

International Newsletter

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Open World Conference Against War and Exploitation

Algiers, 27th to 29th November 2010

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54 countries**

**convene the "Open World Conference
against War and Exploitation"**

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INTERVIEW WITH ALBERTO SALCEDO

LAND MARKS:

Le Caracazo: Popular uprising against the package of measures proposed by the International Monetary Fund and implemented by President Carlos Perez in February 1989. The repression that followed this resulted in 3 000 deaths and the disappearance of dozens of people. It marked the point where the masses movement broke with the Fixed Point parties.

PDVSA Venezuela Petrol SA (Venezuelan Oil Company). State Oil Company, fourth in the world ranking of oil companies.

The Fixed Point Pact: Political agreement between the AD, COPEI and URD parties to share in the government of the State of Venezuela. After the URD left the government this then was down to a binomial AD-COPEI. It governed from 1958 to 1998.

11th April 2002: The opposition with the support of the American Embassy organised a coup d'etat in which the bureaucratic leadership of the CTV (Confederation of Venezuelan workers) took part. Chavez was arrested. But the retaliation in worker and popular areas plus that of the majority of non commissioned army officers was such that Chavez was re established in government.

December 2002-January 2003: The PDVSA oil company management supported by the opposition organised a bosses lock out, which the retaliation of the great majority of PDVSA workers succeeded in overcoming. Break with the former official union CTV; in April 2003 the Congress constituting the UNETE took place. It is to-day the main trade union confederation in Venezuela.

15th August 2004: Chavez won the revocation referendum.

2nd December 2007: he failed with the constitutional reform which would have allowed his re election.

26th September 2010: the next legislative elections.

PSUV: United Socialist Party of Venezuela. Party formed by the fusion of the MVR with sectors that came from the PCV, PODEMOS, PPT, MEP, LS. There is a close link between the party and the state apparatus.

UNETE: National Union of Workers of Venezuela. Main trade union organisation.

CTR: Committee of revolutionary workers. Main tendency inside the UNETE with Marcella Maspero as its main leader.

CTV: Confederation of workers of Venezuela. For 50 years it was the main trade union organisation led by the AD Party.

C-CURA: Revolutionary and Autonomous class tendency. A former tendency of UNETE. Currently very weak. They work with CTV within the Labour Solidarity Movement. Main leader: Orlando Chirino.



Alberto Salcedo answered our questions. He is on UNETE's provisional leadership. He endorsed the call to the Open World Conference. He will be part of the Venezuelan delegation. He told us about his political background, the situation in his country and how the Open World Conference is being prepared in Venezuela.

International Newsletter: Before going over the situation in Venezuela, tell us briefly about your own political course.

Alberto: I was born in Colombia and started as an activist in the student movement. In 1971 I was studying at Technical School and there was a movement for university reform. The ensuing repression resulted in the death of 20 students. The movement spread to secondary schools and the labour movement which demanded wage increases. In 1978 I came to Venezuela and have taken part in the struggle of the labour movement in this country.

International Newsletter : So you have taken part in the whole revolutionary process that Venezuela has gone through since the “Caracazo” ?

Alberto: yes, of course. It has been and remains a very rich process, an experience to be shared with workers all over the continent and the whole world. This process shows it is possible to fight Imperialism and defeat it. Having said that, it is not an easy road and it is often unpredictable. Nobody expected the “Caracazo” of 1989. The Carlos Andres Perez government was implementing IMF plans and in February 1989 announced a wage freeze, an increase in taxes, in the price of staple goods, medication, transport and a whole lot of other things as well as privatisation. Enough for the mass of the people to irrupt on the political scene, dismantle all institutions opening up the revolutionary process. Defence of the Nation was now the order of the day !

International Newsletter: How did Chavez participate in this process ?

Alberto: There was general satisfaction, in the army as well, from where Chavez came. The historical role of the army and its social composition has to be underlined. The combat of Bolivar and other Independence leaders has left a deep trace and a “nationalist sentiment”. The majority of officers and non commissioned officers and a great number of generals come from the people. But since the working class has no class organisation (the CTV was an “apparatus for business”) and because of the lack of a party representing workers , the nationalist sectors in the army have taken on a particular role in the anti Imperialist struggle. Chavez is a product of this combination of factors and interprets popular sentiment.

He tried to get into power in 1992 by a coup d'état, failed and was sent to prison; In 1994 with other insurgents he escaped from prison and was welcomed as a hero by popular sectors. He proposed new institutions, a new Constitution and put a Constituent Assembly on the agenda. Neither the bourgeoisie, nor the media or anybody thought Chavez would win the 1998 elections ! In the Zulia, after Chavez 's victory and the Constituent we set up the “Workers Constituent Front”. This Front claimed : to recuperate social allowance, negotiated by the CTV; to democratise unions and get back the CTV as a union confede-

ration as well as social labour and democratic demands written in the Constitution.

It should be noted that until the 2002 coup , Chavez headed a government that he himself called a “third way” one which sought to “co exist” with transnational companies and negotiate with Imperialism. After the coup d'état, this “coexistence” became difficult.

There was a movement to radicalise among the masses and Chavez who had not touched the State Oil company PDVSA, took control of it since it was a source of big “business” for the transnationals and Imperialism. This is why the Fedecamaras (bosses' organisation), the directors and management of PDVSA organised the “oil strike” which was overcome once again by the masses and in particular by the labour and trade union movement.

International Newsletter: What happened within the trade union movement after the CTV supported the “strike” ?

Alberto: In 2001 , before the strike, the CTV called for elections. We were trying to “recuperate” the Confederation, but we could not come to an agreement against the CTV leadership. After the “strike” there was nothing left to save. The CTV had disqualified itself through its alliance with the Fedecamaras. In 2003 the first assembly of the new union confederation UNET was held. In 2006, at the second Congress, a current C-Cura, tried by anti democratic methods to divide the UNETE. Its aim was to get workers to oppose Chavez on the pretext that it was just another capitalist government. Under this leftist “cover” they are now with the CTV. We made the mistake of letting them use the name UNETE for three long years at extremely important moments for the trade union movement. Union struggle was gaining in force, many unions getting organised outside the CTV, workers confronted with their bosses and transnationals demanded nationalisation of companies and the Sidor struggle in 2008 took on particular importance. All this without an organisation centralising the class struggle. That is why in 2009, from the State of Zulia and the CTR, (Collective of Workers in Revolution, a trade union current that I am part of) we started up a national struggle to relaunch the UNETE. We have succeeded in organising an extraordinary Congress in two sessions, one in December 2009 and the other in April ODF this year. We have adopted the struggle agenda, the UNETE statutes and we have elected a provisional leadership. The challenge to come is the Confederation elections that have not yet been fixed.

International Newsletter: What is the relation between the trade union movement, the UNETE and the Chavez government ?

Alberto: We have no problem about supporting the government's positive measures. We are involved in nationalisation in the towns and country, but we

defend the labour movement and we have even organised strikes so the government answers labour demands.

We are going through a very difficult time, because of the world crisis and difficulties we meet in trying to unify the trade union movement. Bosses murder UNETE union leaders. Labour inspectors do not defend workers: State organisms fire union leaders; collective bargaining contracts that have expired are not under discussion, especially in the public sector. There are bourgeois in the government who are intent on maintaining casual jobs. This is why they are opposed to Labour Reform.

That is why, in spite of considerable progress, we still have to work on this, we need independent worker organisations. If we do not make progress along these lines, the revolutionary process will be in danger.

International Newsletter: Why?

Alberto: Listen, see how inefficient public administration is, it lets 70 million tons of staple goods rot. That is why workers question the governments' capacity in this area. At the same time labour conflict in nationalised companies makes others wonder if it is not better to work in the private sector. This undermines workers and their organisations' support for the government. The bourgeoisie is not stupid and launches a campaign linking the defence of private property – therefore against nationalisation- with the defence of jobs. With the priceless help of CTV leaders and others! In order to progress, these problems must be solved and other measures taken. Venezuela must develop agriculture in the country as nearly 60% of staple goods are imported. As for the control of the exchange rate, in spite of several attempts it has not yet been implemented. To achieve this joint measures are needed,

such as the control of foreign trade and of banks.

International Newsletter: What do you think of the PSUV (Unified Socialist Party of Venezuela) ?

Alberto: The PSUV held its Congress recently and declared itself a party with a nationalist anti-Imperialist programme. But it is a party where the working class has no guaranty of expressing itself. The programme adopted does not mention the defence of workers organisations and the UNETE. It mentions worker control but how is that possible without workers' organisations? The PSUV Congress results have underlined even more the importance of the UNETE.

Even then, we are calling for a volte for its candidates on the 26th September. Chavez, the PSUV are an obstacle for Imperialism. The victory of the pro Imperialist opposition does not suit workers. We do not want to lose ground, we want to make progress in the revolution.



International Newsletter: Finally then, will Venezuela send a delegation to the Open World Conference?

Alberto: Yes of course. I have thought of taking part and we are busy organising a campaign to collect funds to that end. I want to share with comrades from all over the world the experience and the problems we are faced with in Venezuela. I want to get to know the problems of workers in the

US and Europe; to work for the unity of the labour movement against Imperialism and the EU and stop them doing away with all social conquests. This is essential for the progress of our struggle against Imperialism in the world, in defence of independent labour organisations.

The “Anti crisis Programme” a new attempt by capitalists to get workers to pay for solving the problems of their system

As early as summer 2009, the government of the Communists' Party of the Republic of Moldavia had to recognise that the economy of our country had been severely hit by the crisis, contradicting all its pre election declarations of the beginning of the year about the “islet of stability” that Moldavia represented. The



Workers at Cupcini sugar refinery demand : « Renationalise our factory ».

coalition government of all the ex opposition parties that won the legislative elections in July 2009, had to adopt in December an “Economic Stabilisation and Recovery Programme for the Republic of Moldavia for 2009-2011”. As it was rightly indicated in the text, the fall in consumption, following the more than 33% fall in money orders from abroad over the first seven months of the year, was the main reason for the economy coming to a standstill; an economy based on the unenviable model of development depending on consumption and imports and not on investment and export. Moldavia has become part of the global economy as a supplier of cheap labour and as an outlet for exports; it is in an extremely dependent situation.

Over the first six months of 2009 the GDP dropped by 7.8% compared to the same period in 2008 and in the industrial sector, this fall reached 24.3 % for the same period. According to official figures (which generally tend to minimise “disagreeable” statistics) the amount of wages in arrears from January to July 2009 went up 1.7 times in relation to the corresponding period the year before. Unemployment has gone up to the same extent. The

credit crunch has equally affected budget revenue which has fallen by 6.9% leading to an unprecedented deficit of more than 2.5 billion Leis. The level of deficit is up by 8.6% on that of the previous year. The fall in budget revenue is due to the drop in revenue from VAT on imported products and in foreign

trade taxes.

How does the ruling class and its government intend to solve the task of “Economic stabilisation and recovery” ? As in other countries by “ferocious” cut backs in social expenditure. All the “anti crisis” measures in this programme, apart from a few empty phrases about “social defence” and “economic activity recovery”, boil down to an increase in State revenue and cut backs in State expenditure. What's more there is an essential measure of “opening up negotiations with the International Monetary Fund in view of a new Programme of economic and financial policy”, i.e. translated into everyday language, a demand for new credit to cover the deficit. In this field, the coalition government has achieved a frank success, so much so, that, according to the Finance Minister, foreign debt has increased by 208.91 million dollars between January and April 2010 and domestic debt has gone up by 110.5million.

It should be underlined that international financial institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, demand, as a condition for their loans, “structural reforms”, privatisation of State property, public servi-

ces, a drop in the level of social guarantees and the corresponding budget cut backs. Thus, the essential of the measures of this Programme is in fact dictated by the IMF.

To round off its budget, the government intends to increase taxes on luxury products, (cars, perfumes and jewellery), a road tax on private cars, a tax on cigarettes, alcohol, petrol and derived products, a new real estate tax system. It also intends to improve the tax and customs administration system (anticipating the drop in customs' revenue, revaluing profits etc..). But the Programme plans on privatisation of State property being taken up again, 214 companies must be put up for sale, of which 50 + 19 projects actually under construction to be auctioned off in July 2010 and 9 cultural assets (cinemas..) to be put in an "investment contest for the sale of public property".

These measures for increasing revenue for the State budget affect only slightly workers (except for petrol tax which will increase transport costs). The true character of the Programme is apparent in the paragraphs where the government indicates how it intends "optimising" State budget expenditure.

One can only rejoice at bureaucratic apparatus expenditure being cut back and its members' wages being frozen. The situation is so serious that the ruling class had had to resort to such unheard of measures as doing away with the social advantages for its security services, a cut back in army personnel monthly bonuses related to results, the unification of mission expenses for military and special collaborators as well as for judges and public prosecutors.

However the government intends making science, culture, health and social services bear the main brunt of its' cut backs.

According to the Programme, 130 schools out of the Republic's 1 519 are going to be "reorganised" (I.e; closed own), their pupils being transported by bus (funding not provided for) to the remaining schools, some of which will become "district schools". What's more, the number of pupils per class will be increased and the number of classes reduced, as well as the number of subjects taught and the hours of teaching. And all that, as we are told, in the name of "accelerating the process of optimising the schooling network" and of "liberating resources for improving the quality of teaching" !

As for secondary and higher education there are plans for "the introduction of boarding expenses related to cost", a 20% drop in the number of students with grants in higher education (at graduate level a 70 to 50% drop), "the optimisation (i.e. reduction) of the network of professional and specialised education, the increase in the number of contract teachers in higher education", the "development of a basis of legal norms in order to ensure financial autonomy for higher education institutions".

In the health field there are plans for "consolidating and restructuring" hospitals, which obviously means reducing their number and transferring the brunt of their charge on those remaining. What's more the Programme plans to introduce a mechanism of "shared expenses", I.e; an increase in the cost for patients.

In the social services field, there is to be an "adaptation of the index linking the social benefits mechanism to existing economic conditions", i.e., the government can justify these benefits being frozen, the beneficiaries just having to try to cope for survival.

It is also planned to "unify retirement age as well as pension calculation for all categories of pensioners", which means doing away with the possibility of early retirement for certain categories (for example those who work in a health threatening environment). So as not to upset capitalists, the Programme counts on "increasing worker and employer responsibility in minimising costs for absence from work linked to illness or work site accidents, through changing funding sources and the amount of benefit", i.e. cutting back on benefits. What's more, the Programme plans to "examine the possibility of drawing up a retirement model, based on two components, a basic pension and a pension funded by capitalisation", which will lead to the setting up of private pension funds (well known in the West for "letting drop" their clients).

In order to ensure a more efficient social defence for the unemployed (from the point of view of capitalists and their government), there is to be a "change in the mechanism granting unemployment benefits, to encourage the unemployed to look for work and employment services to use existing means more efficiently, through notably, reducing unemployment benefit by 30% after three months and again by 15% after six months".

Whoever is capable of a little reflection, will understand that the the real aim of the "Programme for Economic Stabilisation and Recovery for the republic of Moldavia for 2009-2011" is to make the workers of this country pay for the whole crisis of the capitalist system. But unfortunately, unlike our neighbour Romania, where similar measures have given rise to intense popular reaction, neither employees in education or health services, under threat of being fired, nor students, or the unemployed or workers in companies programmed for privatisation have organised the slightest protest action. It is possible that they do not understand the seriousness of the measures threatening them, but when this Autumn, hundreds of teachers and doctors find themselves out of work while others have their work charge doubled, perhaps then, they will "shake" up their spineless unions that kowtow to the bosses and engage in struggle. However, since there is a possibility that in the Autumn, there is a referendum on the change in the Constitution and early legislative elections, there is the possibility, during that period where the main bourgeois parties in the country will be fighting it out in their struggle for power, of getting the Programme's' main anti social

measures withdrawn; The political crisis at top level, after the 5th April 2009 elections (the riots of 7th April 2009, the boycott by opposition MPs, by PCRM MPs of the election of the President in December 2009) the failure of the PCRM (Party of the Communists of the Republic of Moldavia) at the early elections of July 2009 , makes the ruling class more vulnerable.

Unfortunately the labour movement is still weak and unable to take advantage of circumstances that are favourable to struggle. At the same , time, since the beginning of the crisis there is an increase in labour demonstrations with a higher degree of radicalism . That is how workers in the Goldini and Cupcini sugar refineries , as well as Moldcarton workers came to organise meetings against the violation of labour rights of which they were victims. They added to their other demands , that of re nationalisation (the return to social property/ State property) of their companies. In 2010, since the essential of their demands had not been satisfied , they again came out on demonstration; the 8th and 20th April workers from the Cupcini sugar refinery and inhabitants occupied the Odessa-Brest railway line. In June the workers of the Ferouechty stone quarry (in the suburbs of Kichinev) came out on strike. And

those are only the demonstrations we have heard about.



“Socialism or Barbarism”, those words of Rosa Luxemburg are more relevant to-day than ever. For the survival of this rotten capitalist system of private property , we are deprived of the possibility of normal studies, of proper health care, of the benefit of social security, of jobs and proper housing. Those who have built up their capital through exploiting our labour demand we be “responsible” and accept a “social partnership” But we say : “hands off our rights, we'll not pay for your crisis ! No to social partners-

hip with exploiters !” All over the world the working class is raising the banner of struggle to put an end to this condemned system !

The Moldavian delegation (ex USSR) to the Algiers Conference

TOGO

INTERVIEW WITH PIERRE SENOVO

Pierre Sénouvo is General Secretary of the Federation of Education Employees of the National Union of independent unions of Togo (FETREN-UNSI). On a personal level he participates in the activities of the International Liaison Committee of Workers and Peoples. He talks about the situation in Togo and the reasons for his being present at the Algiers Conference.

The 27th April last, the 50th anniversary of the independence of Togo was celebrated in general indifference by the population. How do you explain this situation ?

The independence (Ablode) of Togo was obtained after the referendum consultations of 27th April 1958 and proclaimed the 27th April 1960. It was a victory over the pursuit of the tutelage regime (first that of the League of Nations , then that of the UN) and over the French Imperialist project of an African French Community. Having appeared in December 1945 , worker trade unions played a determining role in this victory. They asso-

ciated with their social demands, demands of a democratic nature. In demanding , for instance, the right to assemble , unions opened up the road to the right to free political organisation. Several months before the 1958 referendum, it was their strike threat that forced the colonial administration to put up public posters with the list of electors and to issue ordinances giving the right to vote to each “native”, etc. The first democratically elected President was assassinated during the military coup of the 13th January 1963 organised by the French government of the time. A military regime , a true auxiliary to the former coloniser and Imperialism has been in power since that date. It has crushed the people , sold off national resources at a give away price. It implements in servile fashion the plans for pillaging the country dictated by Imperialism. With hopes disappointed , Ablode has seen its contents emptied.... This is what explains the disinterest in the 50th anniversary.

What is the impact on the life of the Togolese population ?

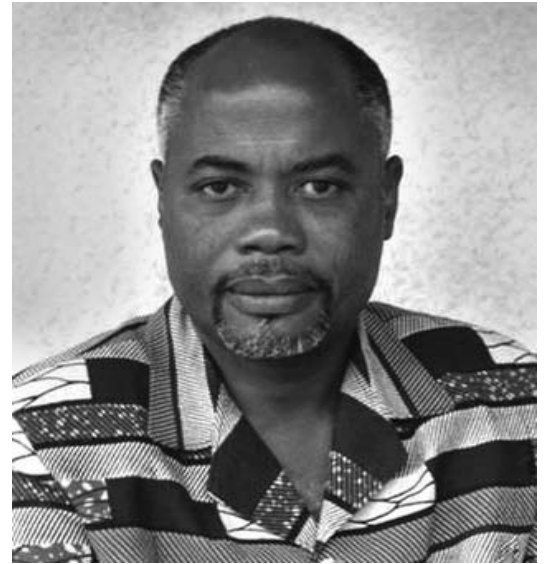
This murderous policy continues to-day. It has led to a lot of privatisation, has supported the IMF in order to oppose wage increases in November 2009. The 19th June 2010 there was the rise (17.45% on average) of oil product prices.

The QUIBB survey (Survey on the basic indicators of well being – editors' note) done in 2006 established a poverty incident of 61.7% with 74.3% in rural areas. Health ? In acute danger. Education ? Ruined. Housing policy ? Non-existent. Access to running water ? A luxury. Electricity ? Expensive and reserved for the privileged in town with frequent power cuts. Road network ? In disuse. In short the public service has been practically killed off. The unemployment and underemployment rate in 2006 has been estimated at more than 32.9% of the active population , which means 83% of the population , estimated at 5 million inhabitants.

Is such a policy possible without the government trying to associate trade union leadership ?

Since the popular uprising of October , the regime has tactically fashioned itself a democratic façade... The previous government had dissolved trade unions from 1972 to set up the National Confederation of Workers of Togo (CNTT), main spring of the one party , State party: the Re Assembly of the people of Togo (RPT). With the “reconquest” of fundamental and democratic liberties from October 1990 on, new unions have seen the day. There are a total of six recognised as active par the International Labour Organisation. Some of

them seem to have been set up by the regime. The attempts at co opting trade unions are expressed in different ways. The national Council for social dialogue (CNDS) is one of the frame-works where this



tendency expresses itself. There are also attempts at implicating unions in the drawing up of the document on strategies for reducing poverty (DSRP) as well as within the framework of negotiations on economic partnership (APE) and in discussions with IMF missions ; they are being drowned , tempted to be stuck in the so called civil society along with NGOs.

Can you tell us in a few words the reasons your comrades and you are preparing to participate in the World Open Conference in Algiers ?

I have just given you a summary of the situation in Togo. A hideous cliché of social calamity. Everything is in a state of ruin, desolation and misery , which has bred rancour all over the country. That is how Imperialism prepares the ground for wars quickly qualified as ethnic. This cliché is in miniature that of the whole of Africa (and Europe soon ?) against which , workers and peoples, their organisations fight to defend their class interests, i.e. to maintain public services and jobs, to fight for renationalisation of privatised companies, for the legitimate and sovereign right of peoples to dispose of national riches, for the implementation of international labour standards and to fight privatisation and redundancies.

The World Open Conference against War and Exploitation in Algeria gives us the chance to exchange views with comrades engaged in similar combat in other countries and to see together how we can co ordinate at international level our struggle against what appears to be a global offensive.

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