



DEMOCRACY, DEVELOPMENT AND RIGHTS

A debate on challenges and alternatives

PUBLISHED BY IBASE

Rio de Janeiro, January 2007

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**Published by the Brazilian Institute of Social and
Economic Analyses (Ibase)**

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This publication was printed on recycled paper.



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PRESENTATION

■ **MOEMA MIRANDA**
Anthropologist, coordinator of Ibase

As part of the activities to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the institution, Ibase organized the seminar *Democracy, Development and Rights – which Brazil does the world need* in Rio de Janeiro on 12-13 May 2006. The initiative was part of the *Post-neoliberal Agenda: strategic alternatives for democratic human development* project, published in partnership with the Rosa Luxemburgo Foundation and ActionAid Brasil. The seminar was supported by the Fondation Charles Léopold Mayer pour le Progrès de l'Homme and the Europe-Latin American Observatory on Democracy and Development (Euralat). This publication is a compilation of the principal texts presented at the meeting, and other unpublished texts on related themes.

Upon completing the first quarter of a century in its struggle on behalf of radicalization of democracy in Brazil – a theme that has characterized our efforts to date – Ibase took on the job of producing an institutional program to discuss development in all its dimensions – environmental, cultural, political, economic and social – and the limitations that the type of development adopted imposes on exercising democracy and universalizing rights. This concern is coupled with the proposal of a variety of social movement, networks and NGOs in this initiative to reflect and find ways to overcome inequality in our country, and to this end takes into account the need to form strategies on the local, national and international level.

Our focus, of course, is Brazil. Nevertheless, we know that many of the impasses that we observe in our country are echoed in other countries. They cannot be treated in isolation without taking into account Brazil's insertion in the world and the role that the country plays in the international scenario.

Our work, actions and reflections point to a hypothesis, namely that in order for democracy to become a concrete fact (in the sense that we give the term), and if we want it to lead to a broad and profound democracy that guarantees full rights, then it has to include a discussion of the dimensions and strategies





of development (and even a rediscussion of the various meanings of the actual concept). Brazil in particular needs to construct new forms of development in order finally to overcome its historical debt towards its own population, the majority of which have been systematically deprived of the benefits that could be afforded by a nation with our characteristics. Likewise, we need to include the notion of environmental sustainability.

Our reflection began on the realization that what we are witnessing in Brazil is the depletion of a democracy surge that has proved incapable of challenging the structure, relations, processes and policies on which our clearly excludent development pattern is based. We invite you to join us in this dialogue.

As we suppose that something similar is going on in other countries, we would like to share this hypothesis. This will enable us to move beyond the emphasis on democratizing the political institutions, and the perspective to rebuilt our life and public actions; begin to form presuppositions and draft alternatives to development that incorporate the enormous political progress that Brazilian society has made over the last few decades and that calls for a form of democracy without frontiers and with deeper roots.





The reflection that we are proposing needs to be radical in order to be effective. We therefore pose the following question to ourselves and the reader: are the model of development and its strategies the real obstacles to the full exercise of democracy and the fundamental expansion of rights? Is this the direction we should be taking if we want to go beyond the limitations that we discern in the democratic system? In short, is the hypothesis that we present here a correct one?

We have to discuss with our partners with social movements and civil society organizations. It must also be stressed that the “new” element presented here does not mean something unheard of before, especially since many of the questions raised here are already being dealt with in various movements and spaces (in some of which Ibase itself has been active, such as the World Social Forum). What we do intend – based on the diagnosis that politics has lost its prominence to the economic-financial sphere – is to contribute towards opening a new stage of reflection on paths that reclaim economics for politics and restore the true meaning of the political area as a moment to unite strategies on behalf of development, with democracy and rights, social justice, environmental sustainability and solidarity.



WHICH BRAZIL DOES THE WORLD NEED?

■ **CÂNDIDO GRZYBOWSKI**
Sociologist, director Ibase

The point of departure for this endeavour is a process of thinking about Brazil, its people, its land, its culture, its economy, and its political organisation. Brazil, with its enormous potential and contradictions, needs to find its way forward, but as part of a world that is increasingly interdependent; it must administer its vast territory and natural heritage as a common asset of humankind.

Like it or not, neoliberal globalisation dominates the whole world, concentrating wealth with its global strategies, marginalising groups and whole peoples and accelerating frighteningly the process of environmental destruction. As a result, the world ceases to be seen as something external and distant, but seems to invade our space, our daily lives. Today, the issue is unavoidable and all-pervading. Nonetheless, there can be no ignoring the enormous theoretical, analytical and especially political deficit as regards proposals and practical measures to address the world dimension introduced increasingly into our societies and our lives.

The World Social Forum (WSF) grew out of the endeavour to humanize and give meaning to that perception by offering a point of convergence for the many organisations and social movements, networks, coalitions and campaigns which, in one way or another, opposed the centrality of markets in ongoing global processes. The WSF has contributed to a major movement of ideas in search of alternatives, an intrinsically world-wide movement centred on a citizenship that is new in both its consciousness and practice and which embraces everyone living on our planet. The WSF is informed by an endeavour to take stock, both of our common humanity in the diversity of cultures and identities, and of life's natural patrimony – nature and its resources – as a greater common good, which we must share today and preserve for future generations. It is a major source of inspiration for this project.

The fact is that in order to think about and build another Brazil we have to think about the world, and in order to think about and build another world we also have to think about Brazil. That means a radical shift in perspective as to where and how we must look if we want to see, understand, propose and act. That change entails reviewing concepts, analyses and proposals, particularly among all those women and men whose yardstick is human rights and the founding values of democracy as the basis for life in society.




BRAZIL: WORLD POWER OR DEMOCRATIC, SUSTAINABLE SOLIDARITY?

The political turbulence of the current situation in Brazil, however serious it may be, cannot mask the enormous challenges that lie ahead for us. Over the past 20 or 25 years, we – like neighbouring peoples in South America – we have embarked on the fundamental adventure of restoring democracy. We have witnessed the emergence of the widest range of social subjects in vibrant new movements of the multitudes who previously had neither identity nor voice, now broadening and strengthening the social fabric and the capacity for intervention by a citizenry actively claiming and securing rights. At the same time the political institutions of a State of Law were being fashioned in order to dismantle authoritarianism and ensure the conditions necessary for democratic participation.

It was therefore an extraordinary process of winning back democratic freedoms and institutions, building spaces for political participation and agreement, and formulating demands for economic and cultural inclusion, greater social justice and far-reaching change. However, there are clear signs that this democratizing cycle is spent. Over and beyond the political crisis in Brazil, the essential issue is the limitations of the groundswell that was driving democratic reform, which is incapable of going much beyond a formal representative model or of challenging and transforming the power, structures, relations, processes and policies that are the basis for Brazil's society and economic development. As a result, Brazil continues to be an emerging economy and a rising power in world geopolitics, but sustains itself internally by maintaining social exclusion and inequality, racism and

violence, and by systematically depleting the natural heritage it is endowed with. Thus far, despite enormous gains, Brazilian democracy is not managing to extend human rights to include all its people nor to produce an economic base with more justice, solidarity and sustainability, and political power with more participation and active citizenship.

Today, Brazil is surprising many with its foreign policy – whether in negotiations on the FTAA and with the WTO, the agreement among India, Brazil and South Africa, the Summit of Arab and South American countries, or in terms of its moves towards regional integration, such as the South American Community of Nations, the return to the IRSA, the announcement of a gas pipeline from Venezuela to Argentina and, particularly, how unreservedly it is financing enterprises



THE POLITICAL TURBULENCE
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through Brazil's national economic and social development bank, BNDES, in the various countries of the region and even in Africa, in a veritable multinational network of companies controlled by Brazilian capital.

Is this Brazil emerging as a sub-regional power? Whose interests does that serve – those of the diverse, multifaceted and long-suffering Brazilian people; those of the peoples of America? Certainly, never before has Brazil exported so much or managed to achieve such great trade surpluses, creating an external environment favourable to the economy in place, which had been spinning its wheels in terms of growth ever since our leaders surrendered to neoliberal prescriptions. This smells more like a return to the developmentist project, to business expansionism, income concentration and environmental destruction, all grounded ultimately in a logic of social exclusion. Yes, if we want development that is radically democratic, we have to overcome exclusion, social inequality in all its many forms, and environmental destruction. Thus far, however, instead of more participatory democracy and more rights as the parameters for social relations, we are seeing a resurgence of contradictions, conflicts and social disputes.

We are at a point today that is crucial to defining the Brazil that we want. Before us lies the possibility of laying the foundations of a citizens' model of development for our country, one that has radical democracy and rights as its driving forces, and closes the historical separation between economy and society, between political power and citizenship. In practice, however, we are pushed along by internal and external relations, structures, processes, interests and forces to continue and intensify a kind of development that furthers an economy that works against society, concentrates wealth and power, is socially exclusionary and destroys our common assets. Such an economy and power combine with the racism, machismo, violence, patrimonialism and patronage that are present in laws cast in stone at the heart of Brazilian society.

The difficulties involved in exercising the option to radicalise democracy are so great that they are leading us naturally to accept as inevitable an agenda of growth at any cost, measured by GDP, by foreign trade and the trade surplus, by profits and by accumulation, a kind of development fostered according to the interests of the large corporations and their global strategies. The challenge facing Brazilian democracy is to overcome that impasse. Not facing up to it may lead us to an even greater crisis. Worse still, democracy itself is at serious risk as long as it is limited to representative formalism and incapable of generating a new society grounded in active, participatory citizenship, responsibility, justice, solidarity, diversity and sustainability.

WHAT IS THE OTHER BRAZIL THAT BRAZILIAN DEMOCRACY CAN AND SHOULD BUILD?

It is time to innovate with daring, courage and determination. It is time, once again, to acknowledge the new challenges posed for democracy in Brazil – today in a context of greater openness to the world and greater interdependence. There is thus an immediate connection with the major issues facing Brazil in the world. We have to ask: what is the Brazil that the world needs and Brazilian democracy can produce?

For such a task it is indispensable that development, the economy, science and technology, the appropriation and use of common assets and the power of the State – in short, life – have to be repoliticised on a perspective informed radically by rights and democracy. And such a process can only be undertaken satisfactorily in open dialogue with the other peoples and subjects of the planet, recognising that we are deciding our future here and also influencing the future of humankind, managers that we are of a vast natural heritage.

Democracy is an uncertain venture by definition, because it rests on a pact stipulating permanent dispute as the means of choosing collective directions and plans. One of its constitutive presuppositions is that citizens participate in the public sphere, defining political power and institutions. The cradle of democracy is civil society, where the active citizenry generates the major movements of public opinion and organises into the social forces that embody them to give form to civic participation.

Dreams, hopes and plans are a fundamental part of any democratic process. They are the motivation behind citizenship, participation and democratic dispute, and thus make it possible to give shape – advancing and retreating – to how the country is to develop. Ultimately democracy means creating, through politics, the conditions necessary so that civil, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, along with the equivalent responsibilities, are the frame of reference for all of society, and so that structures and relationships capable of including all men and women are developed and sustained. What moves democracy is not institutions, but citizenry in action, civic responsibility inspired in common rights.

Over recent decades, the adventure of Brazilian democracy has managed to produce many collective subjects inspired in democratic principles and values and to advance in shaping a state of law. This democracy, however, has been losing strength and intensity, and is no longer able to transform our racist, macho and profoundly unjust society, or the destructive, productivist development we pursue. We face enormous challenges that if not met will limit the democratising process, which will be unable to advance, dangerously engulfed by the authoritarian, exclusionary contradictions that



are destroying the economic, political and cultural relations and structures we have built up over time. We have not yet been able to overthrow the patrimonialism ingrained in our culture, which appropriates and privatises all that is public to serve private interests and privileges. Also losing force – and this is worse still – is the principle that every man and woman has a public responsibility to civic struggle and vigilance, as expressed in civic participation, mobilisation, debates and pressure from the streets. On the contrary, and especially among Brazil's urban middle classes, there is a flourishing culture of cynicism, of every man and woman for him- or herself, of turning one's back and isolating oneself in condominiums protected by high railings and private security guards.

We have to face things as they are, without fear: thus far, Brazilian democracy has not altered the exclusionary, destructive logic underlying society, the economy, the State itself. Privilege tends to override right. For many people citizenship is restricted to the right to vote when summoned to do so. Approximately half of Brazil's population, in the enormous pockets of poverty in the countryside and in the gigantic, socially peripheral masses within and surrounding our cities, live in conditions that are so difficult and violent that they have no social identity, no voice, no real power to count in political processes. When Brazilian democracy is restricted to the formality of a liberal representative democracy, all its contradictions emerge and become visible.

When citizens delegate, by electing their representatives and governments, that is easily turned by those elected into an appropriation of mandates to suit political convenience and personal interests, with no political ethics and no respect for democratic principles. Once installed, members of government disregard the programmes that got them elected and very quickly reach compositions with the groups and forces that control the country's wealth with a grip of steel. As a result, the very institutions of political democracy, which have been won at such cost in the Congress and state legislatures, in the federal and state executives, finally come to be dominated by the same old patrimonialism and patronage, which limits the democratising potential of public policies to promote development and social justice. Worse still, the perverse concentration of income is intensifying, transferring public funds to private groups in a reverse distribution of wealth from the poor to the rich.

That is what we have always done, but now we have refined the methods into the scandalous transfer of public patrimony to multinational private groups and the absolute priority given to generating fiscal surpluses to pay off foreign debt speculators. Brazilian democracy – although certainly an



important accomplishment for a people long subject to dictatorial regimes – has been losing intensity and may die out or become simply a formal rite with no power to make real citizens of each man and woman, to enable them to enjoy their fundamental rights to the full or to exercise their civic duty as responsible subjects who are the constituents of political power and public policy.

The present crisis is a prime example of the impasses facing democracy as practised thus far. The ethical principles and values of democracy are not central to either State power, the laws, judicial decisions, or the structures and relations that govern the production and distribution of goods and services in the economy. If we aim to radicalise a democracy based on ethical principles and values we cannot limit our approach and agenda to the forms of representative democracy, despite our recognising that we need to review and refine our political and electoral institutions in order to advance in democratising State power. But that is insufficient and will not be able to give new vitality to the democratising process among us. The founding principles and values of democracy must be the yardstick for the economy itself and for how it is to develop, and they must be central to all relations in society and our culture.

One indispensable pillar of democracy – ethics in politics – continues being circumvented, and not just in the political practice of our elected representatives, who readily disrespect the mandate delegated by the citizenry. What is worse is the meaning and the direction signalled by the policies that are being adopted, which are anti-ethical, and thus anti-democratic in essence. The ethical principle of inclusion for all, without discrimination, in an effort to achieve justice and equity, and to permit sustainable access to common assets, is disrespected in the name of vested rights and relations sanctioned by tradition, the veritable cast-iron privileges of those who are men, white and have money and property – in short, the “owners of cattle and people”.

Our democracy has not shown itself capable, thus far, of equalising through politics, in favour of all, the power that emanates from patriarchy, property and capital, and even from the legacy of slavery. As it is not guided





by an ethics that produces equality in diversity, with freedom and participation, and with civic solidarity, Brazil's democracy is losing its vigour. Frustration, disappointment and fatigue – is that what lies ahead of us?

We have to recognise that the cycle of democratic renovation inaugurated in the struggle against the dictatorship is exhausted. The best we have produced is what we see there, incapable of guaranteeing even public safety for the great majorities condemned to live in poverty. We need to go back to the grassroots, to our active citizenry, to expand the public dimension, the awareness of rights and duties, and the capacity for public intervention beyond election time. We need to be able to imagine and to propose a democracy that is the frame of reference for development itself and for how Brazil positions itself in the world.

Only a major civic, civilising movement of ideas embodied in men and women who are convinced of their democratic dreams and projects, guided by the ethical principles and values of democracy, will be able to give new vitality to the process. The task is arduous, long and laborious, but gratifying. We need to start right away, shifting our gaze away from the presidential palace, the power of the State, and looking more towards the lowlands, where we live and where the real Brazil lies.

We need an agenda that is positive, engaging, daring and vibrant, that can give us the enthusiasm to produce a new great movement of democratic and democratising ideas, that can penetrate all the pores of society, into all its pockets of poverty and misery, that can halt the advance of the real and symbolic fences and railed-in condominiums that privatise, isolate and segregate, and that can nip in the bud this re-emerging, inwardly and outwardly exclusionary and destructive project of Brazil as an emerging power. Our focus must be politics and ethics – the public space of rights and participation – and to reconquer the autonomous capacity of citizens over State power and market economy.

A MOMENT TO RECONSIDER BRAZIL

Under the Lula government, Brazil is contributing to the effervescence that has taken over South America, with a number of elected governments trying to break with the model of neoliberal globalisation – and with little success, let it be said – in a veritable mosaic of alternative avenues. In 2006, we go back to the ballot in October. The debate that was waged in the electoral process may be restricted to the political and ethical crisis that has enveloped the government and all institutional politics.

It may also, however, be an opportunity for a reaction from a citizenry that has been rather hemmed in by broken hopes and dreams. The same cannot be expected of the parties and candidates. This depends above all on citizens' initiatives conceiving and nourishing a virtuous process of debates on the directions we want to give to Brazil and to development, to ourselves, men and women citizens of Brazil and the world.

In that respect, the electoral situation that is about to begin may be a moment for thinking about the present and the future, the local and the global, what has been achieved and what is lacking, the wave that has broken on the beach and the new wave of democratization that we have to set in motion. We want to set up a space for thinking and to start activities that will inform the debate on the current situation in Brazil, that will set roots in civil society today, but have a longer-term process in view. It is more a question of evaluating the future and of helping to build alternatives that will nurture broad citizens' movements than simply of diagnosing problems and legacies from the past. The time is right to link networks and groups in Brazil up with the debate ongoing in various parts of the world, by bringing its major proponents over for direct confrontation with the issues and perspectives that we see here. However, it is also timely in that just as Brazil needs to think about itself in world terms so others in other countries and situations should think about themselves in terms of the world and of Brazil. That is the best way to integrate the global perspective as an issue and as an opportunity in the construction of democratic alternatives, in solidarity and sustainability for the planet, for all humankind and for each of its peoples.



THE TIME IS RIGHT TO LINK NETWORKS AND GROUPS IN BRAZIL UP WITH THE DEBATE ONGOING IN VARIOUS PART OF THE WORLD



DEMOCRACY + HUMAN RIGHTS + DEVELOPMENT

As what is involved here is a process of thinking, analysis and debate, the initiative is not being conceived as expressing any ready-made, clearly constructed theoretical and methodological position. Above all it will be a search, a test of a working hypothesis, which it is hoped will stimulate a long-term process of intellectual and political production. One basic aim is to outline a bold agenda looking to the future. It is designed as an effort to construct thinking for action, for the emerging movements and organizations of planet-wide citizenship, always rooted in concrete economic, political and cultural realities. But we are not starting from zero.

Over the years, a number of institutions, networks and forums around the world have been engaged in a sustained effort involving research, analysis and exchange. There now exists an accumulation of inquiries, rifts, criticisms, all with a variety of assumptions, in an effort to review ideas and proposals, by many men and women faced with the crisis in paradigms from the past and their experiences of history, as well as the overwhelming hegemony today of neoliberal “one-truth” thinking with its market fundamentalism. The search continues, and it is increasingly clear that what has been accumulated on all sides must be brought into a process of dialogue, confrontation and systematisation. One of the purposes of the WSF is to pool these efforts, but being by nature an open meeting place it cannot cope with such a task. That is why a variety of other initiatives have become necessary. This present project aligns with that strategic perspective, with Brazil as its concrete point of reference.

Ibase itself, over and beyond its role and engagement in the WSF, has been developing endeavours in the same direction. One example is what has been built up by the “Post-Neoliberal Agenda” project, with a network of intellectual

and activist partners in Brazil, the Americas and Europe. A publication for the WSF in Caracas – *Miradas y Reflexiones: bases para la construcción de una Agenda postneoliberal* – brings together some of the group’s points of reference. Also noteworthy is the project for Active Monitoring of Society’s Participation (Mapas) in the context of the Lula government. In fact, many of the questions revisited here about where Brazil is heading arose out of that project.

There are other initiatives, but what is important is the need to go beyond occasional projects and to seek a strategy that will give direction and meaning to Ibase’s public intervention overall. That is why the project is open to partners in Brazil and around the world, and is an invitation to help us build another vision, another approach, the fundamentals of a strategy combining democracy + human rights + development.

Capitalist development, exacerbated in its neoliberal global version, in the quest for private profit at all costs, creates economic and political power structures and processes, and cultures of exploitation and domination by capital, that have unbridled production and consumption as their supreme values to be leveraged by outright competition among people, corporations, sectors and countries. The outstanding scientific and technical basis of this development is that it makes wealth grow, but to the detriment of people – by exploitation, exclusion and social inequality – and counter to the common good, the natural heritage, in a veritable destructive extractivism.

Meanwhile, the experience of real socialism centred on the State’s ability to plan and execute both the organization of production and the distribution of goods and services in the name of social justice, revealed how enormously limited

it was in terms of development. Its scientific and technical base also stimulated productivism at all cost and the consequent environmental destruction, not to mention that its achievements in terms of social justice are not sustainable precisely for lack of active citizens' participation. Also in both models, the issue of citizenship and human rights, the bases of a radical democracy, is absent. What is important, however, is the fact that such models are still hegemonic as paradigms and function as underlying mental structures, veritable codes of reference for thought and action.

In opposition to the logic flowing from these models for thinking about development, its policies and the social relations and processes it prioritises, we are asserting here the primacy of the values of equality, freedom, diversity, solidarity and civic participation, against the yardstick of human rights for all. One fundamental consideration in constructing new development paradigms, with new democratic political cultures, is to articulate and blend the idea of the quest for the broadest equality with radical respect for the diversity that characterises us human beings and our cultures, and also the natural world, its resources and biodiversity that we share.

One fundamental principle from that standpoint is to begin by asserting that men and women, in their capacity as holders of rights and citizenship, are capable and can responsibly construct history, society, the economy, and power. Fundamental to that purpose is to restore and reinvent politics, the public space of debate and dispute, the assertion of the priority of the common, public good over individual, private concerns; that is, of politics over markets. Politics here is not restricted to the State. The point is to politicise all relationships, in the economy, the community, the city, culture, power, and the appropriation and use of nature – in short, in life.

We face complex realities and have many, diverse cultures and, therefore, many possible identities and alternatives. The social subjects involved in promoting democracy, human rights and development are themselves diverse. Who will take the lead is not established a priori. It is in the process of dispute that democracy is constructed as a way of living and of organizing power, and that development priorities are defined. In that regard, we have a lot to learn from the feminist movements, which seek to built alternative subjectivities as a pre-condition for new forms of participation and social organisation.

Those movements have brought us to perceive the dimensions of race, gender and sexual orientation with the same prominence as previously was attributed to social class relations. A radical approach grounded in these dimensions relocates on a new plane the issues of human rights, civic responsibility, democracy and development of society capable of including each and every man and woman.

As a result of this, politics is disputed and the directions of democracy and the development model are defined in a diversity of spaces. These spaces come from experimentation, from new modes of organisation and shared human experience, new forms of family and sociability, and from the emergence of new rights. It is fundamentally important to ponder the embryonic alternatives marked by their participants decision-making capacity based on collective co-responsibility, social cohesion and action in solidarity. The assumptions raised here imply another society, another politics and another economy to curb both the absolutism of the market and absolute State power, and to pave the way for human capabilities to be realized in full.

Thinking about a frame of reference from the premises enunciated here means building up the content of development in the light of human rights, citizenship and democracy. Here we question whether growth and progress are expressions of development and we assert the centrality of rights and common assets on a perspective of inclusion for all and of active citizenship. For that reason, our approach

makes a priority of analysing the democratising potential contained in the disputes and social conflicts thrown up by the process now under way, as spaces where citizenship and collective responsibility are being practised, where rights are emerging and being guaranteed, and to which the various social subjects, the economy and the market, the State and political power must respond.

PRECONDITIONS FOR SUCH AN AGENDA

- Deep-set ethical roots: in a veritable re-equalisation of power, all politics and political institutions must make an absolute principle of respecting the dictates of citizenship for all men and women; it is a priority for democracy to address social inequality and exclusion as a responsibility and duty of the State in determining policies and allocating funding, over and above any imposition by markets; it is an ethical imperative for democracy to recognise the various forms of diversity in citizenship and to promote equality; and the sustainable, equitable use of common natural assets is also an ethical obligation and an indispensable condition for democratic human development.
- A major mobilising project: dreams and hope must be reborn. In order to cement the collective will around a project for a democratic Brazil, the agenda for a new wave must be able to enliven the dream and kindle the hope still present in our popular culture. That is a condition for meeting the resurgence of cynicism and the loss of values, especially among the urban middle classes, who

are led to believe in the extreme competition and individualism of the stampede. But it is also a condition for preventing the galloping fragmentation of social movements and struggles despairing for lack of solutions in sight and legitimate political mediation. The democratic solution of inclusion for all men and women, on friendly terms with our natural heritage, is possible, but we have to believe in it.

- A radically democratic way of doing things: solving Brazil's problems depends on its citizenry and not on the State or the economy. It is we who make the difference, we women and men, young or old, black, indigenous people of all tribes, in short, us in our common capacity as citizens. The essential, indispensable task is to broaden the public dimension, the debate about all rights for all, and about legality that renders a true account of what is legitimate. Participation that is responsible and as direct as possible is the way. Only democratic power based on legitimate, direct participation will be up to the tasks that democracy sets us.



RADICALIZING FEMINISM, RADICALIZING DEMOCRACY

■ **MARIA BETÂNIA ÁVILA**

Sociologist, general coordinator of SOS Corpo Instituto Feminista para Democracia, (*Feminist Institute for Democracy*)

Democracy: government by the people or government by the power of the people. When was it that the people ever really governed? Ever since the very beginning of feminism, the question has been raised about women as part of the people that govern. The sphere of politics has historically been constituted as a man's domain. Politics as a man's domain is related to domination over women in the space of private life. Ever since it was installed as a political movement, feminism has confronted the relation between public freedom and private domination – which in itself implies the need for radicality, in the sense of thinking of democracy not only as a political system but also as an actual form of organizing social life.

The political organization of feminism comes from women's revolt forged in a concrete historical experience of unequal social relations. The feminist *praxis* is political action and critical thinking. Accordingly, radicality of actions is related to re-inventing political practice and feminist theoretical-analytical production in the various areas of knowledge. Knowing and acting are inseparable dimensions for constructing the subject. The production of knowledge is also a sphere of masculine domination. Symbolic domination addressed directly to reproduce material domination and exploration – both patriarchal and capitalist.



FACING CONFLICTS

The feminist movement boasts a diversity of organizations and struggles, but inequality is also found among the women who make up these organizations: women from unequal classes; women from different races transformed historically into inequalities; black women; indigenous and rural women; domestic servants, who account for the majority of the class of poor women; intertwined inequalities of class, race and gender; Lesbian women who radicalize against the legacy of the dominant heterosexual pattern; women who have special needs; and several generations of women who bear the conflicts inherent to transmitting and reinventing.

Radicalizing is living the internal conflict within a movement, facing various tendencies and propositions in a democratic manner and at the same time producing conflict in society concerning these very propositions. Radicalizing is being a reference to other women outside the space of the organization itself.

The radicalization of feminism has to do with its actual form of organization and action in the world. If the movement is radical, first and foremost its organization requires the means to face the daily contradictions of women trying to exercise the right to be political subjects – one conquest of feminism has been to institute women as subjects.

In order to think of a radical proposal of the feminist struggle, it is important to think about access to the area of the struggle. Otherwise, social inequality and discriminations transform perversely into a deficit for the subject. There are obstacles in daily life against women who circulate between the public and the private spheres: sexual and domestic violence, prejudice, the double working day and lack of time, to mention just a few.

The work of women in the productive and reproductive spheres is marked by the inequality of the sexual division of work. We need to respond theoretically and politically to changing the economic bases of this division and the social relations that it produces.

The merchandising of women's bodies and pleasure - the trivialization of sexual exploitation - is an important dimension of economic globalization. Women are considered strategic targets of consumerism; sexual appeal is the key element of this method. Each and every day the industry of culture, through a whole variety of media, produces the craziest ways of alienating and capturing every proposal of freedom and equality. It is also in the area of sexuality that the repressive force of religious and fundamentalist institutions have exercised control and committed abuse in the name of transcendental principles.



The illegal and clandestine nature of abortion has always at the same time served both mercantile interests and the power of the Churches to dominate women's lives. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the power of the State has traditionally been in the hands of men, mostly associated with the owners of the land, industry and financial capital, subordinated to and allies of the lords farther to the North.

Patrimonialism, which had considerable power in forming these States, rural violence, sexual violence, racism, homophobia, violence against the indigenous peoples, concentration of income and its reverse – poverty - are all marks that have persisted since time immemorial of a close relation between symbolic domination and reproduction of social inequality.

A MORE PUBLIC ACTION

A political project that proposes to democratize social life should therefore be radical in relation to racism, heterosexuality as a hegemonic model, authoritarian forms of managing political power, and institutions that sustain domination and exploration: the Church, the family, the State and the market. In short, such a project should be radical in how it deals with the capitalist and patriarchal system.

Women, especially black and indigenous women, make up the majority of the poor people of Central America, South America and the Caribbean. If feminism in Latin America and the Caribbean does not confront women's poverty, there is no way that it can radicalize. If it fails to confront democratizing the land and women's access to it, there is no radicality. If it does not confront women's right to their own bodies, there can be no radicality. Feminism has to become a more public issue, reach out to wherever women are exploited and sexually abused, and create roots as a political organization addressed to social change.

How capable is the feminist movement to recognize all the expressions of the daily struggles of thousands of women who bring about changes in their communities and the institutions where they work, who define themselves as feminists or not, and who forge a wide-sweeping women's movement? How does feminism relate to this movement of women? This is a question that has to be posed as a dialectic relation between feminism and the women's movement in general.

Radicalizing is also fighting against the hegemony of a liberal view of democracy, as if this were the only historical experience and possible definition of democracy. Radicality also has to do with not accepting the idea that the end justifies the means.



THE CAPACITY TO USE
DIALOGUE DEMOCRATICALLY
IN FACING DIFFERENCES AND
CONFLICTS IS A CHALLENGE
FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF
FEMINISM

REVIVING UTOPIA

What forms of political democracy are we forging, theorizing, practicing, defending, and altering? Representative, participative, direct democracy. How to democratize the system of political power? How has feminism actually faced the system of political power and produced criticism and confrontation? How does the feminist movement now see the question of power?

Attacking this system – in which the structures that reproduce inequalities overlap one another – calls for an immense capacity of organization, solidarity and generosity in our coordinated actions, as well as critical capacity to combat in ourselves the forms of action inherited from the tradition of this system and authoritarian political traditions. Amidst atomized fragmentation and totalitarian models, we need to invent processes of radical democracy capable of changing the social order in place, as well as the ways of doing politics.

The capacity to use dialogue democratically in facing differences and conflicts is a challenge for the organization of feminism. Denying conflict only debilitates the struggle and diminishes the capacity to organize collective resistance. Radical political democracy calls for a new political culture. It is necessary to rethink the feminist methods of constructing autonomy and non-hierarchical relations within the movement and in relation to other movements, always reaffirming the subjects' plurality. In this sense, the World Social Forum represents a great challenge to us.





In the face of the challenges before us, mobilization and critical awareness are strategic elements. That is why political organization, socialization of knowledge and educational processes addressed to training subjects are inseparable as a method for a praxis of transformation. There is a dialectic relation between collective processes of transforming political action and alternative experiences, “micro-revolts”, acquiring rights, and the struggle within the institutions, which offers new experiences in everyday life.

We must strengthen the organizational bases of a critical and active internationalism capable of offering real opposition to neo-liberalism, terrorism and war, mercantilization of life and the common goods of nature, and fundamentalism. An internationalism that stretches all the way from the struggle in the most distant village to the big urban centers.

Reviving Utopia – as a permanent fracture with the status quo, according to Françoise Collin. Utopia takes us from being aligned with what we have at the moment. Utopia as an opening to change rather than a representation of a model.

And as feminist Cristina Buarque puts it, “it is necessary to show clearly what we reject.” To express our conflict with determination. The moment for transforming political action is also the moment to invent new relations, to build subjectivity, and consequently to reinvent collectively as well as to reinvent ourselves.



THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND THE NEW “WAR OF POSITION”

■ PIERRE BEAUDET

The first World Social Forum was held in Porto Alegre in 2001. At first, few people had a clear notion of its importance and scope. We knew, we had a feeling that something was “in the air”. The “low intensity” uprising of the Zapatists, the progress of the social movements, especially in the Latin Europe and in South America, the huge anti-neoliberalism demonstrations all around the world, shook the lead screed of real capitalism”, and the “theories” about the end of history and the triumph of the “Western civilization” were scorned”.¹

¹ The Zapatists uprising in the Mexican Chiapas took place early in 1994, when the Mexican government entered into the free trade agreement with Canada and United States. The social movements came up from the mid 1990's on, especially in France (strikes of 1995), in Bolivia (the « water battles »), and elsewhere. Finally, powerful alliances were made to stop the conferences and summits organized by the Countries to discuss neoliberal propositions promoted by the World Trade Organization, the project to create a free trade Area for the Americas, and the G-8 Summits, like those taken place in Seattle, Gotenborg, Genova, Quebec, Johannesburg and many other cities around the world.




SIX YEARS LATER

Gathered in the capital of the state of Rio Grande do Sul in the South of Brazil, thanks to the initiative of Brazilian movements, and supported by the PT (Workers Party) town council, the movements were launched with an intricate intelligibility. They came to the conclusion that they were speaking “languages” at the same time similar and yet different. Although apparently disconnected among themselves, they were at the same time “networked”, at least by the delicate wires of the Internet. They started to thread, at least intellectually, a path of partial, ambiguous breaking-off, seemingly with no clear prospect. Most organizations, in fact, could not appeal to a “mega theory” or an “uppermost utopia”, as it had been the case of the social movements during most part of the 20th century.

Under the sun of Porto Alegre, then, a new “on the job” testing was made by the new grammars about new codes, new expressions. The social movement questioned itself and questioned the political players as well. Six years later, what is the situation? We know for sure that under the historical temporality viewpoint, six years are equivalent to six seconds! Therefore, they had to be too arrogant (some actually are, though we are not going to name them) to propose global explanatory outlines. It is therefore necessary to be prudent, modest, respectful, patient.²

THE SUBORDINATES COME UP

In the wake of the success of the WSF and of the very intense succession of social mobilization that never ceases to grow, the social movement has regained confidence. It experiences a significant progress based, without determinism, on deep, long-term changes that have been taking place in our societies, as so properly put by Immanuel Wallerstein.³ The pace of the immediate changes is evident and intense particularly in South America.⁴ The popular classes keep saying “enough” to the



UNDER THE SUN OF PORTO ALEGRE, THEN, A NEW “ON THE JOB” TESTING WAS MADE BY THE NEW GRAMMARS ABOUT NEW CODES, NEW EXPRESSIONS

² Recalling the short murdering phrase of Grouxo Marx, “we can predict everything, except the future”.

³ Refer especially to his comments on the FSM, <http://www.binghamtom.edu/fbc/130en.htm>.

⁴ The continent continued to be crossed by the mobilizations, and the pro-American right was beaten nearly everywhere in their elections, except in Mexico where, according to every indication, it was kept in power by a monumental fraud.



ruling class, in the streets of course, but through their vote as well. The subordinate groups, including the natives and the peasants, have had enough, and the upper class, especially the whites and the urbanes, can't do it anymore.⁵ Furthermore, South America has become a huge laboratory where a new dialogue is experienced between a democratic improvement and a type of "left-wing neokeysianism". Without being disillusioned or cynical, the huge masses are in motion to change the terms of power, though they have no naïve expectations of a miracle by a "savior" sent from up above. On the other hand, these masses press the political representatives to start far-reaching changes so as to carry on some social redistribution and the protection of common interests. Will it work? Opinions are diverse, though the optimists, the pessimists or the "optipessimists" agree that the structure of power is undermined.

THE RIGHT UNDER STRAIN

Elsewhere, the most arrogant, most aggressive rightist sectors are facing hard times. It is the case of India, Spain, Italy, and more recently the United States.⁶ It is sure that the contest of the parties and of alternation in the representative democratic settings has an impact on such changes. But would it be the sole reason? These rightist sectors are completely discredited by the acting masses and fluid movements, showing the extent of the *loutocracy* that has taken the power in a lot of so-called democratic countries. More and more important segments of the population are becoming aware of the ventures that are undermining democracy, in particular through military, repressive drifts that blame the "dangerous"

⁵ This is a paraphrase of Lenin's statement: a revolution starts when those who have the power are no longer able and those beneath them don't want it any more.

⁶ The "hard" right (the BJP) lost the elections in India in 2004. The Aznar government fell apart against all expectations in Spain by a huge anti-war mobilization carried out by the youths, who have made public the extension of the lies of the right against the Basque movements, which had been accused of several terrorist attacks. Later on, Berlusconi was defeated and finally, a short time ago (November 2006) the American voters turned down the Bush administration and his warmonger policy on the occasion of the Congress renewal.

classes, starting with the “weakest links in the chain” (immigrants, refugees, youths). Nearly everywhere, a loud NO is uttered in face of such reality. As a result, the imposing international “redesign” project secured by the neoconservatives, especially (but not exclusively) in the United States is being jammed by a complex, diversified array of movements, of organized or spontaneous expressions. It is equally due to a combination of political, social and cultural powers in a certain “storm bow” that crosses the world from Jakarta to Casablanca, from Kabul to Baghdad. It is an upheaval, only a few years after the outbreak of a reactionary movement aimed at building up again a “consensus” between the dominant classes, and at reducing the dominated groups to an attitude of impotence and indifference.

LEAVING THE TURBO CAPITALISM BREATHLESS

Meanwhile, the capitalism that claimed to be “the end of history” after its final “triumph” over socialism, collides with its own contradictions. Economic turmoil increase with the intensification of competitions within the “triad” (United States, European Union, Japan) on one side, and between them and certain so-called “emerging” countries”, particularly China. The US financial “bubble” boosted by an excessively overvalued dollar gets weaker and weaker, and the European Union and even Japan are unable to reverse the strong trend towards its decline. The continual cannibalization of the small by the big and of the big by the very big concentrates the wealth in a class polarization process whose development had been predicted by Marx.

So far, the scenario of the dominant forces to “come out of crisis” does nothing but force the dominated groups to accept the unacceptable, as it had been the case with Keynes.⁷ But this does not work. At the same time, financial crashes multiply and accelerate, tumbling down one after another

⁷ The talent of Keynes had been precisely to survive capitalism not by repression, but rather by the formulation of a social commitment in which the dominant classes granted a portion of the social wealth to the dominated classes, in exchange for a long-term stability and their acceptance of capitalism. Of course, this major commitment had been imposed to the dominant classes by the context of that time, in which the possibility of a revolutionary rupture with capitalism was within sight.



the “successful cases” of the World Bank bible (Argentina, Thailand, Indonesia, etc.). The pioneering work of Robert Brenner about the long cycles and the inexorable contradiction that saps the capitalist accumulation brings us back to the basic realities that tried to conceal several pressure-cooker ideologies called “post-modern”.⁸ The half-permanent crisis, the destructive competition of the economic tools and the lives that animate them, the dreadful wasting of resources, are not “accidents” or “collateral damages”, but rather basic features of capitalism that no internal “remedy” can repair. But in opposition to another bible (a leftist one, this time), it should be pointed out that this endless self-destructive process does not lead necessarily to the end of capitalism, quite the opposite.

AN(OTHER) END OF HISTORY?

By means of a series of processes, the relation of forces between the dominant and the dominated classes limits, forks, weakens and unbalances all the somewhat experienced forecasters, either leftists or rightists. But in view of this analytical void, some are led to conclude, too fast in my opinion, that we are “on the verge” of a great “reversal”. The grand evening, the D day, the break-off point is near, they say. To some, the decline of capitalism is marked in history. Under its neoliberal form, it is entering the “senile” age, unable to be restored, leaving devastation, wars and permanent confrontations behind. To others, nameless “multitudes” are getting ready to strike the final blow against the “biopolitical power”. One way or the other, a great many people foresee, contrary to the Washington neoliberalists, another “end of history”, a “happy ending” of the social movements, some predict, in such a way that these will be able to give up their separatist vague desires and recognize the right path and the right tactics that will “capture” in an amazing synthesis the future of social dissent.

⁸ See his latest work, *The Economics of Global Turbulence*, London: Verso Press.

THE OPPRESSIVE INHERITANCE OF CATASTROPHISM

It should be reminded that it is not the first time that a social movement intoxicated by success and by an apparently “terminal” crisis of capitalism predicts another end of history. The Second as well as the Third International have inserted into the core of the social movement the notion inherited from the Enlightenment, that “modernity” and “progress”, and even socialism in its proletarian version, would necessarily prevail in a near future!⁹. The crisis, the real crisis, the big crisis, the crisis with a capital C, would inevitably arrive. The social movement should take action either to “hasten” such inevitable crisis (by means of an insurrection), or wait for the “ripe fruit” of capitalism to fall off the tree naturally and let society advance through a “natural” process towards socialism (social democracy). Also, this leftist “catastrophism” has followed the critical thought along the entire twentieth century, under a variety of forms. With the appeal of its arguments and the strength displayed by a whole generation of movements, it became anchored in a of dominant-dominated “sociology” relation that has reproduced until today.

CAPITALISM IS BUILT THROUGH CAPITAL DESTRUCTION

Let’s get back briefly to this issue. The political, social and economic crises of actual capitalism are increasing indeed. They express complex, conflicting processes. As Marx had brilliantly shown (and was later forgotten), capitalism nourishes from crises and expands over such crises.¹⁰ The destruction of capital brings about its reproduction. At the same time, in spite of other close interpretations, capitalism develops by and through competition, by the continual movement of players and forces. Today, the “neoliberal model” that is evidently a political construct – and not just fate - dominates and redevelops capitalism in many ways. It moves, partially at least, “geographically” towards some areas of the “Southern globe” that become new zones of intensive accumulation. It imposes redesigns where the middle classes of the “triad” confront emerging capitalist powers, especially China, leaving behind other developing centers (India, Brazil, Russia). It “redesigns”, with the destruction, the popular classes and the so called “middle” classes

⁹ Prior dissidents like Rosa Luxembourgh and Walter Benjamin had already detected the risk of such analytical opacity.

¹⁰ “The crisis of the world market should be seen as the actual synthesis and the violent flattening of all contradictions of this economy”. *Matériaux pour l’économie, 1861-1865, Œuvres, Économie II*, Gallimard, Paris 1968.



in the North and in the South as well, excluding some (a significant part of the Ford wage-earning workers who proliferated during the Keynesian time in particular), and including other strata (10-15% of the population of the Southern area of the globe that can turn the capitalist offer credit-worthy, and at the same time sentencing to death hundreds of millions of “non-citizens”, mostly peasants. Nothing seems to indicate that this model is not “long-lasting” except for the quick exhaustion of resources, a fact that remains often misinterpreted by a certain ecologism that is somewhat catastrophist.

THE VARIOUS CRISIS “MANAGEMENTS”

In such evolution, the dominant classes have a lot of “strategies”, and although the building of their supremacy is cracked in some points, the foundations remain sound. To a large extent, the “endless war” is one of these strategies, because it enables the world polarization and at the same time put the dominated groups in a defensive position. With this war, the goal consists of redeploying the empire into more traditional, directly colonial forms. But the project faces huge drawbacks (the counter-example of Iraq). The neoconservatives persist and think of escalating this global war to a “higher” level, for instance by using nuclear weapons.¹¹ But they have to face the “neorealpolitiks” who value more the good old methods of the “indirect rule” via interstate alliances, and the co-option of part of the local elites in the domination management. In addition to being divided by different interpretations of the crisis and possible ways of getting out of the crisis, the dominant groups are equally torn by an increasing inter-imperialist competition. To keep their dominance over the European Union and the emerging countries, the United States have no other choice, rationally speaking, but to be supported by a certain remilitarization. Their competitors are less enthusiastic about that, not for being less “imperialists”, but because their domination weapons are rather economic and technological than military. Therefore, the dominant groups have a serious problem. But for all that we should not underestimate their capacity to rebuild a certain degree of consensus, above all because they are aware of the threats of a growing popular movement.¹²

¹¹ In the beginning of 2006, the Bush administration seriously contemplated the possibility of attacking Iran with “third generation” nuclear missiles. The top administration found the project “premature” and hazardous.

¹² During the great crisis between the two wars, the European middle-class that feared Hitler feared even more the social movement and the influence of the Soviet Union. The French ruling class, in particular, had created this formula, “Better Hitler than the Popular Front”.

THE SOCIAL LIBERALISM AS AN EXIT ROUTE

Objective and subjective limits are imposed though to these crisis management scenarios. In this context, the dominant groups know that they have to go on with the war of position against the dominated groups by other means. A “social liberal” management (the neoliberalism with a “human face”) becomes then a tempting tactic. In substance, it is about offering to a part of the dominated groups a marginal redistribution of the social wealth or even, perhaps, ensuring them that the portion they already possess will not be reduced, provided that they accept the new rules of the game, in particular the loss of the “gains”, the flexibilization of labor, and the shrinking of the social security net. We are certainly years behind the great Keynesian commitment that proposed, on the contrary, a substantial redistribution and a visible improvement of the living conditions of the popular classes. In a rather pernicious way, the liberal social management sets the poor against the “very poor”, the proletarianized middle classes against the excluded peasantry, offering to the latter, contrary to the former’s interests, a certain guarantee that they will not become excluded in turn. Even so, we should not underestimate the impact of these policies and their real capacity to re-establish the political area in favor of the dominant classes.



CHALLENGING THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The social movement is strong and weak. It is strong thanks to its many victories that make the dominant classes move back. It is strong for imposing here and there some new democratic improvements. And the social movement is weak. It is far from having reunified the popular classes around a project at the same time utopian and feasible. It still is often frustrated by the rightist tactics. It remains stuck in our catastrophist and avant-gardist past. To some, the solution is to take off for conquering the sky and force the split between our social movement and the dominant classes, including their appropriation of the political space. Therefore, the “leftist left”, which is based on the social movement, goes for a pre-plan, even if it brings about painful splits. To others, such turning point is more detrimental than advantageous. The power of the social movement rests on its exteriority regarding a certain political temporality, on its



option to take action rather than on choosing a transforming program that would certainly limit the fighting horizons. It takes its strength from its nearness of the array of claims and resistance, and from the fact that it does not try to “lessen” them or establish a hierarchy. It is continually re-defined by the inclusion of new fighting identities on wavelength with the disorders of the strength relations and of the cycles of capitalism. But in its endeavor to unite its heterogeneous processes, the social movement sometimes manages to unite them without flattening them with developments essentially temporary and ephemeral.



THE POLITICAL “BEING” OR “DOING”


In this context, the social movement “is” political but does not “make” politics. It must keep going, using its influence on the political space as it is, and not on another “planet”, nor waiting for the big night to turn up over the base of the grand crisis. Right now, this is a limited space. On one side we have the militarized neoliberalism, and on the other we have the social liberalism that expresses itself in many ways. But beyond such versions, this social liberalism that inherits a social democracy in flames appears as an allied by default. The moving masses accept, with few illusions (and sometimes even holding their noses) to support it, not as a capitulation, but rather as a way of undermining the right.¹³ In addition to such significant tactical differences between those who want to tackle directly the political issue, and those who want to approach it from “outside”, there is nevertheless a strong consensus that has been resumed in the field of the WSF ideas. Everyone (or nearly) has internalized the notion that the social movement can no longer be subject to immediate political projects. Most part of the movements accept the principle that it is unacceptable to condemn subordinate groups in name of the “just line” or of the “main contradiction”. In short, a structuring notion comes up after a few years, and since it continues to move things on, these movements are in general aware that they should not deviate from the course they have undertaken with the purpose of encouraging a conscious, propositional popular force.

¹³ This was particularly the choice of the social movement in India. After the defeat of the hard right (the BJP), the majority guideline (there are dissidents) is to support the center parties like the Congress, expecting that this makes more room for the changing forces.

THE “WAR OF POSITION” ACTUALLY

We can recall the context in which Gramsci used this image. The upward social movement in Europe during the twentieth century bumped into the wall of militarized capitalism, helped by a powerful anti-insurrectionary political affiliation. The “great surprise” of the Russian revolution, according to Gramsci, could not simply be reproduced. The extraordinary conjunction of forces comprising the collapse of a declining Empire, the quick decay of its army, and the outbreak of the peasantry, together with the emergence of a dynamic social movement in the capitalist urban centers could not be “reproduced”. The movement had to pass from an offensive and hardline-attitudeist “war of movement” to a “war of position”, a slow movement, the erosion of the opponent’s positions, a long series of hard, exhausting, difficult combats, not only at the level of forces but also of ideas. According to this viewpoint, the State, contrary to a well-anchored awareness, was not an “object” or a “place” to be taken, like a “winter palace” (Lenin had remarked it as well), but a multidimensional relation of forces to be transformed. But in the line of the October revolution and of the amazing enthusiasm it had raised, the moving masses were not tempted to pay attention to that view, and as a consequence they launched effectively into the attack to the sky that ended in a series of disasters like the one that turned up in Germany. At the other extremity of the globe, however, the cruel failures of the first Chinese revolution led the social movement to develop a new strategy. The city masses and the Communist Party completely annihilated by

frontal attacks against the power were wise enough to devise a retreat, to change defeat into victory, and to re-read the science of war as the art of survival, of bypass, of patience. Later on, during the 1960’s, the Gramscian proposition came out again, to be equally marginalized by a flood of new third-worldly insurrectionary. Today, a new approach of this theme is a must. The situation has certainly changed. Intuitively, the social movement knows that it should avoid defeat, and find a way of keeping its forces, its moral influence, and save its strength to build a new hegemony.



THE SOCIAL MOVEMENT
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GETTING INTO THE OPPONENT'S TRENCHES

Today, on the outer edges of the globe, in a country whose name nearly nobody knows, there is a lot at stake. In Nepal, in fact, a peasant movement led by a party that defines itself as Maoist has reached the threshold of power. But the threshold is what it got, because its leadership was wise enough to notice that the rupture was not attainable. Not only on a strictly military basis, but because the rise of subordinate groups (peasants, ethnic minorities, women) representing that coalition should make political arrangements to gain space vis-à-vis a portion of the popular urban classes. The remarkable developments of the popular movement which triumphed against the aims of the American imperialism and against the Indian hegemonism succeeded, by knocking over the dictatorship, to modify the relation of forces. The movement of the subordinates, made up basically of armed peasants, does not come “to the city” with “bare hands”. It surrounds the city that is not just an urban space, but also a culture, a social relation and a way of managing power. It seeks to untie?? The half-proletarianized popular classes from such space and offer them a new utopia. It is for sure a huge party that can burst in the opposite way and nothing is given beforehand.¹⁴

NO LONGER VICTIMS

In another arena, the subordinates are in revolt against their plague-stricken condition in a post-apartheid or neo-apartheid South Africa. The outrageous management of the rulers has given rise to a situation in which over five million people have been infected with the HIV-AIDS virus that decimates them while there are tools to stop the slaughter. But instead of contenting themselves with their assigned role of victims, these populations got organized and destabilized the rulers. All the more with their array of national and local movements, they outline a new popular movement designed to dig a hole in the building of power that weakens considerably the social liberal project that ANC has become.¹⁵

¹⁴ On the Nepalese rebellion, read the Indian analyst Siddharth Varadarajan (<http://svaradarajan.blogspot.com>).

¹⁵ See in particular the experience with the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC).

A MILLION OF “WATER BATTLES”

Here and there, inspired by the amazing mobilizations of Cochabamba, successful coalitions are organized and jam the neoliberal machine by means of big, sometimes very big grains of sand that prevent the privatization and the looting of common property. We have witnessed this in France, with the resistance of the youth and of the union members against the so-called project of the “CPE”, whose goal was the “flexibilization” (duality) of the labor market. This was also the case during the successful strike (2005) of 300,00 Quebec students against the mercantilization of education. All around, masses as never seen before emerge to reject their excluded condition, and seek alternatives that will allow them to build on a long-term basis a society for the living. These movements face very difficult conditions, even if only due to the hostility and violence of the dominant groups. But maybe their major challenge is not that. Many of these social movements do not intend to be instruments to serve projects aimed simply at reducing extreme poverty. They are aware that they are not ready, that they have no hegemonic capacity to enforce a new course of action. It is not the case of course, of staying on the fringes, of waiting for a miraculous sway, or staying away from a politics defined as “dirty politics”. Action is necessary, but with judgment and no illusions about it.

THE BOLIVIAN “LESSON”

By electing the MAS, the Bolivian peasants and natives have shown judgment, patience and determination. Regarding this “non-party” party, the MAS, they keep the necessary distance, being not there and being there at the same time. They have warned their new government leaders that they are extremely aware and mobilized. They have warned that every commitment will bring about its inevitable failure. They have said that they are ready to make proposals, to resist, to take part in moderate though significant social developments, provided that they are not used as cannon fodder. In view of that, Evo Morales knows that he is surfing on the crest of the wave, that’s all. Under a realistic viewpoint, they can’t take the project of social movement beyond a “reasonable arrangement” as recognized by Alvaro Garcia Linera, another thinking head of the MAS.¹⁶ Therefore, everyone is adopting a patient but alert attitude in the city plains and in the shanty towns of the altiplano.

¹⁶ According to Linera, “The transformation project that the MAS expects to implement can’t be classified either as communist, or as socialist, or even as local communities. An implosion of community economies takes place within the family structures that have built the basis for the social upheavals. It is necessary, in this context, a kind of Andean capitalism. It is about the construction of a powerful State, capable of arranging in a balanced way the three “economic-productive” platforms that coexist in Bolivia: the community, the family and the “modern industrial” ones. Bolivia will be capitalist for at least 50 or 100 years.” Landmarks, Winter of 2005. (Points de repere)





QUESTIONING THE POWER, QUESTIONING OURSELVES

These hard, long fights open a huge horizon for the social movement that strives to sail on troubled waters. For that reason, a survey is in progress to reshape the movements and the structures that make their actions feasible. It is no longer a secret or a taboo that the social change movements repeat the codes and structures that are expressed in the societies where they stem from. How could it be otherwise? To materialists like us, the human thought is inscribed by the environment but is not caused by it. Human beings make their own history, however in a world that was not created by them, as explained by Marx. Once such statement is made, the society changes. New ideas appear to support the dominant ideas, and so humanity moves on.

COMING APART

Today, an upward line of thought shows the need to fight the hierarchies that prevent the subordinates to express themselves. This is translated into various ways, like the articulation of claims and programs, but also in the way of being and acting. The horizontalism of a great many social movements and, at a larger scale, of the WSF, may sometimes look excessive, almost paralyzing, but in general it is the way of stopping the verticalism, the yes-manism, the I-know-everythingism, that have characterized several generations of movements. The social movements must, all the more unequivocally, become the center of gravity of our analyses as they are in reality already.



DOMINANT TENDENCIES OF OUR DAYS. IS OUR TIME RUNNING OUT?¹

■ **EDGARDO LANDER**

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This text proposes to be an anguished reading of the conditions that we face today on the planet Earth, both from the point of view of the survival of life and the possibilities of building democratic, egalitarian, culturally plural and diverse societies, societies that can live in peace and celebrate life rather than war, destruction and death.

Of the multiple tendencies and processes that could be mentioned to characterize the present period of time, only five global processes will be dealt with here, processes that feed one another as the main tendencies that conform the present and future of mankind and life: 1) the tendencies to destroy the conditions that make life possible on the planet Earth; 2) the growing mercantilization of all the dimensions of life, both social and natural; 3) permanent war and the increasing militarization of the planet; 4) the historical decline of liberal democracy; 5) the multiple, varied expressions of resistance, re-existence of peoples, communities, organizations and movements whose broad plurality of historical and cultural experiences all over the planet oppose these destructive processes and reclaim the life, democracy and cultural diversity of peoples.

¹ Partial version of the lecture delivered at the Plenary 4: "Panorama y retos de las ciencias sociales en América Latina y el Caribe" (*Overview and challenges for social sciences in Latin America and the Caribbean*) of the *XXII Asamblea General de CLACSO/IV Conferencia Latinoamericana y Caribeña de Ciencias Sociales*, "Herencias, crisis y alternativas al neoliberalismo" (*Legacies, crises and alternatives to neoliberalism*), Río de Janeiro, 25 August 2006.



1. THE TENDENCIES TOWARDS SHORT- AND MEDIUM-TERM DESTRUCTION OF THE CONDITIONS THAT MAKE LIFE POSSIBLE ON THE PLANET EARTH

The most severe of all the threats that face humanity and life on the planet earth today is precisely the destruction of the conditions that have made life possible. If a brake is not put on the accelerated destructive processes that threaten us today, if there is no life, everything else lacks all meaning. The principal threats to life are today clearly a consequence of human action in its demographic dimensions, modes of territorial occupation, technological models and styles, patterns of consumption, imagination and conceptions of what constitutes wealth and the good life.

For decades now, ever since the first signs of global alarm², the tendencies to destroy life and the non-viability of the current patterns of human relations with the rest of nature have become increasingly familiar. It suffices to look at the media. Endless international conferences and pacts are held. Environmental and ecological studies fill more and more space in the academic sphere. All countries now have public agencies such as Ministries of the Environment and environmental laws and regulations. And yet the processes of destruction of life have not only failed to slow down, but rather have grown even faster.

There are many ways of conceptualizing and evaluating and/or measuring the impact of human activity on the life systems of planet Earth. There are significant levels of uncertainty, and confrontations continue as to the dimensions of such problems. What does seem clear is that beyond the polemics concerning conceptualizations and measures, for a long time now we human beings have together and of course in an extremely unequal manner been using the load capacity of the planet Earth far beyond its regenerative capacity.

One of the most widely known efforts to evaluate these impacts is the approach of the so-called ecological footprint, that is to say, a measure that expresses synthetically the human impact on the planet, both in terms of consumption of resources and energetics and how the natural systems use their capacity to process waste. This is expressed in terms of the biologically productive surface required for human ends. It has been estimated that the impact of human activity surpassed the planet's overall bio-capacity

² Highlights among the first texts that contributed to start these global debates as of the 60s and 70s are: *Silent Springs* by Rachel Carson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, 1962) and the famous report commissioned by the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*, by Donella H. Meadows, Dennis L. Meadows, Jorgen Randers and William W. Behrens III, (Universe Books, New York, 1972).



in the 80s, and that it has not stopped growing since then. Between 1960 and the year 2001, the global ecological footprint grew 160%. According to these calculations, in the year 2001 the global step exceeded the planet's overall bio-capacity by about 21%.³ The living planet index calculates the state of biodiversity on the planet, measuring the density of the populations of vertebrates that live in terrestrial zones, fresh water and marine systems across the world. It is estimated that the index dropped approximately 40% between 1970 and 2000.⁴

It is not a matter, however, of some abstract responsibility of "humanity". These conditions of over-use of the planet's load capacity are seen in the deep and growing inequalities of access to the goods that make human life possible. Hundreds of millions of people, especially but not exclusively in the South, lack the goods to enable them to lead a life of dignity.

The inhabitants of the countries of the North have an ecological footprint four times bigger than that of the inhabitants of the countries of the South, while the population of the countries that do not belong to the OECD are together living almost on the limit of the biological productive capacity of the territories occupied by their respective countries. The set of OECD countries uses more than double the biological productive capacity of the territories they occupy.⁵ That means that their levels of consumption are more than twice the levels of sustainable consumption. In this way, they use a great deal of the biological productive capacity that would correspond to the inhabitants of the countries that do not belong to the OECD, that is, most of the populations of the South. According to these calculations, 100% of the excess of humanity's current ecological footprint (in relation to the Earth's biological productive capital) is the product of OECD countries. Thus, for example, while the African population uses only 77% of the ecological productive capacity of the territory it occupies, in Western Europe the ecological footprint exceeds the ecological productive capital available in its territory by 53%. This figure is 55% in the United States, in spite of its relatively low demographic density, the immense extension of its territory, and the extraordinary wealth of natural resources that it boasts.⁶

³ WWF, The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Global Footprint Network, *Living Planet Report 2004*, Gland, Switzerland, 2004, p.10. [<http://assets.panda.org/downloads/lpr2004.pdf>].

⁴ Op. cit., p. 2.

⁵ World Wide Fund International, The UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, Redefining Progress, The Centre for Sustainable Development and the Norwegian School of Management, *Living Planet Report 2000*. Table 2. Ecological Footprint Data: 1996, p. 24.

⁶ Op. cit., p. 27.

This implies that, now that the biological productive capacity of these regions of the world have deteriorated, demands are being made on increasing proportions of the biological productive capacity of the rest of the planet. Given the growing environmental concern of the inhabitants of the Northern countries, and the inclusion of the environment as a criterion of quality of life over the last few decades, and given also the profound inequality of the distribution of power between the North and the South, the growth of the ecological footprint of the Northern countries did not imply a significant deterioration of their eco-systems between 1970 and 1999.⁷ Most of the deterioration in these three decades occurred in the eco-systems of the South. This means that the sustained increase in the levels of consumption of the inhabitants of the North is directly responsible for this deterioration, on account of far higher living standards than what their own natural resources would allow them to sustain. This means that the patterns of consumption in the countries of the North (mostly located in the temperate zones) are mainly responsible for the loss of natural wealth that is taking place in the tropical and temperate zones of the South.⁸

Since the moment that human activity surpassed planet Earth's biological productive capacity, the relations between populations with regard to the use that they make of the planet's biological productive capacity begin to operate in a zero-sum game. In these conditions, while the rich of the planet (regardless of where they live, in the North or the South) go on increasing their levels of consumption (and consequently their ecological footprint), they will be using greater proportions of the biological productive capacity that would correspond to the excluded inhabitants. Based on these zero-sum game conditions, while the inhabitants of the North are richer, the majorities to the South are bound to have less access to the goods of life. Beyond possible technological innovations to transform radically and quickly the efficient use of resources and energetics and drastically reduce the production of waste – technologies that are not in sight – this zero-sum game also leads to consumption of the resources and load capacity projected for future generations (human and non-human). This, of course, is unsustainable.

Perhaps the issue that seizes most attention – and recognition of implied urgency – in the debates on the changes of life-sustaining systems is climate change. Here one has to mention some recent research that illustrates

⁷ Op. cit. p. 1.

⁸ Op. cit. p. 1. The consumption of resources and load capacity of the planet are of course deeply unequal, both in the North and the South. The figures that correspond to these territorial definitions, being averages, present profound inequalities in each territory, and therefore conceal significant dimensions of the inequality that exists in access to natural resources.



dramatically the gravity of the changes underway and stresses the urgency for deep transformations in the patterns and imagination of human life. What seems beyond any doubt is that human action is responsible for most of the Earth's warming during the last half-century, as well as the forecast continuation of these tendencies. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: "There is new and stronger evidence that most of the earth's warming observed over the last 50 years can be attributed to human activities."⁹ Nowadays, only lobbyists and scientists in the pay of some oil transnationals such as Exxon-Mobil, the think-tanks of the United States Right (fundamentalist defenders of a regulation-free market), and the Bush government deny human responsibility for climate change.¹⁰

Since the beginning of the industrial revolution, the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has increased something like 35%. The average global temperature has risen 0.6 degrees Centigrade. According to calculations of the United Nations World Meteorological Organization, from 1990 to 2004, the ten hottest years were recorded since reliable registers started in 1861.¹¹ And the temperatures keep rising. According to NASA, the year 2005 was the hottest on the surface of the earth since such reliable records were made.¹² The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change considers it probable that the continued concentration of greenhouse-effect gases leads to an increase in the average temperature of the surface of the planet of "1,4–5,8 °C in the period from 1990 to 2100. This quantity is 2 to 10 times more than the central figure for warming observed during the 20th century, and it very likely that the projected speed of the warming has no precedents during at least the last 10,000 years."¹³ The tendency is not only for average temperatures to be higher but also for heat waves such as those that have killed thousands in Europe in the last few years to become more and more frequent.¹⁴

⁹ WMO, UNEP, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Climate Change 2001: Working Group I: The Scientific Basis* [http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/wg1/007.htm]

¹⁰ For a critical look at these postures, see: ClimateScienceWatch, Promoting integrity in the use of climate science in government. Global Warming Denial Machine, [<http://www.climate-science-watch.org/index.php/csw/C25/>]

¹¹ Kevin Gray, "2004 Among the Hottest Years on Record" *Associated Press*, Buenos Aires, 16 December 2004.

¹² Timothy Gardner, "Undersea gas could speed global warming - study", *Reuters*, 20 July 2006. [http://today.reuters.com/news/newsarticle.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyid=2006-07-20T192854Z_01_N19270382_RTRUKOC_0_US-ENVIRONMENT-METHANE-SEAS.xml&src=rss]

¹³ United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and World Meteorological Organization (WMO), Grupo Intergubernamental de Expertos sobre el Cambio Climático (IPCC), *Cambio Climático 2001: Informe de síntesis (Summary for policy-makers)*, Wembley, United Kingdom, September 2001. [http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/vol4/spanish/009.htm]

¹⁴ Kovats, R Sari and others, "Climate change and human health in Europe", *British Medical Journal*, no. 318, pp.1682-1685, 19 June 1999.

The first systematic study of the changes that occur in the whole Arctic region characterizes global climate tendencies and changes even more accelerated and severe than those witnessed up to now.¹⁵ According to the conclusions of this massive study, the temperature in the Arctic region has risen at a rate almost twice that of the rest of the planet. It is projected that the average temperature of the region will go up between 4 and 7 degrees Centigrade during the next 100 years.¹⁶ In Alaska and the west of Canada, the average temperature has increased between 3 and 4 degrees in the last 50 years.¹⁷ The surfaces covered with snow, glaciers and sea ice have undergone significant reduction over the last few decades as a result these increases in temperature. Over the last 30 years, the area covered by sea ice has diminished about 8%. The decrease in summer has been much more - between 10 and 15%, in some areas reaching as high as 40% between 1960 and 1990.¹⁸ Depending on the presuppositions – especially as regards the levels of future emissions of greenhouse-effect gases – it is forecast that between now and the end of the century, between 50% and 100% of the Arctic polar cap will disappear.¹⁹

The snow cover has diminished 10% in the Arctic region over the last 30 years. The projection is for an additional reduction of between 10 and 20% for the year 2070.²⁰ The surface of glaciers that melt in the summer has increased 16% in Greenland since 1979.²¹ Parallel to this is the thawing of vast tracts of tundra. All this increases the discharges of fresh water, which raise the level of the Arctic and lowers its salinity. It is estimated that the Arctic glaciers, the most important being those that cover Greenland, contain enough water to raise the level of all the oceans about 8 meters,²² to which would have to be added the increased level of the seas on account of the increased volume of water as a result of the rise in temperature.

¹⁵ Susan Joy Hassol, *Impacts of a Warming Arctic*, Arctic Climate Impact Assessment, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004. This is the first comprehensive study of global evaluation of the impact of climate change on the Arctic and its planetary consequences. Hundreds of scientists from all the countries bordering on the Arctic (Canada, Finland, Russia, United States, Norway, United Kingdom, Sweden, Island) worked for four years together with the aboriginal communities of the region.

¹⁶ Op. cit., p. 9.

¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 22.

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 25.

¹⁹ Op. cit., p. 30.

²⁰ Op. cit., p. 12.

²¹ Op. cit., p. 13.

²² Op. cit., p. 40.



Aside from the traumatic regional consequences that these accelerated changes are bringing to the life of the human beings and species of animals and plants that occupy these territories, the expectation is of great impacts of these changes on the global climate. According to the authors of this study, most of the models of climate change are based on the supposition of a progressive increase in temperature. But there exists the possibility that the gradual climate change may – after a certain unknown and therefore unpredictable point of inflection - trigger off a dynamic of climate change in a non-linear pattern.²³

This possibility of abrupt and unpredicted changes is all the greater both because of the evidence that previous climate changes in the region occurred within spaces of very few years²⁴, and because of the potential feedback effects that changes in the Arctic region can produce on global climate systems. Three potent mechanisms that can operate in this sense are described in this report. In the first place, as a result of the thawing of the polar caps, glaciers and snow-covered surfaces, there is a reduction of the terrestrial surface capable of reflecting and returning to the atmosphere an important amount of solar light. Both the seas and the earth not covered with snow or ice absorb more heat, thereby contributing to accelerating the increase in temperature.²⁵ Secondly, changes may come about in sea currents that play a vital part in regulating global climatic systems. Differences in temperature and salinity between the tropical and temperate zones produce the currents that regulate the temperatures of the North Atlantic and carry rain and moderate the winters of Western Europe. This process depends on a delicate balance and could be interrupted if Arctic temperatures rise or salinity decreases.²⁶ Thirdly, as increased temperatures cause millions of square kilometers of the tundra surface to thaw, much of the organic material trapped in the permafrost would be released. The consequent emissions of methane and carbon dioxide could accelerate the higher temperatures caused by greenhouse-effect gases.²⁷

²³ Op. cit., p. 32.

²⁴ Susan Joy Hassol, op. cit., p. 33¹⁷ Op. cit., p. 22.

²⁵ Op. cit. p. 36. See too: "Climate Variability and Change", *Our Changing Planet The U.S. Climate Change Science Program for Fiscal Year 2006*, p. 42. [<http://www.usgcrp.gov/usgcrp/Library/ocp2006/ocp2006-hi-clivar.pdf>]

²⁷ Op. cit., p. 36

²⁰ Op. cit., p. 12.

²⁷ Op. cit., p. 38; Janet Wilson, "Global Warming Threat Is Seen in Siberian Thaw", *Los Angeles Times*, Los Angeles, 16 June 2006. Likewise, extraordinary volumes of methane, whose greenhouse effect is much greater than that of carbon dioxide, could be released into the atmosphere as a result of the impact of warming on the immense deposits of methane hydrates existing in the ocean beds. See: Timothy Gardner, "Undersea gas could speed global warming - study", Reuters, 20 July 2006. [http://today.reuters.com/news/newsarticle.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyid=2006-07-20T192854Z_01_N19270382_RTRU-KOC_0_US-ENVIRONMENT-METHANE-SEAS.xml&src=rss]

There are other processes with potential feedback effects that can accelerate the global climate change and lead to sudden breaks in linear changes. The role of forests in regulating climate and hydric cycles and absorbing greenhouse gases has been fully documented. Reducing the forest-covered surface, especially tropical forests, advances in sustained fashion both as a result of voluntary human action – such as the expansion of the agricultural frontier of transgenic soya in the Brazilian Amazon²⁸ – and of forest fires that are all the more frequent due to droughts and temperature increases. So, at the same time that the global emission of greenhouse-effect gases grows, the capacity of the forests to partially deter its effect becomes weaker.

There is growing consensus concerning the probability of abrupt, non-linear changes happening. According to the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change:

“Simulations project that the growing atmospheric concentration of greenhouse-effect gases will lead to changes in the frequency, intensity and duration of extreme phenomena ... Many of these projected changes could provoke an increase in the risk of floods and droughts in many regions, and predominantly adverse impacts on ecological systems, socio-economic sectors and human health.”

*“Some of the projected sudden, non-linear changes in the physical systems and natural and waste sources of greenhouse-effect gases could be irreversible, but some of the underlying processes are not fully known.”*²⁹

Various recent studies have drawn the conclusion that the increase in the intensity of hurricanes over the last few years is the result of higher temperatures in the Atlantic caused by human action.³⁰ Spokesmen for the Pentagon have warned that abrupt climate changes represent a serious threat to world security and could lead to wars, nuclear conflicts, droughts, famine and other disasters.³¹

²⁸ Daniel Howden, “Huge soya farms financed by Cargill, the largest privately owned company in the world, are the rainforest’s new worst enemy”, *The Independent*, London, 17 July 2006.

²⁹ UNEP. WMD, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *Cambio Climático 2001: Informe de síntesis. Resumen para responsables de políticas. (Summary for policy-makers)* (Question four). [http://www.grida.no/climate/ipcc_tar/vol4/spanish/010.htm]

³⁰ Michael Mann and Kerry Emanuel “Atlantic hurricane trends linked to climate change,” *EOS, Transactions, American Geophysical Union*, 13 June 2006; Kevin Trenberth and Dennis Shea, “Atlantic hurricanes and natural variability in 2005,” *Geophysical Research Letters*, 27 June 2006; John Schwartz, “2 Studies Link Global Warming to Greater Power of Hurricanes”, *The New York Times*, 31 May 2005.

³¹ United Nations Environment Programme, *Geo-Yearbook 2004-2005. An Overview of our Changing Environment*, Nairobi, 2005, p. 3.

The impacts of climate change will be felt disproportionately in the countries of the South and the less favored segments of the population across the world, which would contribute to increase even more the inequalities as regards health and access to proper food, clean water and other goods. The population of the Southern countries is exposed to relatively higher risks of suffering the adverse effects caused by climate change. As shown by the hurricanes that hit central America and the Caribbean in the last few years, including Katrina that destroyed New Orleans in 2005, the poorer and more excluded the population in question, the less political power it has, with less possibility of taking preventive measures and less capacity to recover following extreme climate events. In addition, “In most tropical and subtropical zones, the projection is for harvests to yield less with most of the forecast increases in temperature”.³²

Many more destructive processes today threaten the survival of life on the planet. An accelerated reduction in genetic diversity is taking place, processes that in many areas could lead to ecological systems collapsing. Sea life has been over-exploited, with situations where large oceanic tracts now practically without any organic life. The volumes of many of the main varieties of edible fish have diminished severely. The sources of fresh water are being exploited beyond their capacity to replenish, and are also being contaminated. There is a tendency for agricultural land to become less available as a result of over-exploitation and contamination by agrochemicals.

Based on this somber but widely known diagnosis, it may be affirmed that today no issue is more urgent to humanity. Beyond generic declarations, this is a problem that deserves priority status on all national and international agendas and should be an express part of all public debates and policies, as well as of the production of knowledge in the academic field. This, of course, is not what happens. The public policies and productive models of almost every country in the world are still moving with irresponsible sloth as if ignoring such matters is enough to make them disappear. Global information has been available for over 30 years on the predictable consequences of climate change. The limits of the planet have been recognized, some measures might be expected to be taken and some indications made that international agreements and conferences on climate have had some impact. The truth is that it is difficult to know whether these efforts have even diminished the rhythm at which the destructive factors are increasing.

. Idem.

Decisions that are presently being taken accentuate rather than deter these tendencies. In this sense, the Chinese model of development is illustrative. Some years ago, when the Chinese government pushed forward its present model of capitalist (neoliberal) development, it found itself in a situation where it was still possible to define a model of alternative transportation to the individual automobile. However, taking the United States model of consumption as the pattern to imitate, the option was made in favor of the automobile culture. With rates of sustained economic growth close to 10% during the last two decades, the Chinese internal market for automobiles went from 220,000 in 1999 to 2 million in 2003, with a 69% increase in sales in 2003. If these trends continue, the country will have 30 million automobiles in 2010 and more cars than the United States in 2030. It is estimated that China accounted for 40% of the increase in the global demand for oil between 2000 and 2004. In order to reach the average of two cars per family, as in the United States, 600 million automobiles would be needed, more than the total that exists today throughout the planet.³³

The continuity of life on the planet will only be possible if a radical redistribution of access to the planet's resources takes place, which would require a deep, fundamental reduction of the patterns of consumption of energy and resources on the part of the rich minorities of the Earth. This involves an equally radical cultural change in the imagination and modes of producing knowledge concerning wealth and "the good life". Otherwise, we shall advance in seemingly inexorable fashion towards deeper and deeper environmental crises, with profoundly unequal consequences. While the segments of the population that have no access to resources or are victims of the major natural disasters will try to move to places where they have better chances of survival, the reaction of the privileged will be to increase racism, anti-migrant walls, and wars.

One of the scenarios (or nightmares) to which the lack of immediate action could lead is that in which, once the real threats to survival are recognized, the more powerful, seeing the demographic growth and "irresponsible" consumption of the population, manage to establish a global State of environmental authoritarianism, a Big Brother to save life on the planet. This authoritarian-technological State would regulate, supervise and control the destructive threats represented by human action in such a way that life in such conditions would cease to be life.

³³ *Newsday* "Editorial: 1.3 Billion Reasons to Worry about Oil", Sunday 15 August 2004.

2. TENDENCIES TOWARDS RADICAL MERCANTILIZATION OF ALL SPHERES OF LIFE.

Part of the logic of the capital regime is the inexorable and expansive tendency to incorporate more and more territories, markets, natural resources, work capacity and knowledge to its accumulation requirements. Since the birth of capitalism there has been conflict over the processes of appropriation and privatization of what in different contexts have been considered part of common goods. Tendencies to mercantilize everything by no means constitute a historical novelty. Nevertheless, after five centuries of global capitalist expansion, significant proportions of human activity and the conditions that make life possible on the planet Earth find themselves fully subjected to the logic of capital. Tendencies towards mercantilization have confronted all sorts of limits and obstacles. Common goods are valued and defended by communities, peoples and movements all over the world.

What today constitutes an extraordinary historical novelty that defines a new moment in the expansion of capital are the ways in which an attempt is being made to overcome these limits and the multiple, simultaneous confrontations that they cause globally. It is possible to distinguish roughly four types of historical obstacles to the appropriation/mercantilization of ways of life, knowledge and resources: geopolitical; democratic; technological; and ideological/cultural/communicational. Faced with these obstacles, the logic of mercantilization that accompanies the expansion of capital tries to knock down barriers against its advance and so generates new spheres of confrontation with those that resist.

Geopolitical limits. This refers to territories, resources and populations that have in some way been at the margin of possible appropriation for



SINCE THE BIRTH OF CAPITALISM THERE HAS BEEN CONFLICT OVER THE PROCESSES OF APPROPRIATION AND PRIVATIZATION OF WHAT IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED PART OF *COMMON GOODS*

geopolitical reasons. Historically, these limits have mainly been represented by territories not colonized or submitted to imperial domination. In the 20th century, the geopolitical limit was the existence of the socialist bloc. With the collapse of Soviet socialism and China's capitalist turnabout, these limits are growing smaller and smaller. Incorporating the majority of the countries in the planet to the WTO is a clear measure of how far this process has advanced.

Democratic limits. These obstacles are the result of the multiple ways in which popular struggles in different parts of the world have managed to conquer rights that placed limits on submitting all the processes of life to the logic of capital. This refers fundamentally to the existence of a public sphere and economic and social rights (education, health, social security, water, etc.) that thanks to the conquests of the democratic struggles have operated with political criteria and were not directly part of the processes of valorization of capital.

Today one of the main areas of the global political struggle involves the defense of the public sphere and the area of rights against the tendencies towards the privatization and mercantilization of these areas promoted by the neoliberal agenda. The changes made in this area over the last few decades have been very radical. There has been a radical limiting of what is public, and rights have been transformed into merchandise. From access to goods and services as a collectively and politically demanded right, one passes to the private contractual relation between a company and a client who has access to the good or service to the extent that he has the capacity to pay. This agenda has been imposed through the political device of foreign debt, policies of structural adjustments and privatizations.

The transformation of the role of the State and the consolidation of these reforms as obligatory norms have been established through the so-called commercial treaties via the World Trade Organization and the TLCs, which have become a new global constitutional order.

Technological and/or cost limits. This refers to the limits met by the process of mercantilization when as a result of the available technology it is not possible to convert a certain good into merchandise, or when this is only possible at too high a cost to be profitable. These limits are characterized by natural resources that are not very accessible poco inaccesibles or have high costs of production or transportation to markets, such as deposits of non-conventional hydrocarbons - bituminous sands, heavy oils, deep-sea deposits, deposits of minerals in not very accessible regions, and so on. Current and progressive technological overcoming of these limits can be seen in deep-sea oil prospection, in the Amazon forest and in the bituminous sands of Canada.

Water is becoming a merchandise not only on account of its growing scarcity but also because of the technological capacity created to make it possible.

Efforts to overcome these limits relate even more fundamentally to the scientific-technological processes of manipulating/appropriating life and matter (biotechnology, nanotechnology and their combinations with information technology and satellite observation), through which colossal steps have been taken to control the generative capacities of life and change them into merchandise. This is accompanied by biopiracy and other means of appropriating the knowledge of indigenous and peasant peoples across the planet, also in order to change them into merchandise.

Agricultural activity today represents the main frontier of the expansion of mercantile logic all over the world. According to the United Nations FAO, approximate 60% of the planet's agricultural area is farmed by traditional or subsistence peasants, the majority being women (FAO, 1998). This agriculture is assumed as a way of life, not fundamentally as an economic activity designed to produce merchandise. The genetic diversity of the plants present in farms, fields and woods of the South has traditionally been available to all³⁴, being conceived as a common good.

While agricultural activity is undertaken by hundreds of millions of peasants and independent farmers with an extraordinary genetic diversity, in a great variety of ecological contexts, with many farming modalities and techniques, using equally varied experiences and knowledge, and with its production mainly for self-consumption and local and/or regional markets, severe limitations allow this activity to be subordinated as a sphere for large corporations to exploit. Changing peasant and independent agriculture into an activity submitted to the control and valorization of capital would require profound changes both to the gamut of genetic varieties used and to the role of peasant knowledge. Industrialized agriculture calls for genetic uniformity and standardization of productive patterns. It demands reproducing the successful (for capital) historical experience of the so-called *scientific administration of labor*³⁵, and carrying

out a systematic process of appropriation/devalorization of the knowledge of peasants and other independent farmers, and their substitution by a scientific-technological knowledge controlled by agro-industry corporations.

In order to achieve this ambitious objective, agro-industry counts on two parallel instruments: the first of a scientific-technological nature and the second of a juridical nature. The new challenges for biotechnology to make genetic manipulation possible in order to create new standardized varieties of seeds with some specific characteristics considered to be of value, seek to replace the immense genetic diversity (not controllable or marketable) by just a few such characteristics. The juridical instruments for the defense of intellectual property allow these new varieties to be patented and incorporated to the technological packages designed to increase control by agro-industrial companies, with the consequent loss of the farmers' autonomy. In this way, the knowledge of peasants and "direct" farmers is being replaced, a knowledge that accounts for the particularities of the various ecological and cultural contexts (type of soil, rain pattern, productive modalities, etc.) and the genetic diversity of their cultivation, by just a few or a single genetic variety and by the standardized norms established by the companies from which the seeds are bought. This represents a death threat for peasant life on the planet.

³⁴ FAO, Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations Sustainable Development Department (SD) 1998 "Special: Biodiversity for Food and Agriculture", *SD Dimensions*, February. [<http://www.fao.org/WAICENT/FAOINFO/SUSTDEV/EPdirect/EPpre0040.htm>]

³⁵ Taylor, Frederick W. 1971 *Principios de la administración científica del trabajo*. (Principles of scientific administration of labor) (México: Herrera y Hermanos, Sucs., S.A.).

Cultural/ideological and communicational limits. These limits refer to a gamut of questions that appear in very different spheres. One, closely linked to technological changes and of extraordinary significance in the last few decades, refers to the sphere of the means of social communication and its growing planetary expansion. The globalization of communications through satellite television has become a powerful instrument for diffusing the expectation of universal access to the pattern of consumption represented by the image of the United States spread by its cinema and television.

A relatively recent and particularly significant sphere of the processes of expansion of mercantile logic into spheres in which up to a few decades ago it was not considered adequate, is the accelerated process of submitting increasingly more direct scientific and technological research to the demands of valorization by capital. A deep cultural change is taking place here that is lending new meaning to previous conceptions of science and the university. This is happening with special vigor in the disciplines associated with biotechnology and biomedicine.³⁶ These cultural shifts are fast leaving behind the ethos of science and the university as it appeared in the idealized model described by Robert Merton. According to this classic formulation of the ethos of science as an institution of modern liberal society, scientific activity is characterized by complying with the following normative prescriptions: universalism (this supposes that scientific knowledge transcends particular cultures); communalism (scientific knowledge is



THE GLOBALIZATION OF COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH SATELLITE TELEVISION HAS BECOME A POWERFUL INSTRUMENT FOR DIFFUSING THE EXPECTATION OF UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO THE PATTERN OF CONSUMPTION

³⁶ See: Edgardo Lander, "La ciencia neoliberal", in Ana Esther Ceceña, *Los desafíos de las emancipaciones en un contexto militarizado*, (*The challenges of emancipations in a militarized context*). CLACSO, Buenos Aires, 2006.



the fruit of a joint effort, it cannot be appropriated but rather considered as public knowledge); and a disinterested knowledge (the researcher's quest for scientific knowledge should preclude any personal benefit, he should be guided by the search for the truth and the common good).³⁷ The immediate demands of valorization of capital – principally through control of financing – more and more define research agendas, select specializations for new students, the system of remunerating and awarding the teaching staff, the means of divulging and using the results of

research, and all academic culture in general. If it is true that the universities of the United States is where this submission of science, technology and the university to the direct demands of the valorization of capital is more advanced, it is also true that today the universities of the rest of the world are heading in the same direction.

Each of these tendencies towards mercantilization, as will be seen further ahead, generates spheres of social struggle, resistance and confrontation which can properly be characterized as combats of a war of global civilization.

³⁷ Krinsky, Sheldon 2003 *Science and the Private Interest. Has The Lure Of Profits Corrupted Biomedical Research?*, Rowman & Littlefield Publisher, Inc., Lanham, 2003:, pp., 76-77.

3. THE DECLINE OF LIBERAL DEMOCRACY

Liberal democracy as a construction of a society of universal citizenship, recognizing equality of political rights with the conquest of enhanced economic and social rights that have made it possible to reduce the tendencies of the profound social differences that characterize capitalist society, has historically been a very exceptional experience concentrated in just a few key countries of the world system. This has not been the experience of most of the world of the South, the ex-colonial world. Today, at a moment when the centers of power celebrate the universalization of this model of democracy, this finds itself globally in the full process of depletion or reversion, including in the few countries where more significant advances have been made to build historical experiences of liberal democracies: Western Europe and the United States. The global order of mercantilization – increasing priority of the rights of capital over the rights of people – and the militarization that characterize neoliberal globalization is undermining the feasibility of this political regime.

In the European Union, whose experience of the welfare State in the decades following the 2nd World War represented the highest degree of democratization of society under the liberal regime, this State model finds itself in full decline. The political debate within the European Union today is not about basic social options (alternative models of the desired society), or about new democratic conquests. Debates are about the speed with which the social and political conquests of the golden era of the welfare State will erode in order to adapt better - and compete – in the conditions created by neoliberal globalization. The Constitution of the European Union seeks to consolidate, constitutionalize and consequently make the neoliberal conquests of the last few decades irreversible. This explains why this text was rejected in the referenda held in France and the Netherlands.

To study the health conditions of liberal democracy, there is no better case than the country that today assigns to itself the divine mission of carrying democracy and freedom to all the countries of the world, if necessary by force: the United States. A country at present going through a deep constitutional crisis, the current situation of the United States political system is a far cry from Lincoln's Utopia of government of the people, for the people, by the people. As never before, the power of the large financiers of political campaigns and the corporative control of the means of communication determine who can be candidate and who can end up elected. The electoral frauds in Florida in 2000 and in Ohio in 2004 which made both the first election and the re-election of George Bush possible, have been widely and convincingly documented.³⁸

³⁸ On the elections of 2000, see: David Margolick, Evangelina Peretz and Michael Shnayerson, "The Path to Florida", *Vanity Fair*, October 2004; and Greg Palast, *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy*, Plume, New York, 2003; on the elections of 2004, see: U.S. House of Representatives, *Status Report of the*

The simultaneous control of the Executive, the Supreme Court and the two branches of Congress by a Republican Party that is increasingly more controlled by corporate interests, the radical Right and Christian fundamentalism have produced deep changes in the political system over the last few years. The so-called “war against terrorism” and the systematic promotion of fear in the population have become effective instruments to justify step by step a significant restriction of the political rights that are supposedly guaranteed in the Bill of Rights³⁹ that is part of the Constitution, as well as a severe weakening of the separation of powers, concentrating more and more decisions in the Executive. Wars are started and justified against “sovereign” States on the basis of systemically distorted manipulation of intelligence information. The government expands the scope of the fields in which it operates in secret to impede public evaluation of its administration. The approval of new laws that seriously restrict the rights of citizens, as in the case of Patriotic Acts I and II, and the reinterpretation of legal norms by the courts to authorize policies that had hitherto been considered clearly unconstitutional, reveal deep shifts in the political system. All this accompanied by communications media that are more and more under the control of large corporations and less and less willing to question and/or denounce the government’s actions. This occurs in part as a result of threats to and persecutions of those who spread information that is damaging to the government,⁴⁰ but it is mainly a reflection of the interests of the head corporations of the large communications conglomerates. Could it be expected of the NBC – the television network owned by General Electric, one of the major military contractors in the United States – to present a critical view of the invasion of Iraq?

One of the most alarming expressions of the increasing concentration of power in an increasingly imperial presidency is the recurrent use of the so-called signing statements, by means of which Bush, when he disagrees with some aspects of a law approved by Congress, instead of vetoing it, signs it (thereby converting it into a mandatory law for all, including the President) and reserves the right to break that law whenever he feels that it contradicts

House Judiciary Committee Democratic Staff, *Preserving Democracy: What Went Wrong in Ohio*, 5 January 2005. [http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/ohiostatusrept1505.pdf]; Bob Fittrakis, Harvey Wasserman and Steve Rosenfeld, *Did George W. Bush Steal America’s 2004 Election? Ohio’s Essential Documents*, The Free Press, The Columbus Institute for Contemporary Journalism; Robert F. Kennedy Jr., “Was the 2004 Election Stolen?”, *Rolling Stone*. 1 June 2006.

³⁹ Ann Fagan Ginger, *Editora, Challenging U.S. Human Rights Violations Since 9/11* (Report by Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute), Prometheus Books, 2005.

⁴⁰ The Associated Press, “Fearing Legal Battle, Ohio Newspaper Holds Stories”, 9 July 2005.

his interpretation of the Constitution. In this way he bestows upon himself the power to formulate and interpret both laws and the Constitution itself, attributions that the Constitution grants to Congress and the courts.⁴¹ This has been considered a serious threat to the constitutional system of separate powers.⁴² The American Bar Association set up a working group comprised of renowned constitutionalists to assess the implications of such practices. In its report, the working group unanimously concludes that the signing statements constitute a violation of the state of law and the separation of powers established in the Constitution.⁴³

One of the many conclusions reached by the final report of a thorough study on the current crisis of constitutional order in the United States prepared under the responsibility of Representative John Conyers, Jr. (Democrat for Michigan)⁴⁴, is that the Bush government violated the Constitution and laws on the following matters: 1) deciding on the war against Iraq prior to obtaining authorization from Congress; 2) manipulating intelligence information on arms possessed by the Iraq government to justify so-called “preventive war”; 3) persecuting and punishing critics of the war and government policies, many of them being civil servants; 4) lying and deceiving in respect to the development of the war, its cost and its impact; 5) illegally spying on innocent citizens without authorization from the courts; 6) concealing illegal acts for which the government was responsible; 7) refusing to provide Congress and the population with information; and 8) deteriorating civil liberties generally. Among the more controversial aspects of the Patriotic Act, this report mentions authorization given to the FBI to supervise without court order and without prior notice telephone calls and Internet communications and access by intelligence agencies to medical records, registers of purchases in bookshops and consultations in libraries, as well as records of past consumption.⁴⁵

In flagrant violation of the Constitution, the government defends its right to detain United States citizens without any formal charge.⁴⁶ Calling war prisoners “illegal combatants”⁴⁷, the government of the United States

⁴¹ Charlie Savage, “Bush Challenges Hundreds of Laws”, *The Boston Globe*, 30 April 2006.

⁴² Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy, Ranking Member, Judiciary Committee, Hearing on Presidential Signing Statements, June 27 2006. [http://judiciary.senate.gov/member_statement.cfm?id=1969&wit_id=2629]

⁴³ American Bar Association, *Task Force on Presidential Signing Statements and the Separation of Powers Doctrine*, 2006. [<http://www.abanet.org/op/signingstatements/>]

⁴⁴ *The Constitution in Crisis, Final Investigative Report Prepared at the Direction of Rep. John Conyers, Jr.*, August 2006. [http://www.house.gov/judiciary_democrats/iraqrept2.html].

⁴⁵ Op. cit., p. 132. Ver: Barton Gellman, “The FBI’s Secret Scrutiny”, *The Washington Post*, 6 November 2005.

⁴⁶ Tom Jackman, “US a Battlefield, Solicitor General Tells Judges” *The Washington Post*, 20 July 2005.

⁴⁷ Patrice de Beer, “Illegal Combatants, a False Debate”, *Le Monde*, Paris, 29 June 2004.



declares that the norms of the Geneva Convention do not apply to them. The generalized practice of torture has been widely documented, both in Guantánamo⁴⁸ and Abu Ghraib⁴⁹. The Bush government claims that it has the right to use torture as part of its “war against terrorism”⁵⁰. Nothing is known of what goes on in the broad network of secret detention centers sponsored by the United States in various parts of the world and to which not even the Red Cross has access.⁵¹

One consequence of the use of this modality of government of capital, by capital, for capital is lower taxes for the rich, accelerated increase of social inequalities, deterioration of public education, millions of people without medical insurance, walls, guards and armed militias to prevent the entry of immigrants.

In most Southern countries, and certainly in Latin America, no democratic or sovereign national States have ever been constituted. With significant differences between countries, with advances and setbacks, after the political independence of the early 19th century, most of the population in this continent continued to live in societies with a colonial pattern of power, racially hierarchized, with highly excluding patterns of citizenship.⁵² The profound, and even growing, social inequalities that characterize Latin America at present are an affirmation of the persistence and historical continuity of these mechanisms of exclusion. In these neoliberal times, countries that were never properly sovereign have faced tendencies to reduce their autonomy. They operate in a global context dominated by transnational capital, a small group of North countries,

⁴⁸ AFP and The Independent “Constata la Cruz Roja Internacional torturas a presos en Guantánamo”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 1 December 2004; Neil A. Lewis, “Fresh Details Emerge on Harsh Methods at Guantanamo”, *The New York Times*, 1 January 2005; Carol D. Leonnig, “Further Detainee Abuse Alleged”, *The Washington Post*, 26 December 2004; Andrew Buncombe, *The Independent*, London, “Green light for Iraqi prison abuse came right from the top”, 3 April 2005; Rosa Miriam Lizalde, “La tortura, estimulada por Bush, acusa vocero de grupo de juristas estadounidenses”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 26 November 2005.

⁴⁹ Suzanne Goldenberg, “Abuse ‘continued after Abu Ghraib’”, *The Guardian*, London, 9 December 2004.

⁵⁰ Edward Alden, “Dismay at Attempt to Find Legal Justification for Torture”, *Financial Times*. London, 10 June 2004.

⁵¹ Andrew Buncombe “Bush ‘operating secret gulag in eastern Europe’”, *The Independent*, London, 3 November 2005; AFP Y DPA “Cerrar centros de detención secretos, exigen ONU y OEA a Washington”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 29 July 2006; John Hendren, “CIA May Have Held 100 ‘Ghost’ Prisoners”, *Los Angeles Times*, 10 September 2004; AFP Y Notimex, “Detectan más de mil vuelos secretos de la CIA por naciones de la UE”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 27 April 2006; DPA, Reuters and AFP, “Estuvo en Polonia el mayor centro de detención secreto de la CIA: HRW”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 10 December 2005; Afp, The Independent y DPA, “EU ha creado un archipiélago de centros de detención, denuncia AI”, *La Jornada*, Mexico, 6 June 2005.

⁵² Aníbal Quijano, “Colonialidad del poder, eurocentrismo y América Latina”, in Edgardo Lander, *La colonialidad del saber. Eurocentrismo y ciencias sociales. Perspectivas Latinoamericanas. (The colonialness of knowledge. Eurocentrism and social sciences. Latin-American perspectives)*. CLACSO, UNESCO, Buenos Aires, 2000.

and the financial, commercial and military instruments that defend their interests. The territorial base of liberal democracy, the national State, has ceased to be the pertinent sphere for taking the principal decisions that affect the populations of these territories. Democratic international law, which with setbacks and advances has managed to broaden the definitions of the rights of persons and peoples in the period since the 2nd World War, now finds itself in a state of regression. In an imperial global order, the norms of international law and its institutions are observed only insofar as they correspond to the interests of the hegemonic potency. Current Latin-American projects for development, industrialization, subregional or continental integration are based on imagination and betting on patterns of production and levels of consumption and material abundance that are no longer sustainable. Everything seems to indicate that it is already too late for all that. In the present global context, the aspiration of the peoples of the South to achieve “developed” national States, even with liberal democracy, capable of ensuring equality and effective universal rights for all, constitutes a path heading towards the past. It is too late. Other options are necessary.

4. THE AGE OF PERMANENT WAR

Another key characteristic of our age is the state of permanent war, just as Orwell predicted in 1984. The so-called global war against terrorism is by definition a war that has no limits in space or time. It is infinite war, a war with no end. Inasmuch as the tensions - so characteristic in times of liberal democracy - between accumulation and legitimacy have been resolved in favor of accumulation, a regime of growing domination without hegemony is being established. More and more, the search for consensus and legitimacy is being replaced by the promotion of fear and the use of force. This frank exercise of power necessarily generates multiple forms of resistance. According to the neoliberal system, the military dimension is essential and constitutive. The industrial-military complex has more and more economic, political and communicational power, and has even found a

new sphere of valorization by operating as subcontractor in the new dynamics of corporative privatization of war.

In Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, the Lebanon, so-called “intelligent” bombs kill the civilian population systematically and with impunity, massacres that are cynically called “collateral damage”. The indiscriminate murder of civilians – preferably at a distance so that it is not actually witnessed – is trivialized as an inevitable fact of contemporary life, with the televised images on Fox News and the CNN differ little, in aesthetics and zero moral impact, from the films turned out by Hollywood.

The inevitable consequence of imperial policy is increasing militarization of the planet. Iraq was not invaded because it had arms of mass destruction, but precisely because the intelligence agencies of the United States and the

United Kingdom knew that the Saddam Hussein government did not have the military capacity to resist invasion.

The nightmare of nuclear war, which seemed to have been ended together with the Cold War, was once again on the carpet. The leading nuclear powers fail to comply with the obligations assumed by signing the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Arms to reduce their nuclear arsenals. Countries “friendly” to the United States, such as Israel, Pakistan and India face absolutely no obstacles in the so-called “international community”, in the International Atomic Energy Agency or the United Nations to develop their nuclear arms programs. The same does not hold true, of

course, for Iran and North Korea. What will happen when more and more countries decide that only possessing missiles and nuclear arms can offer some degree of protection against a military attack from the United States when it decides that some country is sheltering or sponsoring “terrorists”, that it belongs to the “axis of evil”, or simply that it does not like its policies? For smaller States or sub-State groups that lack these military possibilities, there will always be other options. So-called terrorism and religious and ethnic-identifying fundamentalism is apparently becoming the answer of the weak, the desperate, the trapped, people whose very existence is being threatened.

None of this augurs a peaceful future.

5. RESISTANCE AND RE-EXISTENCE: THE STRUGGLE FOR LIFE

These civilization processes that point towards death are today confronted by an extraordinary gamut of forms of existence and resistance, mobilization and struggles of peoples, communities, organizations, movements and local, regional and global networks that use their vast gamut of experiences on behalf of life. It is not just a matter of confronting the capital system, its forms of property and exploitation and its forms of exercising power. It is also rejecting a model of civilization historically characterized by the idea of controlling and submitting nature – including human beings, a model that, if not deterred, will lead inexorably to the destruction of the conditions that make life possible on the planet Earth. Accordingly, the anti-capitalist struggle and the resistance to this model of civilization are not principally an expression of internal contradictions of the capital system, contradictions that function in a bet shared by industrial society (such as that imagined by Marxism in betting on the protagonist role of the industrial proletariat), but rather a struggle based on experience, memory, the community, history, a struggle based on the life that is being threatened. It is this truly civilization characteristic that allows the convergence of the most extraordinary diversity of subjects across the planet. This convergence is not based on agreements on a model of an alternative society but rather on principles to preserve cultures, knowledge, nature, life, re-existence.

ARE WE RUNNING OUT OF TIME?

As pointed out above, today the capital regime counts on new geopolitical, technological, communicational, military and juridical-political resources to enable it to overcome the many obstacles that have historically prevented full mercantilization of all the dimensions of life and realization of the Utopia of total market⁵³.

Returning to and integrating questions touched on earlier, it is possible to identify two new conditions that define precisely a new historical era. The first is the capacity for human beings to destroy in a short space of time the conditions that make life possible, both because of the impact of their productive activities and a global nuclear holocaust. The second refers to the confrontations – which for the first time are truly global, in that they appear in a very different but spontaneous way in all the corners of the world – concerning the processes of mercantilization of all dimensions of culture and life, to submit them directly to the demands of valorization of capital. In turn, this dynamic of mercantilization of life can only accelerate the processes of its destruction.

These two conditions oblige us to rethink the ways that time has been conceived. In the principal forms of imagining the future of society associated with modern experience and capitalism, whether they are celebratory or critical, time was conceived as a good infinitely available in the future. The welfare society, abundance, freedom

and equality would all be possible in the future. What cannot be achieved in the present or in a short space of time would surely be achieved in the long term. Nonetheless, what happens if we realize that these suppositions are no longer sustainable? What are the implications of our assuming that we find ourselves in a decisive historical moment, at a point of inflection such that if the present generations of humanity fail to stop the advance of these devices of systematic destruction of cultures and life, there will be no guarantee for the future?

This consideration about the conception of time and its availability is based on the two conditions of our age pointed out above. The calculations and projections of the various models of the future of the planet may vary and be subject to polemics, but there is no doubt that the current civilization patterns are not sustainable and that they are undermining the conditions that make life possible. How much time do we have left before these destructive processes become irreversible? Evidently, not much.

Also from the point of view of the struggles concerning the productivist-depredatory logic of industrial society – radicalized in its present neoliberal expressions – this is a critical historical era. Most of the capacities of resistance against the mercantilization of all the expressions of culture and life are not based on imagination or projects of alternative future societies, but

⁵³ Edgardo Lander, “La utopía del mercado total y poder imperial” (*The Utopia of total market and imperial power*), *Revista Venezolana de Economía y Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 8, no. 2, May-August 2002.



rather – as already pointed out – on experiences, traditions, stories, identities, community life, and memories that things have been and may be otherwise. It happens based on the socio-cultural fabric of the very historical existence of peoples, on the subjectivity of what human experience has been. If today there is such vigorous resistance against transforming water into merchandise, this is not only because water is a condition of life. It is equally because in the experience of peoples and communities, water has historically been a common good, because access to water as a human right was a conquest of democratic struggles in different parts of the world. If this historical memory and this defense of democratic conquests are defeated, and global capital manages to impose full privatization and mercantilization of water, the next generations will assume water as just another piece of merchandise. It will be taken for granted that those who cannot afford it will not have access to it. The struggles will shift to problems of quality and price in the relation between clients and the companies that sell the service. Likewise, after one or two generations for whom access to education and health and social security services are only available through the market, the political-cultural patterns that today define access to these goods as rights may disappear from collective memory.

This is exactly the same pattern that defines, for example, the current global confrontations between the peasant way of life and the productive

model of agro-industry. This is not just another confrontation in the historical progressive expansion of the frontier of capitalist agriculture, a battle that continues the dynamics of past decades and centuries. Today, as pointed out above, capital counts on new technological possibilities (especially biotechnology) and juridical-political possibilities (WTO, the TLC and the corresponding norms of intellectual property). We may be in the presence of a great final confrontation, a global assault in which what is at stake is the very existence of the cultural complexes that make up peasant life, not in some distant corners of the world but all over the planet. The devastating impact that TLCAN has had in just one decade on millions of indigenous and peasant maize farmers in Mexico illustrates the extraordinary speed with which these processes move. The material and territorial conditions that enable the extraordinary diversity of cultures and ways of life in this planet are under threat.

All this defines the present – and here it would be necessary to discuss what we understand as “the present” – as the moment in which a possible solution has to be found for the continuity of life and the diversity of cultures on the planet Earth. We are running out of time. In the multiple available forms of resistance, creation and re-creation of other forms of living that struggle to put a brake on this expansive logic of mercantilization, submission and destruction, that is, the civilization pattern of progress, the future of life is at stake.