

## OVERVIEW OF INTERNATIONAL ANTI-CAPITALIST MOVEMENT TODAY

The ravages inflicted by capitalist globalisation have provoked resistance by the oppressed and exploited throughout the world. Acts of spontaneous or organised resistance, whether occurring in the imperialist heartlands or peripheral countries, all are taking place against this new restructuring of the world. This restructuring was ushered in by the imperialist bourgeoisie in the 1980's through their political representatives, Thatcher and Reagan. A neo-liberal economic policy was implemented to provide for the unfettered circulation of money, commodities and productive capital. The mobility of labour was restricted by a wide array of measures to create competition between workers and to pit one section of the international working class against the other. The New World Order (NWO) announced in 1990 by George Bush senior on the eve of the first Gulf War is 'the political superstructure of the economic strategy of 'globalisation' (Savran in the Politics of Empire p119). This political superstructure constructed as it was within the context of the collapse of the bureaucratic workers states in Eastern Europe was also an attempt to try to fill the vacuum created by this fall. This unipolar world in which the USA emerged as the only superpower replaced the bipolar world of the two superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union. I will come back to this later.

### **Development of resistance against capitalist globalisation**

A turning point in the struggle against capitalist globalisation occurred in Seattle in 1999 with the mobilisation of the youth, social movements and trade unionists against the WTO talks. This together with the dissatisfaction of peripheral countries with what was on offer at the WTO talks led to their collapse. The Seattle mobilisations followed earlier less visible protests such as the European marches of the unemployed to Amsterdam in 1997 against the Maastricht and other treaties of the European Union (EU). Earlier, there had been the rebellion of the Zapatistas in Mexico and the Landless People's Movement in Brazil. Post Seattle, the movement against capitalist globalisation took a further step forward in creating the World Social Forum (WSF), which met at Porto Alegre in 2001. Moved by a radical internationalist and potentially anti-capitalist spirit, the movement not surprisingly chose Porto Alegre, where the PT (Workers Party of Brazil) developed direct democracy, as the venue for the forum. With its slogan of 'Another World Is Possible' it appears as a social movement, which is confronting capitalist globalisation and has created a public space for discussion and activist commitment. The decision to move the forum to Mumbai in 2004 and to Africa in 2007 and to create continental forums has greatly strengthened it.

In Genoa, in July 2001, inspired by the WSF, social and political organisations were able to combine with radical sectors of the mass trade union movement in a confrontation against the G8 summit of rich nations and Russia. In Italy and Spain the social forums directly stimulated struggles in the labour movement and created a new political framework in these countries embracing an alternative to defensive social struggles. The 'traditional trade unions in these countries, although weakened organisationally and politically, retain the support of millions of workers. General strikes and massive popular mobilisations in Italy, Spain and Greece brought on to the political scene millions of workers in unity with other social layers and movements. In Argentina, where the neo-liberal policies led to the collapse of entire sections of the economy, the working class and the middle classes rose up in struggle. For the first time in its history a democratically elected government was toppled not by a coup but by direct action of the working and popular masses.

### **The New World Order**

Earlier, I referred to the NWO announced by Bush senior in 1990 taking place within the context of the collapse of the bureaucratic workers states in Eastern Europe. Imperialism had to oversee the restoration of capitalism not only in Russia and the states in Eastern Europe but also China. Then there was the political vacuum created in many parts of the world, where different governments had set up alliances with the Soviet Union most notably the Middle East. Imperialism today is

confronted with the task of assimilating a vast expanse of territory practically extending from Berlin to the China Sea. It was no coincidence that Bush senior chose the first Gulf war to inaugurate the NWO. This war as well as the three other wars since the first Gulf war, Yugoslavia 1999 and the two wars of this century instigated by Bush junior, Afghanistan 2001 and Iraq 2003 have to be seen within the framework of the US bid for global control in the NWO. These wars were conducted by the US with different alliances in each war. In the attack on Afghanistan, the US used a shifting series of alliances and in the war against Iraq it bypassed both UN and NATO forming 'a coalition of the willing'. While the US remains the world's only superpower, inter-imperialist rivalries do not disappear and the question of who gets how much remains a big issue in the NWO. In the Iraq war, the refusal of France and Germany to sign up to the 'coalition of the willing' was essentially a dispute of who gets how much although of course the ruling classes in those countries would have had to take account of the opposition of the people of France and Germany to the war.

### **The "War on Terror" after Sep 11th**

The attack by terrorists on the World Trade Centre in New York on Sept 11th, 2001 presented George Bush junior and his administration, which was dominated by neo-conservatives, with an opportunity for which they had been waiting. The influence of the neo-conservatives has been to radicalise an existing trend towards militarising international relations and world domination by the US through absolute military superiority. They proclaimed a 'war on terrorism' in which 'all those who are not for us are against us'. This war not only involved those externally whom they proclaimed as their enemies but also internal enemies who could be attacked through restricting democratic rights. Their first external target was a backward country, Afghanistan, using the massive US military machine to conquer it. The US had at last succeeded in one of its most cherished objectives, obtaining a military foothold in Central Asia. The military bases that it built during this war, with the connivance of Russia, in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan attest to the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the region in which they have been established. It is an open secret that in Asia, US imperialism views Russia and China as potential threats and the US bases are in place to engage in any future struggles over the whole of the Asian land mass. Not least of importance to US imperialism is the economic significance of the region because of the huge reserves of oil and natural gas in the Caspian basin, which the multinational oil companies have been thirsting to lay their hands on.

### **The Quagmire in Iraq**

The political climate created by "the war on terror" following Sept 11 encouraged the Bush administration into its next military intervention, the attack on Iraq. Iraq was chosen firstly because of its oil wealth. Iraq holds the world's second largest oil reserves, after Saudi Arabia. Secondly, because of the geostrategic importance of Iraq, the US had decided to build a number of bases there, which it would occupy indefinitely. What it did not bargain for was the determined resistance of the Iraqi people to occupation. This took the form of armed resistance, the rejection by the population of the US led Coalition Provisional Authority and the demand for democratic elections and an end to the occupation. Having been forced to concede elections, the US is now faced with the victory of the Shia coalition, the United Iraqi Alliance(UIA), which is demanding the end of the occupation and which is friendly to Iran. What Washington seeks now to prevent is an Iraqi majority hostile to the US from ruling Iraq. To this end it has been engaged in trying to sow division between Shia and Sunnis as well as between Arabs and Kurds, employing the tried and tested policy of divide and rule.

The stakes for the US in Iraq are high. If it loses control over the country and is compelled to leave this "will have worse consequences than Vietnam with regard to US imperial credibility, its ability to intervene militarily, as well as US economic and political world hegemony. Due to the oil factor, the strategic importance of Iraq and the Arab Persian Gulf area is far higher than whatever was at stake in Vietnam and the whole of Indochina. Iraq is part of a regional, mainly Shia, "crescent of crisis" in Washington's—and Israel's—strategic view, which stretches from Lebanon, where it is

represented by the Hizbullah in alliance with Syrian hegemony, to the Alawite-dominated regime in Syria (the Alawites are an offspring of Shiism), to pro-Iranian Shia forces in Iraq, to the mullahs' regime in Tehran. Washington has set itself as a priority the subversion of this reshaped and refocused version of "the axis of evil". Its attitude to the events in Lebanon, as well as its increasing threats against Damascus and Tehran, indicate the context in which it envisages its role in Iraq" (G.Achcar-Whither Iraq Feb 2005). In Iraq a Shia-Sunni anti-occupation alliance of the Association of Muslim Scholars and al-Sadr's current has been set up. It is a political expression of the legitimate armed resistance to the occupation and the rejection of the occupation by the vast majority of the population, which are crucial for the liberation of Iraq.

### **The World's Second Superpower**

After Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>, the anti-globalisation movement was able to transform itself in many countries into an anti-war movement. The hundreds of thousands throughout the world who demonstrated against the imperialist war in Afghanistan became millions when Bush jnr and Blair invaded Iraq. It was at the European Social Forum in Florence in November 2002 that a decision was taken which led to the organisation of worldwide mobilisations on February 15<sup>th</sup> 03 against a war in Iraq. The New York Times named the anti-war movement the 'second superpower'. Just how effective the 'second superpower' had become was shown by the demonstrations of the masses in Turkey just before the start of the war, which halted the plans of its government to enter the war on the side of the imperialists. The first Cairo Conference in Dec.02 against the war attracted 400 people from all over the Middle East and the world. For the first time in many years, demonstrations against the war and the repressive rule of President Mubarak were organised. The Cairo Conference furthered the growth of the movement in the Middle East against the occupation of Iraq. The Third Cairo Conference is being held this Easter with a much bigger attendance expected. The defeat of the Spanish Prime Minister, Aznar in the elections following the Madrid railway bombing and the subsequent withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq was a blow to the US and British led coalition.

In the US and Britain it is becoming increasingly difficult to recruit soldiers for what is a deeply unpopular war. The chief of the Army Reserve in the US had to admit that the Army Reserve is "in grave danger of being unable to meet other operational requirements...and is rapidly degenerating into a 'broken force'. There is talk in the US of Bush having to reintroduce the draft to provide the badly needed troops for the army. Think of the role the draft played in the US during the Vietnam War. The resistance in Iraq to the occupation coupled with the international opposition to the occupation has for the time being halted Bush's plans to attack other countries in his sites, Iran, Syria and North Korea, his original 'axis of evil'

### **The Dead End of Neo-Liberalism**

The neo-liberal policies of the 1980s and 90s led to a brilliant success for capital. As the world economic problems worsen, instead of ditching their policies, world capitalism continues with and reinforces neo-liberalism. These policies are now running up against a big credibility problem. Not only has capitalist globalisation led to war but to the collapse of the Argentinian economy and the Enron bankruptcy. The resistance to these policies is broadening and deepening. In Latin America, governments have been swept away with the election of left wing presidents-Lula in Brazil, Hugo Chavez in Venezuela and Tabare Vazquez in Uruguay. While Lula in power has adopted neo-liberal policies, provoking a split in his party, Chavez has introduced real reforms and diverted \$4 billion from oil revenues to social programs. In Europe there have been public sector strikes in France against corporate style management and accelerated outsourcing of the post offices and in the UK public sector strikes have taken place against the attack on pensions of workers. The reaction of people all over the world in support of the victims of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster coupled with demands for cancellation of the debt owed by the countries affected reflects to some degree the impact of the ideas of the anti-capitalist globalisation movement on public opinion. The prolonged experience with neo-liberal policies and with the political and social forces that have imposed neo-liberalism will play a key role in political clarification on a mass scale and in the rebirth of a

reorganised, reinvigorated workers and social movement at every level.

The contradictions that are tearing contemporary society apart are putting the definition and construction of a systemic alternative on the agenda. Never before has a ruling class had such complete supremacy on the material level(military, economic, diplomatic), while ruling over millions of exploited, oppressed, humiliated, crushed women and men, victims of a system that has never been so iniquitous and barbarous on the human level. But only conscious, organised activity by the exploited and oppressed can prevent further capitalist disasters. To achieve this, overcoming the historic crisis of the “subjective factor” in the broad sense is our fundamental task.

### **Overcoming the crisis of the subjective factor**

The break in the prevailing sense of political powerlessness as a result of the turn in the world situation is leading to a long period of rebuilding the workers and social movements. This long term work aims to strengthen trade unions, women’s, youth, anti-war, ecological, anti-fascist and anti-racist movements. At the same time it is aimed at developing the consciousness of the strategic stakes including the formulation of “transitional demands”. A refoundation of the transitional programme will occur through vast, free discussion, collective elaboration, ‘globalised common work, critical and self critical debate, and openness to ongoing and future social experiences. In the peripheral countries, where 50% of the population live in the rural areas, demands focusing on the land question are being highlighted as is the relationship between urban and rural struggles.

While there has been growth in the social movements, the trade union movement on a world level has made less progress and is lagging dramatically behind the centralisation of capital.

Revolutionaries have therefore to focus on building an active, internationalist and feminist trade union movement. In view of the decisive role for anti-capitalist and socialist strategy of the globalised wage class we need to deploy a renewed, broad concrete analysis of it to highlight its unity against capitalist exploitation and oppression. The hierarchical structure of world capitalism is imposing a parallel, structural inequality within the world proletariat, between the working class in the imperialist countries and the countries of the periphery but also within each of the working classes. The task therefore is to strengthen solidarity, unity and organisation between workers in the imperialist countries and those in the periphery as well as between the most and least skilled workers in each country.

### **Building broad anti-capitalist proletarian parties**

An anti-capitalist recomposition is taking place internationally. In Europe, socialist parties to the left of social democracy are being formed. They are anti-capitalist, broad, pluralistic and representative. They put forth immediate demands and social aspirations of the world of labour. They express workers’ militancy, women’s desire for emancipation, the youth revolt and international solidarity. They base their strategy on the extraparliamentary struggle and the proletariat’s self activity and self-organisation and take a clear stand for expropriation of capital and democratic self-managed socialism. The struggle for such parties will go through a series of stages, tactics and organisational forms specific to each country . This requires

- a. the presence of significant political forces, in which revolutionary Marxist currents collaborate with important currents of left wing reformism and function as an accepted part of a broader whole.
- b. a close relationship with social movements which put forward their own demands and actions
- c. a formation recognised as representing something real in society, breaking the monopoly of parties loyal to social neo-liberalism, thanks to the presence of elected representatives in assemblies (local, regional national) elected by universal suffrage.(Fourth International document prepared for their World Congress in 2003)

One important issue facing anti-capitalist parties is their need to clarify their positions on

governmental questions, whether they should participate in or support governments adopting neo-liberal policies. In the case of the PRC in Italy and the PT in Brazil with Lula, these parties lead or prepare to support or participate in this type of government. Most of the international radical left basing themselves on historical experience believe this to be a grave error.

The willingness on the part of a series of revolutionary or anti-capitalist currents to discuss, exchange, act in common as reflected in the conference of anti-capitalist parties in Mumbai and this year in Porto Alegre at the WSF is an important development. The participation of Apdusa at the meeting in Porto Alegre will help us in our struggle here in SA just as it strengthens the anti-capitalist parties internationally.

Norman Traub March 2005