalist property and would thus leave bourgeois power intact.

From the ranks of Marxism, the United Secretariat and other smaller “Trotskyist” currents, instead of fighting the heavy legacy of Stalinism by reclaiming the best of our Trotskyist tradition – the fight to the death against Stalinism and the struggle to reinstate a soviet-based strategy – renounce ever more explicitly the revolution by speculating that in the transitional society itself, in the workers' state, is the breeding

ground of bureaucratic totalitarianism. In its last congress, the LCR expressly renounced the dictatorship of the proletariat, replacing it with the struggle for “thoroughgoing democracy”, revealing its profound adaptation to bourgeois democracy.

Against this vulgar adaptation, we argue that the proletarian dictatorship is still the key component of Marxist strategy in order to defeat the bourgeoisie. For revolutionary Marxists the dictatorship of the proletariat is equivalent to a new kind of democracy – proletarian democracy based on the masses' organs of self-determination: the soviets or workers' councils. This is the most democratic form of domination by the working class, which will need a transitional workers' state while imperialism and the enemy classes still exist, and while there is a need to defend the revolution against the attacks by bourgeois reaction, both internal and external.

In his relentless struggle against Stalinism, Trotsky developed in the 1930s the foundations of a revolutionary programme for a society of soviets and for the transitional society in general, clearly showing that there was an alternative to Stalinism and that bureaucratic domination was not inevitable. This programme, whose central pillars were soviet democracy, democratic planning of the economy combined with mechanisms that would allow control of the progress of the plan, ensuring that the market was subordinate to it and that the currency remained strong and stable, and the struggle for the international socialist revolution, retains all its validity today when considering the strategic lines for a society in transition to socialism.

Political democracy is inseparably linked to economic democracy. As Trotsky said about the USSR, “soviet democracy is not an abstract or moral political demand. It has become a matter of life or death for the country”. That is so because in a nationalised economy, in which the market still exists but must lose more and more relevance as the capacity for planning grows, quality requires democracy for producers and consumers – allowing production mistakes to be corrected through criticism and participation in the productive process by workers and the general public.

The Stalinist bureaucracy eliminated all organs of workers' and popular power and took hold of the state machinery, implementing a one-party dictatorship that dominated through terror. Little by little all mechanisms of control over the economic process were done away with. Production statistics were falsified according to the needs of the governing caste and mid-level bureaucrats in order to be able to reach the plan's objectives. For Trotsky, the combination of democratic planning of the main economic engines with the “regulatory” action of the market provided a mecha-

nism that was able to control and to some extent implement the plan, testing the effectiveness of the planning departments by commercial criteria.

This was complemented by a strong, stable and convertible currency that in the last instance would act as an objective measure of labour productivity and the real state of the economy. Today this combination is the key to the transition, as it would allow using the corrective mechanisms of the market – bearing in mind its distortions – to counter the imbalances of the economy and make a comparison between the productivity of the planned economy and that of the world market.

In the transitional society, the functioning of the soviets enables, through the freedom of criticism, the reaching of a relative equilibrium between the needs posed by the current development of the productive forces, the effort required and the progressive reduction of the working day. Likewise, the freedom of criticism for consumers is essential to reach acceptable qualities in goods and services. In a transitional revolutionary workers' state that seeks to develop the socialist elements in nationalised property, economic planning is nothing like the Stalinist "command economy", but rather relies on the conscious participation of producers and consumers through the workers' councils.

The experience of Stalinism absolutely perverted the relation between the united-front organs of the masses – the soviets – and the revolutionary party. It

turned the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the Stalinist party.

Trotsky opposed to this single-party regime the soviet multi-party system as a programmatic norm, based on the existence of other non-exploiting classes in the transitional society, such as the peasantry, and on the heterogeneity of the working class. This same social heterogeneity poses in an acute way the need for a revolutionary workers' party that consciously seeks to realise the aims of the revolution and win the leadership of the soviet bodies.

Stalinism's failure shows that it is impossible to create socialism within national frontiers. If the German revolution had triumphed, the German proletariat would probably have aided the fledgling Russian revolution that was being throttled by backwardness and imperialist siege.

The conquest of power by the proletariat is just the start of a process to transform the whole of a country's economic, political and social life. At the same time it serves as a base to support the extension of the socialist revolution internationally, because only by defeating capitalism in its major centres will socialism be possible as a project to emancipate humanity from exploitation and oppression. This would allow an advance towards the definitive conquest of the "reign of freedom" – consisting of a society based on the disappearance of wage labour, commodities, money and the state: a communist society.

PART III

WORKERS' MOVEMENT, SUBJECTIVITY AND LEADERSHIP

I. THE CLASS STRUGGLE AND WAYS TO REBUILD THE WORKERS' AND MASS MOVEMENT

Although the class struggle and the clashes between revolution and counter-revolution are not the predominant elements in the current international situation, it is clear that after two decades of retreat we are going through a period of slow and tortuous re-composition of the mass movement and, in particular, an advance in the subjectivity of the workers' movement, albeit with inequalities between countries and regions.

It is within such a framework that we should see the development of new political and class struggle phenomena that, although with different dynamics and depth, express this slow re-composition. Among the most recent examples we can highlight:

- 1) The emergence in 2003 of the anti-war movement – with its epicentre in the central countries – which held the biggest demonstrations in modern history against the imperialist war in Iraq.
- 2) The rise in Iraq of an armed resistance to US occupation almost immediately after the imperialist triumph over the Saddam Hussein regime. This resistance, despite not yet having reached the stage of being a mass movement of national liberation of the kind that fought the US in Vietnam, or France in Algeria, has exposed the limits of US military might.
- 3) The tendency for direct action and workers' in-

tervention in Latin America, particularly in the 'Southern Cone', which has developed over the last five years. In countries such as Ecuador, Argentina and Bolivia, mass mobilisations have brought down neo-liberal governments and ushered in an organic crisis for the bourgeois regimes. This was shown by the revolutionary revolts in Bolivia in October 2003 and June 2005. Latin America is undoubtedly playing the role of advanced guard in the international class struggle.

These processes demonstrate that a new transitory period has opened up, marked by the fall of Stalinism and, more generally, the loss of hegemony of the old counter-revolutionary apparatuses that led the workers' and popular movement for decades. But this awakening into political life by millions does not mean radicalisation in itself, and even less does it mean independent actions that openly tend toward revolution – with the partial exception of Bolivia. As a result of previous defeats, the brutality of the capitalist offensive and the reformist and bureaucratic leaderships, what generally dominates is a kind of "lesser evil" ideology. In the case of the anti-war movement this was shown by the fact that the majority trusted the United Nations or the action of imperialist powers opposed to the war to stop the US offensive.

Electorally this was expressed, for example, in the United States in the “anybody but Bush” campaign that in practice meant voting for the Democrat candidate Kerry, who had supported the war. Nonetheless, it does not take away from the huge importance that the movement has had in politically awakening thousands of young people, who are still proving to be the sector that is most radicalised and open to left-wing politics.

In Latin America the degree of immaturity of the workers’ and mass movement has for the time being given the bourgeoisie space to breathe, allowing, in countries such as Argentina, a mere change in political personnel.

From the point of view of socialist and workers’ revolution, the most important thing to point out in these processes is the emergence of a new workers’ movement which in the last few years has shown continued signs of an embryonic change symptomatic of a rise in political consciousness.

A new workers’ movement

The growth in the number of wage earners in the last two decades has categorically contradicted the “end of work” thesis that became very popular in the early 90s. The working class has extended to regions that previously were mostly peasant, such as for example south-east Asia. Millions of women have entered the workforce. With large-scale services such as transport, energy and communications becoming key to the functioning of the capitalist economy, jobs that disappeared when workers were made redundant from heavy industries in the 80s and 90s have reappeared in the service sector, where there is now a new concentration of workers.

As a consequence of neo-liberal counter-reforms, the working class has undergone a significant restructuring, characterised by huge fragmentation, a reduction in the industrial working class, an increase in unemployed workers and the growth of a new proletariat in services – younger, with less job security and with a very low level of union membership.

This fragmentation combines on the one hand highly intellectualised complex jobs such as computers and communication with, on the other, work that is “unskilled or low-skilled”, poorly paid, precarious, and often in the “black economy” with no rights. Capitalism in its current phase tends to create both kinds of labour and strengthen its hold through dividing the ranks of workers.

The re-configuration of the working class, along with the retreat of the last two decades, the collapse of Stalinism, and the loss of conquests achieved as a by-product of the Russian revolution of October 1917 and the class struggle throughout the 20th century, have enabled the rise of petit-bourgeois theories – echoing capitalist triumphalism – which claim that the class struggle is a thing of the past and that the working

class is no longer the social subject of revolution, and instead is diluted into amorphous “multitudes” or identity-based social movements.

But the prophecies of the ideologues of a new class struggle-free era were not going to last long. In 1995, the strike by public-sector workers in France showed that not only did the class struggle still exist but that the new working class had an incredible social strength – since by paralysing the railways, activity in the large cities practically came to a standstill for over a month.

The tendency for struggles in the big service industries has shown itself time and time again in the last 15 years, particularly in the advanced countries. In the US, a few examples of this phenomenon are: the strike by UPS workers in 1997 and in the communications giant Verizon in 2000; the fight by the San Francisco dockers in 2002, which threatened to prevent supplies reaching the West Coast of the US, and the six months of strikes by workers in large supermarket chains during 2004.

In Europe, as well as the conflicts in different countries’ national airlines, such as Air France and Alitalia, the most notable struggles have been by militant sections of workers in France’s gas and electricity companies (GDF and EDF), who opposed the partial privatisation of these services in 2004 – despite betrayal by the trade-union bureaucracy. The struggle included measures as radical as cutting off the electricity to public buildings and aristocratic neighbourhoods, and reconnecting the electricity service that had been interrupted due to non-payment in poor areas – showing symbolically the enormous power of the proletariat. These battles by workers in strategic services tend to go beyond what the union bureaucracies are prepared to do – as was also shown by the “wildcat” strikes by transport workers in Milan in 2003 and the postal workers in Britain in 2004.

Although the intervention by the service-sector proletariat is basically taking place in the central countries, there have also been important fights in this sector in semi-colonial countries. In Argentina, for example, despite the crushing defeat suffered in the early 90s with the privatisations, today workers in the big privatised public services – railway, telephone, aeronautical and underground workers – are the vanguard of the workers’ movement. This is both in terms of the methods of struggle, and the tendency to have more anti-bureaucratic shop stewards and leaders and greater trade-union democracy.

This re-composition process in the large service industries seems to have been a foretaste of similar processes among workers in industry, the sector that was hardest hit by neo-liberal restructuring. In some countries it is taking place alongside advanced experiences, either in the course of wages struggles or campaigns to reorganise bureaucratic trade unions, by vanguard sectors of the industrial working class.

In 2003, FIAT workers in Italy led a great struggle

against factory closures. In March 2005, Citroen workers in France won an important victory after a struggle by a young group of workers that sidelined the trade-union bureaucracy.

In Bolivia, where the class struggle is sharper, advanced guards of miners played a central role in the revolutionary rehearsal of October 2003 and the uprising in June 2005.

In Argentina, the recovery of factories by their workers in the face of closures and sackings that took place between 2001 and 2002 has demonstrated this advance in subjectivity. In particular, the experience of workers' control of production in Zanon – an unheard of event in the international workers' movement in recent years – constituted the most advanced expression of this process and has now become an international milestone.

Although lagging behind in terms of struggles and direct action, re-composition is beginning to be seen in the Brazilian proletariat after its political experience of the PT and the Lula government. This is producing anti-bureaucratic phenomena such as CONLUTAS.

In mentioning these events, we wish to point out that while workers are not centre-stage, there is an incipient but significant trend towards the re-composition of their subjectivity. This has fundamental importance from the point of view of re-founding a class-based, militant workers' movement with a revolutionary perspective.

Soviet strategy, class independence and revolutionary workers' parties

Contradicting the “end of work” thesis is no more than a first step towards recognising the empirical reality of the working class as a “class in itself”. However, those that defend such theories counterpoise them to a certain vulgar Marxist view, according to which the working class is a homogeneous and undifferentiated whole, whose political unity would be a mechanical expression of its common situation in the productive process. From that position it can be arrived at that the current fragmentation of the working class refutes the Marxist strategy based on the proletariat as the social class with enough power to defeat capital. This could not be further from the truth. We oppose the theories in vogue that divide the proletariat according to rigid dichotomies: those who do material work and those who do “immaterial” work; intellectual/manual; low earnings/higher earnings; service sector/industrial sector; and dozens of others. We reaffirm the classical Marxist definition according to which a worker is someone who lives on a wage that prevents him or her from accumulating capital. Based on the condition of being exploited under capital's rule, the working class is the most homogeneous in society. But that does not mean that we deny that it has internal differences. For example,

Trotsky argued in the mid 20s that “The proletariat is a powerful social unity which manifests its strengths fully during the periods of intense revolutionary struggle for the aims of the whole class. But within this unity we observe a great variety of types. Between the obtuse illiterate village shepherd and the highly qualified engine driver, there lie a great many different states of culture and habits of life. Every class, moreover, every trade, every group consists of people of different ages, different temperaments, and with a different past. But for this variety, the work of the Communist Party might have been easy. The example of Western Europe shows, however, how difficult this work is in reality. **One might say that the richer the history of a country, and at the same time of its working class, the greater within it the accumulation of memories, traditions, habits, the larger the number of old groupings – the harder it is to achieve a revolutionary unity of the working class**”. (‘Not by Politics Alone’, in *Problems of Everyday Life*) (Our emphasis.)

Unlike other tendencies, the FT has been identifying programmatic and practical responses to try to overcome the huge fragmentation of the proletariat among employed and unemployed, temporary and permanent, and unionised and non-unionised workers; and fighting for their unity using transitional demands such as sharing out job hours and a sliding scale of wages. This fight for unity in the ranks of the working class begins in the workplace, with the organisation of factory committees, shop-stewards' committees and delegate bodies that aim to unify democratically all sectors, and take on the bureaucratic unions. It is essential to expel the union bureaucrats and reclaim the unions as true workers' fighting organs based on workers' democracy.

In opposition to corporatist trade unionism, we are fighting for a greater coordination of workers' struggles and for the proletariat to win hegemony among all of the exploited. This will be done firstly by workers winning the support of other sectors – such as in the case of strikes in public services through an active policy towards users – and more generally by adopting as their own the demands of the other exploited classes. That way the working class can start preparing itself to become society's ruling class, ending capitalist exploitation.

In this lies the key to soviet strategy, which in an embryonic way foreshadows proletarian power, not just by coordinating sectors and leading the working class but by putting into practice workers' democracy, with the freedom to create tendencies and discuss strategies inside the workers' movement. Linked to this, we promote the full flowering of the most left-wing tendencies in our class – for example workers' control and management in Zanon, which as a “school of planning” prepares the working class for its leadership tasks.

These programmatic and organisational measures

help overcome both internal division and the profound subjective crisis, which is expressed in the working class lacking political independence and remaining tied to the bourgeois state through the union bureaucracies and employers' organisations. The aim is to move

towards breaking with the bourgeois and reformist parties and building revolutionary workers' parties which through a set of transitional demands are able to unite the different layers of the popular exploited classes behind a strategy of taking political power.

2. SUBJECTIVITY AND CRISIS IN REVOLUTIONARY LEADERSHIP

The beginning of the process to rebuild workers' subjectivity is emerging after two decades of defeat and a crisis in revolutionary leadership of historic magnitude.

Since the end of the Second World War, the subjectivity of the international workers' movement has been shaped by reformist leaderships – mainly social-democratic and Stalinist – and in semi-colonial countries, bourgeois nationalism. During the years of post-war boom, the working class in the central countries and in some prosperous semi-colonies achieved important conquests in terms of wages, social issues and the welfare state. In Eastern Europe and China, it was even the case that capital was expropriated, producing new bureaucratised workers' states. However, the big reformist apparatuses – such as the bureaucratically-led unions and party structures like the Socialist Parties, Communist Parties or the British Labour Party – progressively wiped out the best revolutionary traditions of the workers' movement.

The end of the economic boom and the revolutionary processes from the late 60s to the mid 70s put into question reformism's hegemony, sparking a wave of political radicalisation among wide sections of the workers' and young people's vanguard. The 1968-81 revolutionary rehearsal spread across the central and semi-colonial countries and included processes of political revolution in bureaucratised workers' states. At its peak it led to imperialism's military defeat in Vietnam.

But this great workers' and popular upturn exposed a sharp crisis in revolutionary leadership. The processes were drowned in blood in Latin America and Eastern Europe, and were contained and deflected in the central countries, thanks to the aid given to the bourgeois regimes by the Socialist and Communist parties, and bourgeois and petit-bourgeois nationalist leaderships in the semi-colonial world.

The neo-liberal offensive and the shift rightwards by the reformist leaderships

After the years of instability that followed the US defeat in Vietnam, imperialism managed to recover and once

again went on the attack in the 80s and 90s. The years of neo-liberal offensive that opened with the arrival of the Reagan and Thatcher governments saw large-scale defeats for the workers' movement, which led to the loss of material conquests and a weakening of the ability to fight, as well as a significant retreat in class organisation and consciousness.

The British triumph in the Malvinas/Falklands war in 1982 led to greater subjection of the semi-colonial world and facilitated the defeat in 1984 of the heroic strike by the British miners, who had resisted pit closures for more than a year.

At the beginning of the 90s, the US victory over Iraq in the first Gulf War redoubled the capitalist offensive, which continued throughout the decade and strengthened the feeling that it was impossible to defeat imperialism.

The lack of workers' struggle and a class perspective encouraged the development of completely aberrant and reactionary political phenomena – such as the nationalist leaderships that led struggles for self-determination in Bosnia, Kosovo, etc., or the different varieties of Islamic fundamentalisms in the Middle East that won mass audiences by raising the anti-American banner.

The traditional leaderships of the workers' movement either capitulated or became direct accomplices of neo-liberal policies. While trade-union membership fell to historically low levels and governments passed anti-union laws, the reformist bureaucracies even became junior partners in privatisation processes.

With the implosion of the USSR and Stalinist regimes from 1989 to 1991, Marxism became brutally discredited and the idea of socialist revolution was wiped from the imaginations of the exploited. The governing bureaucrats in such countries competed among themselves to become the new bourgeoisie.

Europe's Communist parties, which since their Euro-Communist shift in the 70s had abandoned even their class rhetoric, completed their transformation into simple social-democratic or centre-left parties. In some cases they have formed part of "social-liberal" government coalitions – such as in France and Italy.

Social-democracy, which in much of Europe alter-

nates in government with right-wing parties or coalitions, has become a direct agent of neo-liberal policies. This has made it practically indistinguishable from the parties of the traditional right. By the mid-90s it reoccupied its electoral space with so-called “third way” governments. But these were the governments that advanced the EU imperialist project most, attempting to wipe out workers’ gains and implement a programme of privatisations and social-security and pension reform.

Tony Blair’s New Labour government, elected in 1997 after nearly 20 years of conservative rule, has continued with Thatcherism. Its alliance with the United States in the Iraq war has speeded up the Labour Party’s crisis with its working class base, which has seen the rise of a union bureaucracy in favour of the old ways of negotiating. The crisis has also affected the middle class electorate that the party has won over in recent years. German social-democracy has gone through a similar crisis with the attempt by the Schröder government to apply its “agenda 2010”.

In recent years this shift rightwards has caused deep discontent with social-democratic governments, which has been expressed electorally in terms of the oscillation of their mostly working-class supporters – who since the 80s have alternated between voting for

them against the advance of the right-wing parties and punishing them for their government policies.

Such a situation has led in some cases to electoral polarisation with a strengthening of varieties of extreme left and right parties. The most important expression of this situation was the crisis for the French Socialist Party in the 2002 presidential elections. In the second round the choice was between Chirac’s traditional right wing and the xenophobic right of Le Pen’s National Front.

In Latin America, bourgeois nationalist leaderships, such as Peronism in Argentina, have been deeply discredited by turning themselves into the executioners of neo-liberal policies. That does not mean, however, that the Argentine working class has overcome the class-collaborationist ideology that has been instilled in it by Peronism, but it has meant a crisis period for these parties and their mainly working class and popular traditional base. The crisis is leading to the emergence of intermediaries such as Chávez and populism, which have grown thanks to their anti-US rhetoric within the context of renewed hope among the mass movement. These are important obstacles to the advance towards class independence and the construction of a workers’ and revolutionary alternative.

3. FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE 4TH INTERNATIONAL

The shift rightwards by social-democracy and Stalinism has opened up a space to their left, which expresses the disillusionment of wide sectors and their rejection of the old reformist leaderships. But this has taken place without there yet having been any political radicalisation or the development of progressive centrist tendencies.

Internationally, out of the anti-globalisation movement was created the World Social Forum (WSF), hegemonised by reformist organisations such as ATTAC, which advocate the “humanisation” of capitalism. Five years after the first WSF meeting in Porto Alegre, the Forum showed its character as a fig leaf for social-democratic reformism and its governments, such as Lula’s in Brazil.

From the point of view of political organisations, there is an attempt to fill this non-revolutionary space with left-reformist parties that are claimed to be “anti-capitalist”.

One model for this new kind of “anti-capitalist” party is the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), fuelled by a section that broke from the Trotskyist Militant tendency (later called the Socialist Party). This involves social-democratic groups, ex-Labour Party mem-

bers, left-wing Scottish nationalists and also groups that claim to be revolutionary such as the Socialist Workers Party. Another paradigm is Rifondazione Comunista in Italy, which was founded in the early 90s by a section of the Italian Communist Party that resisted the openly centre-left turn by the majority of the party, and small Trotskyist groups that have stayed in its ranks for over ten years – even when Rifondazione became part of the ‘Olive Tree’ (Il Olivo) government alliance. The party, which was presented by groups such as the British SWP as an “example”, concretised in its 6th Congress a categorical shift rightwards, leaving open the possibility of forming part of a future centre-left government.

Such organisations, because they are “broad” in terms of programme – meaning non-revolutionary – can also have a wider socio-electoral base, as has been shown by the “success” of the SSP, the Left Bloc in Portugal or the Red-Green Alliance in Denmark.

An important strand of groups and tendencies that speak in the name of Trotskyism or have their origins in the 4th International, such as the Socialist Workers Party in Britain and the French LCR (the most important section of the United Secretariat), have been trying

to capitalise on the crisis between classical reformism and its electoral base by means of an opportunist policy of promoting “broad” parties or movements that allow coming together in a common organisation – or electoral front – with the left wing of reformism. This right-wing turn has been accelerated above all by the emergence of the “no global” (and later anti-war) movement, as shown by the Respect electoral coalition promoted and formed by the British SWP with bourgeois sections of the Muslim community.

The justification by the LCR and SWP for such opportunist policies is that for decades the revolutionary left organisations – as a result of the strength of Stalinism and social-democracy – have been limited to being small groups, isolated from the mass movement. They say that today, despite the absence of political radicalisation, the existence of social movements such as the anti-globalisation movement has provided the opportunity to overcome this situation and avoid the danger of “sectarianism”. Consequently they put forward a new obstacle to that which they see associated with a whole period of history.

These broad “anti-capitalist and pluralist” constructions, which seem to be an opportunistic shortcut faced with the genuine difficulties in building revolutionary workers’ parties, express a deep political and programmatic adaptation to the bourgeois democratic system by these tendencies, which make up the right wing of the “Trotskyist movement”. The most extreme example of this adaptation is the Brazilian section of the United Secretariat, Socialist Democracy, which not only formed part of the Porto Alegre city government for years but which has one of its leaders, Miguel Rosetto, as Minister for Agrarian Development in Lula’s capitalist government. The United Secretariat has thus returned to the dreadful tradition of social-democracy at the beginning of the 20th century of providing ministers for bourgeois government, violating every basic principle of not participating in such governments.

Discontent with Lula’s neo-liberal policies and the expulsion from the PT of four MPs belonging to groups calling themselves Trotskyist – among them Socialist Democracy – has led to the formation of the PSOL (Socialism and Liberty Party), which is an “advanced” experiment in building broad multi-class parties adapted to the democratic-liberal regime.

These “anti-capitalist” parties have opposition to “neo-liberalism” or Bush’s militarism as a defining feature, but lack any class politics or working-class social composition. This makes them in every way petit-bourgeois party projects adapted to capitalist democracy, and advocates of direct class collaboration through the participation of bosses’ politicians in their ranks and electoral fronts.

“Socialist” rhetoric is at the service of mere electoral growth and expanding its space as the left wing of the bourgeois regime. They talk about “socialism”

without revolution – in the same way as old-style social-democratic reformism did. This has nothing to do with the destruction of the bourgeois state and the introduction of a workers’ state, but is limited to achieving small reforms while maintaining the system of capitalist exploitation.

There are other Trotskyist organisations that reject this quasi-reformist policy and that have formally preserved their revolutionary programme, such as Lutte Ouvrière in France, the PSTU in Brazil and the CRCI – the international grouping including the Workers’ Party (Partido Obrero) of Argentina. Our tendency has proposed a common campaign with them against the United Secretariat’s “ministerialism”, rescuing the elementary class principle of non-participation in capitalist governments. However, these groups have refused the offer, in fact allowing Rosetto to continue for two more years in the government without the left provoking a crisis in Socialist Democracy and the United Secretariat.

Although these groups have a more left-wing discourse, their priority is the strengthening of their own political apparatuses within the left spaces that are emerging within the system, not the advance of the class by even a single step towards a revolutionary strategy. Thus they are parties that oscillate between sectarian self-proclamation and political opportunism and between trade-unionism and electoralism. And this is without presenting an internationalist revolutionary class alternative or political practice that seeks to win a section of the proletariat to the Trotskyist programme. For example, the Partido Obrero in Argentina has made a big step backwards in terms of adaptation to the bourgeois democratic system, establishing a front organisation of *piqueteros* through which it distributes the state’s social benefits. The Italian group Progetto Comunista has been in Rifondazione Comunista for a decade, and far from doing entryism it has helped build a left-reformist party based on class collaboration.

The PSTU has been trying to hegemonise bureaucratically a still-embryonic political rupture with the Lula government, with a trade-union orientation for CONLUTAS that prevents thousands of vanguard workers from leading the struggle to expel the trade-union bureaucracy that continues to lead the unions of millions of workers.

We are in a new phase in which workers are starting to show a recovery in subjectivity, the imperialist offensive is being repelled and resisted by millions across the world, internationalism has once again been posed and in order to make a qualitative leap forward it has become necessary to break with the reformist and populist leaderships that have historically led us to disaster. In such a context we have an urgent need to advance in the reconstruction/re-founding of the World Party of Socialist Revolution: the Fourth International.

Our tendency – the Trotskyist Fraction for the

Fourth International – has been arguing that it is not enough to have correct general programmes and talk about socialism and internationalism. The proof of a revolutionary organisation consists in the programme being applied concretely in political practice, and that it fights to be part of the working class and lead its most militant sections – encouraging the development of the most advanced experiences of our class and turning these into programmatic lessons for future combat. Examples of this include the experience of workers’ control in Zanon in Argentina; the fight to develop the anti-bureaucratic tendencies and for political independence in the new workers’ movement in Argentina or Brazil; or our intervention in, and the political and organisational conclusions drawn from, the revolutionary process in Bolivia. This is because only a Trotskyism built and tested in the class struggle can become the basis for the reconstruction of a revolutionary and internationalist workers’ movement.

We are aware that we are a revolutionary tendency within the Trotskyist movement and that the re-founding of the Fourth International and national revolutionary workers’ movements will not be the product of the evolution of either our groups or those of other tendencies. Rather it will emerge from fusion with revolutionary elements of the workers’ and popular vanguard. Internationally we represent an ideological, political and organisational pole that proposes recreating revolutionary Marxism and transforming

into a programme the central experiences of the international working class,

With this framework in mind, we believe that we must put all of our efforts into reclaiming the best revolutionary traditions of the working class. We should demonstrate the superiority of our programme and strategy and the wretchedness of those who, seeking a parliamentary or trade-union post, end up reconciling themselves with the reformists.

The Trotskyist Fraction for the Fourth International is presenting this Manifesto Programme in order to have a discussion with the advanced workers that are beginning to be aware of the social and political power of the proletariat in the fight against capital, with the young people who have suffered the experience of the reformist leaderships, and with all those honest members of left-wing organisations that see the need to resist the right-wing course of their leaderships.

We are willing to debate ideas and advance as far as possible together with all those Trotskyist tendencies and activists that call for – through their programme and political practice – the revolutionary tradition and legacy of Trotskyism. And we wish to take concrete steps through joint experience, exploratory committees or liaison committees – depending on the degree of convergence that exists – in order to rebuild the Fourth International as the expression of the general staff of the world’s army of exploited, and lead the coming revolutionary processes to victory.

