

Sand in the Wheels

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SPECIAL G8

Content

G8 This year France proposes to focus on four major themes, namely: 1- solidarity, with particular emphasis on the Partnership for Africa's development, and access to water for all, 2- the spirit of responsibility that not only Governments, but all economic actors, especially business corporations, need to display in the financial, social, environmental and ethical spheres, 3- security, in order to strengthen the fight against terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; and, 4- democracy, through ongoing dialogue with civil society and with other States.
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Of course I can understand it. The main thing that saddened you was the fact that this collapse has enabled the vultures in Washington and London to deck the carrion-filled halls. This was a semi-colonial war that the tandem Bush and Blair (let's call them B2 - it suits them well to call them after a bomber!) waged in defiance of a clear majority of world public opinion. Yet now they can declare it a "war of liberation" inspired by democratic ideals. Yes, that's infuriating! But remember the predictions that we've been making for months and months.

4. Monsanto, Unilever Use Child Labor in India (By By India Committee of the Netherlands)

Child labour is used intensively in India, by European and American multinationals as well as by Indian companies. Cotton-seed production, particularly, is labour-intensive. Child employees work long hours and are often housed in unacceptable conditions (eg. cowsheds). Children cost the employer 30 % less than women and 55 % less than men. A campaign to eradicate child labour and send children to school has been launched by the India Committee of the Netherlands



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Next meeting of the G8 in Evian, France: Security operations and mobilisations

By Eduardo Tamayo G.
Translation. Marie-Christine NAILLOT and Claudie GRANTHAM. Coeditrad, volunteer translators (*)

While the after-effects of the war led by the United States and the United Kingdom against Iraq are still to be felt, social movements and organizations in Europe are preparing important demonstrations to protest against the G8 meeting that will take place in Evian, France, from 1st to 3rd June.

It is difficult to predict, but it is thought that between 200,000 and 300,000 people will participate in mobilisations aimed at denouncing the illegitimacy of the G8, which comprises the seven richest countries of the world (United States, Italy, France, United Kingdom, Japan, Canada and Germany), plus Russia.

The venue selected for the G8 meeting, Evian, is a small town located on the shores of the Lake of Geneva, close to the Swiss cities of Geneva and Lausanne. The Heads of States and Governments of the G8 and their suite of ministers, advisors, etc., will stay in the luxury hotels of these and other cities, surrounded and protected by impressive police, army and air forces.

On 8 April, the governments of France and Switzerland signed a co-operation agreement prior to the G8 Summit. Authorities of both countries are planning to enforce heavy security measures, which will extend to the whole area of the Lake of Geneva. On the Swiss side, 5,700 soldiers and 4,650 police will be mobilised, at a cost in excess of 30 million US dollars. French authorities have prohibited demonstrations in Evian and are adopting exaggerated and unusual control measures to prevent any "alien" person from approaching the town on the days of the G8 Summit. These measures include an obligation – for the inhabitants of Evian – to go to the town hall for a permit that will allow them to move around the town for the duration of the Summit.

Since protests will be impossible in Evian, mobilisations will take place in Geneva, Lausanne or Annemasse (France). The social organizations and movements of the transborder regions of Switzerland and France are planning to organise – on 1st June, opening day of the G8 Summit – a joint demonstration that will leave simultaneously from Geneva and Annemasse to converge towards the borders of both countries. Three alternative camps are being organised to house, feed and inform demonstrators who will arrive from Italy,

Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and other European countries. Prior to this, workshops and meetings will be held on issues ranging from the crisis in Argentina to the situation in the Middle East, financial instability and the arms industry, including the "information war".

The Evian Summit is taking place in a period marked by division in the ranks of the G8 with regard to the invasion and occupation of Iraq. As is well known, France, Germany and Russia were against the Bush war and have been refused any slice of the cake. George W. Bush's participation in this Summit G8 is heating up spirits among the European anti-war movement which considers the Evian Summit as an opportunity to continue mobilisations. On this issue, it is worth indicating that a meeting was to be held between Bush and Pascal Couchepin, President of Switzerland, on 1st June at Geneva airport. But it had to be cancelled as a result of protests by the anti-G8 movement and even by Geneva authorities.

The G8 emerged in 1975, at the initiative of the Head of the French Government, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, who invited the six most important capitalist industrialised countries of the world to an "informal world summit on the global economy". In fact, the G8 was founded to confront Third World countries, which at that time, were demanding a new international economic order and better prices for raw materials, including oil. Initially, this group comprised West Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy and Japan. Later, at the request of the United States, Canada joined. Several years after the fall of the Soviet regime, the Russian Federation was called upon to join as well, although it is excluded from ministerial forums held on the eve of Summit.

The G8 is presented as an informal club with no power of binding decision, no regulations, no head office nor secretariat, which does not enter into competition with either the United Nations, or the World Trade Organization (WTO), nor with any international body. Nevertheless, since 1980, this club of the powerful fixes policies of neoliberal globalisation, in the interests of transnational companies and investors, encourages the extension of world trade, privatisation and cuts in public spending. In order to impose its policies, the G8 relies on international financial institutions, like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, where it wields great power, and on the World Trade Organisation, which, despite its overt facade as a democratic body, follows their "recommendations" to the letter.

A Manifesto of the Geneva Social Forum – one of the demonstrations' convener – indicates: "In effect, the G8 tries to play the role of government of the world,

although it has received no such mandate from countries of the world. Hence, it is an illegitimate body, which nevertheless imposes its preferences and directs the march of the planet. The G8 implements neoliberal policies that increase the concentration of wealth, violate labour law, generate instability in employment and living conditions for the vast majority of the population, and encourage cultural exclusion and destruction of the environment”.

And the Manifesto adds: “While countries of the G8 refuse to really fight against financial fraud, money laundering and convenience flags, in the name of the fight against terrorism, the G8 legitimise wars, militarism and repression. The G8 claims to want to fight against poverty in the world, but the programme of debt reduction for poor countries turned out to be totally insufficient and subjected to unacceptable conditions; IMF plans continue to lead countries such as Argentina to bankruptcy; trade liberalisation, approved by the WTO, is increasingly more unfavourable for countries of the South; and financial contributions for the fight against AIDS, malaria and other pandemics are far from fulfilling their promises in the face of expressed needs. Finally, G8 member countries have taken no serious measures to protect the environment”.

The G8 has met 28 times since 1975. There have been mobilisations against the G8 for some 15 years. In 1989 (Paris), in 1996 (Lyon), 1998 (Birmingham) and 1999 (Cologne), tens of thousands of demonstrators demanded cancellation of the debt of countries of the South.

In July 2001, over 250,000 people were mobilised in Genoa (Italy), despite heavy police repression that caused the death of the student Carlo Guillian.

Protests against this club of the wealthy have gained new ground in the last years with the emergence of a social and citizen’s movement world-wide, which has adopted the slogan “another world is possible”. Actions against the G-8 in Evian, which have been defined as “festive and peaceful”, promise to be a further contribution to this slogan.

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War on Iraq, what’s next?

By Pierre Khalfa
Translation. Coorditrad, volunteer translators (*)

This short text is a contribution to the seminar debate titled New Responsibilities for Activists for Another Globalisation held on May 5 and organised by Transversales, Mouvements et Espaces Marx. It attempts to highlight the ongoing transformations and some of the consequences for the movement for another globalisation.

Challenging the neoliberal model

The war in Iraq and its consequences must unveil that neoliberal capitalism faces a triple crisis of legitimacy. First a crisis of the model. The burst of the financial bubble and the collapse of the new economy completely destroyed the paradigm upon which neoliberal globalisation was constructed: new technologies, unlimited increase in the Stock Exchange and market liberalisation were supposed to ensure an enduring accumulation of wealth for most. The wake-up was violent.

This crisis of the neoliberal model is then doubled by a specific crisis of the type of development supported by international financial institutions. The situation in Argentina, and more particularly throughout Latin America, without even mentioning totally neglected regions like Africa, exposed the failure of the policies of structural adjustment and a model based on total immersion into the global market.

Finally, a crisis of governance with the fraudulent behaviour of the various protagonists of the neoliberal system was unmasked in cases involving companies branded as the champions of triumphant capitalism. What is particularly remarkable is that all the chain links have been affected: company managers and boards of directors, audit companies, statutory auditors, banks and supervisory authorities. All have been, under the benevolent eye of government authorities, in the worst-case scenario, active agents of fraud, or at best, turned a blind eye to certainly suspect, but so lucrative, practices. The famous company governance did not resist the temptation of profit.

If this triple crisis did not challenge the foundations of neoliberal capitalism — domination of financial assets based on the total freedom of circulation of funds and market liberalisation —, it prompted a debate on a possible re-engineering of its process among the leading social classes. Even if this debate has been eclipsed by the war on Iraq, there will be many more consequences if the world goes into a deep recession, something that cannot be excluded at the moment.

This crisis in the legitimacy of neoliberal capitalism has reinforced the relevance and force of criticism from the movement for another globalisation. The successes of the European Social Forum in Florence and the Third World Social Forum in Porto Alegre confirm that this movement has become permanently established on the political scene and that the open period from the mid-90s, and which was spectacularly demonstrated in Seattle at the end of 1999, is not over.

But the weaknesses of the movement have not yet been erased. If its themes have succeeded in integrating it into public debate, it has neither succeeded in changing actual policies adopted by governments and international institutions nor stopped

the neoliberal assaults aimed at destroying the Welfare State. Moreover, it can hardly respond to questions that it has itself raised, even though the question of the war is being raised again.

War and neoliberal globalisation: the new American course

Relations between war and capitalism are not new. The “classical” analysis expressed by Jaures in a famous expression: “Capitalism brings about war like clouds bring storms”, has been confirmed by the two world wars. Basically, it comes from the idea that conflicts between nations reflect the conflicts between the different national bourgeoisies, which struggle for a piece of the world pie. In this context, the result of the two world wars led to a new division in the world and to double domination by the United States and the USSR. This division of the world, based on the balance of nuclear terror, more or less forced countries to align themselves with one of the two “Superpowers”. War is pushed out of the “centre” and ends up at the periphery, particularly under the shape of national liberation fights. But these conflicts remain globally under the control of the two “Superpowers”.

The collapse of the USSR caused this lock to break. Nations, hung for decades under the yoke, longed to find their identities again, even against their immediate neighbour. But, at the same time, the adoption of liberal policies considerably aggravated the social problems and the development of neoliberal globalisation seemed to challenge a newly rediscovered identity and sovereignty, without even counting the countries where the State gradually crumbled under the effect of these processes. The cocktail was especially explosive in the case of the former Yugoslavia, but a series of “little wars” involving the great powers, and especially the United States, exists today.

But these conflicts, which are extremely painful for the peoples who are subjected to them, do not fundamentally concern the “super game” between the great powers whose struggles remain regulated in international institutions. If the United States was always defiant toward them — permanent criticism of their efficiency, non-payment of their dues to the UN for years, suspicion at the creation of the WTO, etc — these institutions completely served their interests. They were, however, a place for the other great powers to support theirs and so were an obstacle to an actual imperial policy.

Following the intervention in Afghanistan, the war in Iraq illustrates this new deal. Beyond geopolitical reasons — reshaping the Middle East, increase control of the oil resources —, or pressure from the military-industrial lobby, this war is first and foremost about an attempt to reestablish the general order of the world by the United States as summarised in the “Who is not with us is against us” of GW Bush: It is the United States and only the US who is to decide what is good

for the world and other governments have to align themselves with US policy.

The new course follows in a way the past attitude of the United States whose main goal has always been since the Second World War to assert its hegemony on the world. This has always been a combination of several aspects — economical, political, ideological and military —, each one prevailing at one time or another to strengthen the others and deepen global hegemony. Three key facets, however, distinguish today’s course from the past period: the ideological and messianic facet of the new American plea which breaks from real political discourse, the unilateral characterisation of decision-making, the excessive emphasis on the military aspect with the theory of preventing war by making war, or at least the threat of it, an eternal political axis. The idea is to use the absolute military supremacy of the United States to emphasise an authority that might be challenged. In this way, the other great powers have been the collateral target of the war in Iraq.

Furthermore, the links between this new course and the process of neoliberal globalisation has to be clarified. Indeed, hiding behind the US troops in Iraq are the American conglomerates that will conquer the local market. Neoliberal globalisation, however, is characterised by the extreme liquidity of “stateless” funds and by a weakening of the links between the nation-state and the big “national” companies. These have a straight global strategy, interests around the whole world and shareholders whose nationality is secondary. If they do not spurn, as the case may be, the assistance of the state to drive down labour costs, dismantle the social welfare system or assist them financially to become established in some country, we are no longer living in the times when the gunboats of the great powers were used to open countries to western goods. Neoliberal globalisation probably does not need an armed hand to become implanted, market liberalisation, practised by all governments of the world, is enough to do so. Sure, if some countries really challenged this process or if some popular movements became strong enough to do so, the use of force will be undoubtedly required to bring them to heel. But this was not so with Iraq!

Likewise, it seems difficult to establish a causal link between the present economic crisis, whatever the forecasts for its development, and the new course of American policy. The United States did not intervene in Iraq, urged by the pressing obligation to get out of the crisis. Today no one is able to say if this war will pull them in even deeper or, on the contrary, have a positive effect. Moreover, unlike the 1930s, the present crisis did not lead to a withdrawal of each country. Such a process might not be excluded if the present crisis were to lead to a global depression. The signal of such a withdrawal might therefore be the massive repatriation of foreign capital invested in the United States that allows this country to spare itself the trouble of applying

the rules that it imposes on others. It would then become a split of historic proportions.

The new American policy therefore does not respect a rationality that would have its roots in the economy, even if it can definitely benefit economically from it. It is mainly a politico-ideological choice of a team ruled by neo-conservatives who used the terrorist attacks of September 11th to impose it. Among the potential ways to strengthen the American hegemony, the choice made by the Bush team was modelled in a certain way that only triumphed because of favourable circumstances.

A new course of contradictions

This triumph is only temporary and difficulties are already existant with which the American administration will have to come to terms. For example, the central emphasis on the American discourse on democracy is indeed especially hypocritical when you consider the behaviour of the United States around the world, but it will become more complicated to establish a puppet government in Iraq, the repression of the Iraqi people and more globally American support for dictatorial regimes.

Additionally, the development of a haughtily unilateral policy in every field leaves the other great powers with no other choice but that between two attitudes, either alignment or refusal. It is unlikely that the other large developed capitalist countries will always be ready to sacrifice their interests for those of the United States by becoming its vassals. The Iraqi situation that has seen a number of states reject the American diktat is likely to happen again. The "inter-imperialist" contradictions are therefore likely to become bigger, even if they can only exist in an environment over? determined by American hegemony. Finally, this arrogant behaviour, coupled with the recurring use of force, can only lead to a massive rejection of American ideology by the public whose demonstrations against the war in Iraq was just a sampling.

The impact of these contradictions will be all the more important as significant difficulties will inevitably occur following the events in Iraq and as the domestic American economic situation looks uncertain (record trade and budget deficits, nonexistent savings, etc). If the position of the Bush administration looks momentarily supported by the rapid military victory, it is not certain that it can transform it into a lasting political victory. If circumstances become more unfavourable, the support of the dominant American class for present ideology would probably be challenged, since there is an important movement against war in the United States. Hence the temptation to rush headlong into thwarting threats from other countries like Syria while benefiting the most from the situation created by military victory.

New problems

The movement for another globalisation has been deeply involved in the fight against the war. It is highly symbolic to note that the date of February 15, which saw the largest ever world demonstration ever organised, was discussed during the preparation of the first European Social Forum: for Europe during the Assembly of social movements which took place in Florence and for the rest of the world during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre. In a number of countries, the movement for another globalisation was the spearhead of anti-war demonstrations. In view of the present direction of the American administration, the fight against war will remain a central theme of its action in the months to come.

The fight against war opened up the question of alliances that the movement can form on that issue. The meeting points with governments from certain great powers who opposed American intervention do not pose a problem right now. This kind of position puts the American administration in a difficult situation depriving it of the unanimity it was searching, reducing its legitimacy even a bit more. However, we must be careful not to lose sight of this situation so that certain questions remain unanswered, like Chechnya or France's African policy for example, at the risk of seeing the movement for another globalisation being instrumental in appearing to play one "imperialism" against another.

Moreover, the fight against the war in Iraq and the development of the situation there raise the question of relations between the movement for another globalisation and the Islamic political trends that oppose American policy. This question is especially complex because we must avoid two pitfalls. The first one is indistinctly condemning all these trends because they claim to follow Islam. Such an attitude actually stigmatises Islam itself and treats the religion differently from the others, the presence in the movement of organisations claiming to follow Christianity and more or less linked to churches posing no problem. The second pitfall is in the principle, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend", which risks turning a blind eye to plans, behaviours or statements totally opposed to the democratic values of emancipation and equality, which are the same for the movement for another globalisation. The respect of these values must be first and foremost our guide.

The present situation also exposes new problems in the same traditional field of activity of the movement for another globalisation. It has always strongly criticised international institutions. If all of them do not play the same role, they work entirely for the great powers, and especially for the most powerful of them, the United States. Faced with the new course of the American administration that aims to marginalize them, they seem to rediscover a semblance of legitimacy in public opinion.

So faced with the arbitrary decisions of the American administration in trade matters, turning to the WTO seems natural and gives legitimacy to this organisation that up until now had none. Yet the WTO is still a machine for liberalisation and destruction of social rights and environment standards. What about a new legitimacy for the IMF and World Bank? The UN case is at least as enlightening. If the basic texts of this institution are remarkable, it must be noted that they were never really promoted by it and that its activities are totally dominated by the permanent members of the Security Council. Worse than that, the latest directions, commenced by its Secretary-General through the Global Compact initiative, aim to promote a "partnership" with multinationals, as illustrated at the recent summit in Johannesburg. Yet, in front of the will of the United States to govern the world, turning to the UN also seems obvious.

To respond to these new problems first requires an effort to clarify certain themes. If the issue of the WTO seems easy to deal with — sound arguments exist on this subject — the power of liberal propaganda, which will spread with the meeting in Cancun in September, must not be underestimated. The movement will have to prove its ability there to combine in-depth explanations with mass mobilisation and responses to concrete cases.

The question of international law and the UN is more complex to solve. The debate on the role of the UN, its function and its directions must take place quickly. The ritual recourse to the primacy of international law must not cloak the weakness of the argument: would a legal war, ie approved by the Security Council, have been truly a righteous war? If we do not want the refusal of American unilateralism to envelop the movement for another globalisation into a formal legalism, or to have it tag along like a UN controlled by the great powers, we must quickly put radical reform ideas forward for this institution and specify the basis for an international law based on justice.

Furthermore, the war once again exposed Europe's incapability to play a decisive role on the international scene and reopened the public debate on its future. If the movement for another globalisation is clearly conscious that the present Europe is a vehicle for neoliberal globalisation and has begun with difficulty and still imperfectly to engage in combat against liberal European policies, it is struggling to define alternative directions for the present European construction. Furthermore, it is hardly represented in the institutional debate and not very forthcoming on the role that Europe must play in the world. This situation can no longer endure at the risk of being destabilised by the attacks of some governments or European institutions in Europe.

A new chapter for the movement?

The movement will have to tackle a series of new questions that might deeply divide it. The future will

depend on the ability to manage these differences. This question is all the more important because the movement for another globalisation is under double pressure. On one hand, the power of the movement, its impact on public opinion, attracts new players who want to become a part of it. Its heterogeneity is therefore strengthening. On the other hand, the ever more urgent requirement to bring alternative answers and to build the necessary social mobilisation forces us to search for a certain homogeneity. The ability to manage the tension between these two processes will determine the dynamism of the movement in the future. The debates on the role of the Social Forum and its link to "social movements" illustrate the current difficulties.

The heterogeneity of the movement for another globalisation is powerful. It proves that the movement occupies a vast political field. It includes actors with very disparate entry points. For this heterogeneity not to be the cause of any break-up and division, presupposes that its function is based on consensus, which it created almost spontaneously. The consensus in question here has to be more than the lowest common denominator and must be understood as a dynamic process. It is built on debate, which requires time to be implemented, and attempts to go beyond the competing positions in play. It is based on a minimum political framework common to the forces involved. The movement was able to integrate their concerns into a general framework based on two requirements: the refusal to commercialise the world and the aspiration for a true democracy. These two requirements are the platform on which the movement for another globalisation was built.

This will of unity for the movement for another globalisation, essential for the future, is what is at stake in the political battle and all the more important because there exists a permanent will of governments and international institutions to divide it between "moderates" and "radicals". Many times proclaimed since Seattle, the break-up of the movement has not come. Beyond the fundamental political agreement mentioned above, one reason explains why this unity has held. Contrary to past emancipation movements, the movement for another globalisation does not aspire to power, it challenges established authority. Therefore, it has been able to avoid certain strategic debates, including the one on "reform or revolution", which deeply divided past emancipation movements. Here come the problems posed by the presence of political parties, even beyond the directions they can take, and the difficulty to think about relations with them, and more generally with the political sphere, beyond the mode of suspicion. This suspicion is all the more important since the movement for another globalisation is compelled to rely on political parties with whom it disagrees in order to implement its proposals.

This search for consensus does not magically make the question of the balance of power within the movement disappear. Consensus is often built on an agreement

between the major forces present in the movement. It therefore carries a risk of frustration and marginalisation for some organisations that may feel that their point of view is not considered. From this point of view, the pursuit of consensus can have the opposite effect to what is being pursued. It can exclude instead of integrating. Another perverse effect, which came to light during preparation for the European Social Forum, is the development of lobbying practices, with some movements participating solely to have their issues considered with little willingness for integration into the whole process.

The construction of the movement for another globalisation is an ongoing process, currently maintained by large regular international meetings. Indeed, these meetings vary, but they are designing the profile of a world movement, built on international events, and therefore able to respond to the process of capitalist globalisation. It is this characteristic of the movement that was responsible for its initial success because it perfectly matched the ongoing transformations. But it might not be enough to move to a new stage in its development.

The essential question the movement for another globalisation will have to face is its long-term usefulness. What makes this movement efficient to really transform the existing situation? First of all, the movement fundamentally refused to accept the state of the world. This refusal remained and remains fundamental because it clarifies what is at stake and delineates the enemy. The problem we have to solve today is less one of alternative proposals — they exist in numerous areas, even if there is some work left to be done — than one of strategy for the movement. How do we focus its action on targets that allow for the largest social mobilisation in order to stop the ongoing projects of social regression and to implement alternative solutions? What is the role of the trade union movement, key actor, in this process? How to proceed together despite significant divergences? The setting up of continental social forums can help answer these questions more concretely. In particular, the European Social Forum (ESF) can be the framework ensuring that they start dealing with them with respect to mobilisation building at the European scale.

For more information on this article, contact: khalfa@attac.org

Letter To A Slightly Depressed Antiwar Activist

By Gilbert Achcar

April 17, 2003

Dear Friend,

I don't think that the disappointment that you've felt at the news of the Iraqi regime's collapse is warranted.

Of course I can understand it. The main thing that saddened you was the fact that this collapse has enabled the vultures in Washington and London to deck the carrion-filled halls. This was a semi-colonial war that the tandem Bush and Blair (let's call them B2 - it suits them well to call them after a bomber!) waged in defiance of a clear majority of world public opinion. Yet now they can declare it a "war of liberation" inspired by democratic ideals. Yes, that's infuriating! But remember the predictions that we've been making for months and months. They can be summed up in a few hypotheses:

1) That B2's easiest task would be overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime, which they could defeat without too much trouble. Their real problems would begin afterwards.

2) That they dared to defy public opinion because they counted on the spectacle of Iraqi crowds celebrating Saddam Hussein's fall to win over public opinion. We had to be prepared for this spectacle. Given how hated the Baathist dictatorship was - with good reason - it was inevitable.

3) B2 are adventurers, gamblers; they went to war betting on a best-case scenario. They bet on taking over the bulk of the Iraqi state apparatus, particularly the army, on its turning against Saddam Hussein, and on their being able to use it to control Iraq after their victory. But the most likely outcome was that their intervention - which would begin with an attempt to liquidate Saddam Hussein and the occupation of the Iraqi oil fields - would lead to the collapse of the state apparatus and would result in a vast chaos marked by bloody score-settling.

All these hypotheses have been verified. Nothing that has happened, in the last analysis, should have surprised you; everything was predictable. Let's take a closer look at the events of the last few days:

1) The "victory"

On the one side we had a "coalition" between the world's main military power, which accounts on its own for more than 40 percent of world military expenditures, and a major vassal power. On the other side we had a Third World country, two-thirds of whose armed forces had been destroyed in 1991, the other third of which had been worn away through the ensuing years by an embargo that interfered with maintaining its weaponry, and all this further aggravated by several years of UN-supervised disarmament.

How could anybody be surprised in these circumstances at the Iraqi rout? This same regime had already suffered a crushing defeat in 1991 with the collapse of Iraqi forces in Kuwait and Southern Iraq. True, this time Washington's goal was to take the cities and occupy the whole country; admittedly, that was a harder goal to achieve. But in the meantime the country

had been bled white, exhausted by more than twenty years of wars, bombings and embargo. This is the country that Washington set out to conquer. And in 2003 as in 1991, the great majority of the Iraqis who were supposed to carry out the orders from Baghdad hated the Baathist regime. How could anybody expect a popular mobilization in conditions like these!

What was surprising in fact was not the rapid victory by US and British troops, but the resistance that the Iraqi regime's troops put up in the first days of the offensive. Remember, all the commentators joined at first in sneering at the predictions of a speedy victory. Many believed that the quagmire predicted in 1991 was now finally becoming reality. They were mistaken about the reasons for the initial resistance. It was due to the fact that the ground offensive was launched at the same time as the intensive bombing campaign, whereas in 1991 Washington had subjected the Iraqi army to more than five weeks of savage bombing before sending its troops into action. This meant that the regime's forces were still ready to fight at the moment when the ground offensive began - much more than in 1991, when the Iraqi troops that had survived the bombings were exhausted and dazed, and surrendered en masse to the coalition troops.

The regime's forces, nothing more! Anyone who confused what happened in Iraq with genuine popular resistance, anyone who confused the regime's troops' defense of Baghdad with the people's defense of Beirut during the Israeli army siege in 1982, made a big mistake about the military prospects as well as about the Iraqi people's relationship to Saddam Hussein's tyrannical regime. The main setback for the Pentagon's plan was in any event the fact that the "opportunistic" bombings on the offensive's first day missed their target: Saddam Hussein. And the end of Saddam Hussein's role as commander-in-chief probably directly provoked the sped-up collapse of the defense of Baghdad, whether he was killed by a bomb or sneaked off. In such a centralized, personalized dictatorship, getting rid of the dictator is enough to destroy the regime's foundations once they are put under intense pressure.

2) The reactions in Iraq

How could anybody be surprised at the Iraqi people's relief and joy when they learned of the dictatorship's fall? I felt genuine relief myself, even though I had never experienced what the Iraqis had. The Iraqi Baathist dictatorship took power in July 1968, when I was in the midst of my own radicalization, like much of my generation in many parts of the world. The new regime's first priority was to crush the Iraqi expression of that radicalization, whose catalyst in the Middle East had been the Arab regimes' defeat by Israeli aggression in June 1967.

The reign of terror established in Baghdad proceeded to ruthlessly crush the guerrilla front opened in southern

Iraq by the Guevarist Khaled Ahmed Zaki as well as the left-wing split from the Iraqi CP. The new putschists quickly earned a reputation as the region's most vicious regime. Iraqi militants knew that they were better off dying in combat with the regime's forces than being arrested and dying under torture of unrivalled cruelty. The Baathist regime crushed the Iraqi left, the largest component of the Arab left, in blood and gore. It thus contributed in its way to preparing the ground for the hegemony of Islamic fundamentalism over Middle Eastern popular protest movements. Of all the dictators who have been compared to Hitler in the past half-century, generally in the most tendentious way and for propagandist ends, Saddam Hussein is the one who most closely fit the bill - not only in terms of his regime's domestic characteristics (minus Nazism's ideologically mobilized mass base) but also in terms of an expansionist drive fuelled by blind megalomania.

For 35 years I have been waiting and hoping for the fall of this horrible regime! So I was relieved when it finally fell, as were millions of Iraqi men and women. Nor was the Iraqi people's relief surprising; it was completely predictable. What was surprising, at least for Washington and London, was the lukewarm welcome, often edged with hostility, that Arab Iraqis gave their troops - including in the Shiite South, which they thought they had won over. This is not hard to understand either.

What Washington and London failed to grasp is that this people, which had so many reasons to hate Saddam Hussein, has even more reasons to hate them. Iraqis remember how the coalition abandoned them to Saddam Hussein in 1991. They are still suffering from the twelve years of genocidal embargo imposed by Washington and London with the complicity of their UN Security Council partners. And they could not welcome as liberators the US, the main oppressor of the Middle East and sponsor of the state of Israel, or the tag-along British colonizers of yesteryear who had left such bitter memories behind them.

As a result of this fact, the Iraqis' expressions of joy were quite restrained. Washington had to resort to propaganda tricks in order to give the impression that the US-British coalition troops were being welcomed as "liberators." Hailed they were, but above all by the looters, who with their booty in hand had the most reason to find "Bush very good." The occupation troops deliberately gave these plunderers "free" rein, on the orders of "unlawful commanders" who thought they were securing the occupation against popular hostility and in the end increased it considerably. (The only public building in Baghdad that was well guarded was the Ministry of Oil, just as the only "secured" areas in Iraq were the oil fields.) The new invaders became responsible for a sack of Baghdad that will linger in historical memory as the modern equivalent of the 13th-century sack of Baghdad during the Mongol invasion.

The only part of the Iraqi population that allied with the occupied troops and massively expressed joy at their presence has been the Kurds. Once more the leaderships of Iraqi Kurdistan have demonstrated their sempiternal short-sightedness, having so often cast their lot with very poor allies: Israel, the Shah of Iran, the Turkish government, the Iranian mullahs - even Saddam Hussein! They have not had the sense to avoid compromising themselves with an occupation force destined to become an object of resentment for Arab Iraqis, the only ally that will make a decisive difference in the end to the future of Iraqi Kurdistan. It would be disastrous for the Kurds for their leaders to confirm their image as devoted partners of the occupying powers. The US and Britain have in fact no intention of defending the Kurdish people's right to self-determination. They will not hesitate to sacrifice Iraq's Kurds if that serves their purpose of consolidating their hold on the country.

3) Controlling Iraq, dominating the world

The small-scale looters of Iraq's cities have at this early date already singularly complicated the task of the big-scale looters, the occupying powers. Each passing day confirms how difficult it will be for B2 to control Iraq in face of a population that cordially detests them. Confidence man Ahmed Chalabi and his handful of mercenaries brought along in the US troops' baggage are certainly not capable of changing this situation.

The US' problem is that - to a far greater extent than in Germany or Japan after 1945, when it could make use of whole layers of the old regime's state apparatus (including in Japan the emperor himself) - it will find nothing more reliable in Iraq than the leftovers from Saddam Hussein's apparatus. Only the servants of the old regime have in sufficient numbers the degree of moral degradation required to put themselves at the occupiers' devoted service. They alone will be inclined to serve the country's new masters, with all the more enthusiasm because they will be saving their skins while slaking their thirst for power. This will make the occupation all the more hateful for the great majority of Iraqis.

As it extends its presence in the Arab world further and further, the US is stretching its troops too thin. The hatred that it evokes in all Middle Eastern countries and throughout the Islamic world has already blown up in its face several times; 11 September 2001 was only the most spectacular, deadliest manifestation so far of this hatred. The occupation of Iraq will push the general resentment to extremes; it will speed up the decomposition of the regional order backed by Washington. There will be no Pax Americana. Rather there will be another step downwards towards barbarism, with the chief barbarism of Washington and its allies sustaining the opposite barbarism of religious

fanaticism - as long as no new progressive forces emerge in this part of the world.

The project of building a global empire dominated by the US by means of brute force is inexorably doomed to failure. In this respect Washington has at this early stage already suffered major political reverses, contrary to the impression that its military victory in Iraq might temporarily give. Never since the end of the Cold War has US hegemony been so widely challenged in the world; never has the consensus around this hegemony been so lacking. This is the case at the level of international relations: the grumbling and fractiousness of countries that Washington considered its loyal allies have never been so widespread. Even the Turkish government refused to let US troops pass through its territory. Washington failed to buy it, just as it failed to buy enough members of the UN Security Council to get nine measly votes for its war on Iraq!

Admittedly, the existing states are not reliable allies for the anti-war movement, nor its allies at all in fact - particularly when like France and Russia they behave just as brutally and hatefully in their own imperial domains as the US does in its. But this cacophony in the system of states associated with the great empire ruled from Washington has in a way reflected the other major reverse for the imperial project. I refer of course to the emergence of the other superpower, "world public opinion," as the New York Times rightly labelled it after the demonstrations on 15 February 2003, the biggest day of worldwide popular mobilization in history. "World public opinion" - or rather the real movement, the anti-war movement; polls do not demonstrate.

During the 1990s many thought that this movement was fated never to overcome its notorious weakness. They thought that the Vietnam years had essentially been well and truly buried, particularly since Washington had learned the lessons of Vietnam and applied them in its later wars, starting in Panama (1989). But beginning in the Fall of 2002, we have seen the breathtaking rise of a new anti-war movement, which has quickly set new historic records in several countries and even engulfed the US. This fact is absolutely decisive; the key mobilization is of course the one that takes place in the US itself. The US anti-war movement has not yet the level of its peak in the Vietnam years, but it has already distinguished itself by reaching a mass scale, in spite of the trauma of September 11 and the Bush Administration's exploitation of that trauma. Carefully selected images of the so-called "liberation" of Iraq and the Pentagon's scripted scenes have impressed many opponents of the war. But each passing day shows how right the anti-war movement was. The countless deaths, the massive destruction and the pillage of Iraq's national wealth constitute a huge tribute imposed on the Iraqi people to pay for a "liberation" that is ushering in a foreign occupation. As Washington bogs down in a country that cannot be hidden from the world - unlike Afghanistan, more chaotic today than ever - the anti-war movement will be able to rise to new heights.

This movement's spectacular growth has only been possible because it rested on the foundations of three years of progress by the global movement against neo-liberal globalization born in Seattle. These two dimensions will continue to fuel each other, to strengthen people's awareness that neo-liberalism and war are two faces of the same system of domination - which must be overthrown.

14 April 2003 Gilbert Achcar

(Translated from French by Peter Drucker. Gilbert Achcar is the author of *Clash of Barbarisms*, 2002, and *Eastern Cauldron*, forthcoming 2003, both from Monthly Review Press, New York)

Monsanto, Unilever Use Child Labor in India

By India Committee of the Netherlands (courtesy of CorpWatch India, a project of CorpWatch - "Holding corporations accountable locally and globally")

Both Hindustan Lever Ltd., an Indian subsidiary of British-Dutch multinational company Unilever, as well as the American multinational Monsanto are making use of hazardous forms of child labour in cotton seed production in India on a large scale. An estimated number of 25,000 children, mostly girls, work an average of ten to thirteen hours a day for Hindustan Lever, while around 17,000 children work for Monsanto and their Indian subsidiary Mahyco. These children get no education, earn less than 40 Eurocents (Rs. 20) a day and are exposed to poisonous pesticides like Endosulphan during their work. More than 11,000 children work under similar conditions for the multinationals Syngenta (Swiss), Advanta (Dutch-British) and Proagro (owned by Bayer of Germany).

This is the result from the research done by the Indian researcher Dr. D. Venkateswarlu for the Indian Committee of the Netherlands.

Cotton Seeds: Largest Employment of Children

In the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh alone, 247,800 children work in cottonseed production and around 450,000 in all of India, most of them for Indian-owned companies. No other industry in India employs so many children. The cottonseed companies do not employ the children themselves, but they work through agents called seed organisers. The companies unilaterally fix a price for the farmers that makes it almost impossible for them to employ adults. A child earns 30% less than a woman and 55% less than a man.

Cottonseed production is very labour-intensive. The sector is 'unique' in the sense that nine out of ten employees are children between 6 and 14 years of age. Generally they are, through advances paid to their parents, bonded to the same employer. According to

Dr. Venkateswarlu's research, almost 30% of the children are being recruited by intermediaries to work as 'migrants' away from home. These children work 12 to 13 hours a day and sleep in the farmer's cowshed or in a 'child camp' where ten to thirty children live.

Take Narasamma. She is 12 years old and she worked in the cotton seed fields for the last three years. She sleeps in a cattle shed with other migrant children and works more than 13 hours a day with two breaks. She regularly gets ill after being sprayed with pesticides. She is paid Rs. 800 (16) a month.

Unilever & Hindustan Lever

Unilever informed the Dutch press that it would like to contribute to a solution of the child labour problem in cottonseed production in India, though in its press release of May 5th 2003, it rejects the accusation of using child labour. Unilever's contention in its press release that NGO's have not sought contact with Hindustan Lever is not correct. In February 2002 representatives of the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN), the Netherlands Confederation of Trade Unions (FNV), Novib and Amnesty International Netherlands and the NGO MV Foundation from Andhra Pradesh discussed the issue with Unilever. Unilever promised a follow-up discussion between Hindustan Lever and the MV foundation. This discussion could not take place.

On Thursday 15 May 2003 representatives of the same organisations will meet again with Unilever representatives in Rotterdam.

In March 2002 Hindustan Lever (HLL) sold its seeds division to its subsidiary Paras Extra Seed Growth Seed (PEGS) and formed a joint venture with Emergent Genetics, a US based biotechnology company for the seeds business. HLL now holds 26% share in PEGS while the remaining was sold to Emergent Genetics. An important reason was that Monsanto has sub-licensed its patent rights over BT terminator gene, technology also to Emergent Genetics. Access to Monsanto's BT Bolgard gene seems to be crucial to survive and grow in cotton seeds business.

European Campaign 'Stop Child Labour - School is the Best Place to Work'

This week the campaign 'Stop Child Labour - School is the Best Place to Work' starts in Germany, The Netherlands and Ireland. This is a three-year campaign of Concern from Ireland, German Agro-Action from Germany and the Dutch Teachers Union, Hivos, India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) and the Netherlands Confederation of Trade Unions. The campaign draws inspiration from and closely cooperates with the MV Foundation from Andhra Pradesh (A.P), India, which has brought about 150,000 children from work to full-time education. The state government

of A.P. has adopted a similar policy that no child should work and every child should go to a full-time school.

The demands of the campaign towards the European Union and its member states are:

Create a coherent policy on the elimination of child labour linked to the provision of full-time, formal education for all children up to 14 years of age.

Ensure that the European members work together to allocate at least 8% of Overseas Development Aid to formal primary education, including strategies to integrate all out-of-school children into the education system.

Make provisions in development aid to ensure that girls and young children from vulnerable groups (including those living in absolute poverty) are integrated into the formal school system.

The MV Foundation is also closely involved in combating child labour in the cotton seed industry. It has already withdrawn hundreds of children from the cotton seeds industry and put them in full-time schools.

For more information contact Gerard Oonk, Co-ordinator, India Committee of the Netherlands: : g.oonk@indianet.nl The full report, Child Labour and Trans-National Seed Companies in Hybrid Cotton Seed Production in Andhra Pradesh by Dr. Davuluri Venkateswarlu can be found at <http://www.indianet.nl/cotseed.html>

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