

International VIEWPOINT

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Bush sweeps aside peace hopes

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On the brink

AT THE MOMENT of writing, the world is awaiting a decision from George Bush: will he launch the all-out ground offensive that his troops have been preparing actively for more than one month, or will he try Mikhail Gorbachev's "peace plan" that the Iraqi government has already accepted?

A combination of international, regional, Iraqi, military and political factors are involved in the US president's decision making: the international factor relates to the kind of "New World Order" Bush is looking for, that is, one falling under the exclusive and unchallenged hegemony of the US world cop. The Kremlin's move, from that angle, is most embarrassing for the White House, whatever the latter's final decision may be.

This is not only because the peace plan jeopardizes the ground offensive which had been already planned, but also and above all because it represents a political comeback by Moscow on the Middle Eastern stage. This move by the Soviet bureaucracy will restore its prestige among the Arab masses and governments and, if successful, may leave in power a Saddam Hussein who will be more popular than ever in the Arab and Muslim countries (including the Soviet Asian Republics) while more dependent than ever on the USSR.

On the other hand, the possibility of finishing the job without taking great risks involving heavy casualties, is certainly welcome to the US administration. However, they need to be sure that the job of crushing Iraq is really finished and that Saddam, if he remains in power, may be a hero but a clearly vanquished one, prevented from rebuilding his military might by all sorts of provisos, controls and sanctions.

Hence the conditions that they are putting on the Iraqi retreat envisaged in the Soviet plan; insisting that the withdrawal must be very rapid, so as to prevent the Iraqi army from taking back a large part of its material, and refusing to give any guarantees to Baghdad in exchange for the withdrawal of its troops. The problem for Washington is that they have no ready-made and satisfactory alternative to Saddam Hussein, unlike in Grenada and Panama. Had they, their unhesitating decision would have been to carry on their aggression. ★

— Salah Jaber 22/2/91

The US ruling class and the war

BY THE TIME the Persian Gulf war was month old, the ruling class of the United States could take great satisfaction in the performance of its military technology: the virtual destruction of a relatively powerful Third World nation had been accomplished by the use of overwhelming American air power, with very little human cost to the attacking force.

DAVID FINKEL

BUT BEFORE the war actually began, there had been a serious crisis in the US ruling class about whether such a war with Iraq was too risky, or even whether it made any sense at all. Why did capital decide, ultimately, in favor of war? What interests were compelling enough to justify the risks of war, when — as critics of the establishment repeatedly pointed out — the United States faced no threat of a cutoff of oil or any other strategic danger?

An analysis of the debate and its outcome may provide some insight into the way the US ruling class thinks. It also demonstrates the way in which, under certain conditions — particularly when the bourgeoisie itself is uncertain and undecided over policy — the "executive committee of the ruling class", particularly the presidency as opposed to the Congress, plays an extraordinarily powerful role.

A fraudulent debate— and a real one

There were, in fact, two debates, which took place simultaneously. The first, although it occupied most of the Congressional attention, was essentially a fraudulent debate over sanctions: were they working well enough to force Saddam Hussein to capitulate without war? The second, more substantive, debate was essentially over whether the war itself was a good idea for "America's national interest" and the "New World Order".

The second debate was surprisingly open, though ideologically narrow. It was open in the sense that for nearly three

months, there was broadcast testimony before committees of Congress and debates on the editorial opinion pages of major newspapers by people who are high-level government and ruling class advisors. It was narrow, of course, in the sense that the basic justice and rightness of the imperialist objectives in the Gulf was universally taken for granted; the question was whether they were worth having a war over.

This substantive debate did not, in general, pit liberals on the one side against conservatives on the other. The pro-war versus no-war debate cut across the categories of liberal and conservative; but most of the interesting and important arguments on both sides of the issue came mainly from sectors of the right-

wing.

There were a few exceptions. Some African-American political figures and a few whites, notably one Democratic Senator Paul Wellstone (Minnesota), and the independent Socialist Congressman Bernie Sanders (Vermont), argued strongly against the war on moral and left-populist grounds. One Republican Senator, Mark Hatfield (Oregon,) also broke ground with the administration and opposed the war on grounds of principle, not merely tactics.

For the most part, however, anti-war liberals did not intervene in the substantive debate, but relied instead on the argument of "giving sanctions against Iraq time to work." This argument was also unfortunately echoed by a wing of the mass movement protesting the war mobilization. It was self-defeating, because it misunderstood what the sanctions were for.

Whether the sanctions would weaken Iraq if given another nine or 12 months, to the point of forcing Iraq to concede, was basically a technical question. And it is, in fact, almost certainly true that they would have done so, simply because the powers that usually undercut and sabotage sanctions against aggression — the United States and Britain above all — were supporting sanctions in this case.

Sanctions used as cover for mobilization

However, for the Bush administration, the sanctions' purpose was not to force Iraq to concede or even primarily to hurt the Iraqi economy, although that was a desirable side effect. *The sanctions were*

the vehicle through which to mobilize for war.

It was under the banner of sanctions that UN support was mobilized, that the huge strike force was assembled in the Arabian desert and that the pro-war coalition was put together. Between the November 29 UN Security Council resolution 678 and the January 15 deadline, the pro-war coalition reached its strongest and most unified level.

To continue relying on sanctions after January 15, in terms of their *stated* purpose of weakening Iraq, would have been sound technical strategy. But from the standpoint of their *real* purpose — to assemble the pro-war coalition — the sanctions had already completed their work.

So much for the artificial debate over sanctions. What about the more substantial debate as to whether a war in the Gulf would be in the real interests of US imperialism?

The pro-war argument, roughly speaking, was carried by forces who can be called military-statist Keynesians, who have dominated state policy for some time and were particularly prominent in the Reaganite spending spree of the 1980s. Indeed, these elements have been dominant in US administrations of both parties since the beginning of the permanent arms economy.

Military-state Keynesian policies

Especially in the Reagan years, under the ideologically convenient cover of promoting conservative and "free market" values, these military-statist Keynesians have in fact organized and implemented an extraordinary state subsidy of military and high-tech industry, at the expense of the working class and the poor. The so-called collapse of Communism represented a victory for their policy but also a problem: if there was no longer a global enemy, what would justify vast subsidies to the military?

Further, these forces have also run up against a big disadvantage, which surfaced in the debate over the Gulf: in carrying out their massive military buildup, which contributed to THE bankruptcy and virtual collapse of the Soviet Union, they have *also* helped to accelerate the destruction of US capitalism's competitive capacity in relation to Japan and Germany.

These partisans of the military-statist economy, however, have one big advantage: they control the United States government. They therefore controlled the pace of events and the terms of debate. Given the lack of unanimity inside the ruling class about whether this war should be carried out, the fact that Bush, Baker, Cheney, Sununu were at the center or

terms was a decisive factor.

Once they had put 400,000 troops in Saudi Arabia, they were able to advance a strong "use it or lose it" argument. Such an army could not remain there indefinitely in face of growing opposition in the Muslim world, not to mention the effects on the reservists pulled away from their jobs and families.

This point was made almost explicitly in the January Senate debate on authorizing war by two Senators — Bennett Johnson (Dem) of Louisiana and Arlan Specter, a Republican from Pennsylvania. They both said, in effect: I think the sanctions policy was working and it would have been better to continue it. But the choice the president made is to go for war now. And I am going to vote for that.

They were, in short, politically trapped by the administration's ability to create facts and set the terms of the debate. Senator Bennett Johnston said most explicitly of all that the decision for war had been made in November by Bush, not on November 29, the day of the UN resolution, but on November 9, when Bush announced the offensive military capability build-up.

What are the basic assumptions around which this pro-war party was organized? Assumption number one: Arab nationalism must be confronted and crushed. Number two: US force must be used to maintain military and political superiority vis-a-vis all enemies and indeed vis-a-vis our friends. And third: the strategic alliance with Israel remains vital for US domination of the Middle East, even though the Cold War is over, even though the Soviet Union as a military threat no longer exists, and even though Israel was a political liability in this war.

Confrontation with Arab nationalism

Once these premises are accepted — as they are across a wide spectrum of American political discourse — then the reasoning for war was strong. Especially with respect to a confrontation with Arab nationalism. It's a lot easier to confront that nationalism in the brutally military and bureaucratic form of a Saddam Hussein than when it takes the form of the grassroots and democratic Palestinian *intifada*.

With regard to the second premise, if you accept that US forces must be used to maintain political and military superiority — over not only enemies but also over allies — then the argument follows fairly directly that the US must fight now or later and now is better. If the United States didn't use its force effectively now against Saddam, it wouldn't be credible in a future crisis. The power of that argument depended on the way in which the agenda had been set. Having put 400,000 troops out there, the administration could say to their loyal imperialist opposition:

there will be times in the future when you want to have a military option, and if you don't use it now you'll never be able to make it credible.

The argument against the war was voiced by several groups who had much the better of the intellectual argument, but not the political strength of the pro-war faction. First of all, there are genuine conservatives: the vanishing breed who actually believe in the power of the free market to revive American economic power. For authentic conservatives, war is justified only to defend "vital national interests" — that is, when the very existence of the ruling class is at stake.

Such people were ideologically committed to the struggle against Communism and the Soviet Union, but not the permanent massive state subsidy of the military. They found the latter to be a necessary measure when fighting Communism, but don't feel that it is very vital when what is involved is the price of oil, which is going to be set by the free market. They also understand that the US economy absolutely cannot afford the cost of this war, even if Japan and Germany and the Saudi royal house can be blackmailed to finance part of it (which real conservatives regard as humiliating).

Secondly there are some among the liberals — a minority — who don't place the US alliance with Israel above every other consideration. They recognize that the fundamental problems of the region include some kind of Israeli-Palestinian settlement and at least a partial redistribution of oil wealth in the Middle East, neither of which would be advanced by the war undertaken by the Bush team.

Competitors laughing all the way to the bank

Third, and most important, were some pragmatic strategists who have been looking with horror at the economic realities of the US. One such expert, Edward Luttwak, who testified before the Senate, openly ridiculed the pro-war ravings of Henry Kissinger. Luttwak in essence said: The Japanese and the Germans and the Dutch and the Belgians are watching us carry out this adventure in the Gulf and laughing, because they are making money. They are re-tooling their economies, and we're out there in the desert.

A second antiwar expert was Zbigniew Brzezinski; who pointed out that the costs of winning the war might be even greater than the costs of fighting it. Brzezinski argued that the destruction in the Middle East, from which various forms of Islamic fundamentalism as well as Syria might benefit, would force the US to maintain a massive occupation army for many years.

Brzezinski, a former National Security Advisor to Jimmy Carter, also pointed out the cost of keeping the Soviet Union as part of the anti-Iraq coalition. He predicted that Bush's Gulf War meant giving the

Soviet Union freedom to repress the Baltic Republics, and possibly the end of the economic "reforms" in the Soviet Union in which the USSR ruling class has placed such high hopes.

As events showed, Brzezinski was right. Indeed, the predictions of those who argued that American capitalism may lose more than it gains from a victorious Gulf War may prove to be devastatingly accurate. The federal budget deficit for fiscal 1991 alone will exceed \$300 bn; state and local governments are in financial shambles all over the country.

War party creates a fait accompli

Nonetheless the party of war won the debate, not on the merits of their case, but for several reasons that can be briefly summarized.

1. A fairly narrow clique at the center of power, headed by Bush himself, was organizing for war from the very first day of the crisis and controlled the pace of the build-up. The antiwar elements within the elite had to argue on the administration's terms.

2. Secondly, though not the decisive factor, the drive for war was supported from the beginning by the Israel lobby in the US and by at least a substantial fraction of the neo-conservatives who place an extremely high value both on militarism and on Israeli interests.

3. The pro-war argument was backed up with various forms of manipulation and deceit, particularly the initial pretence that sanctions might resolve the crisis without war, which was never the administration's intent. In addition, the costs of the operation were kept deliberately obscure.

4. There was very little principled dissent from the sanctions and the blockade against Iraq. Such dissent would have been necessary, not in order to apologize for Saddam Hussein's butchery in Kuwait and in Iraq, but to break the Bush administration's hegemony in setting the tone and terms of the debate.

5. Finally, and most important, the ruling class was never really against the war. They weren't sure how strongly they were for it, but they never opposed it. The bourgeoisie were willing to hand Bush a tentative mandate at each stage of the war buildup, which he skillfully employed to prepare the following escalation.

And so it was, ultimately, that the United States went to war against the wishes of its own population and with only hesitant and shaky support from its ruling class. With the first night raid on Baghdad, public opinion swung in Bush's favor. To maintain the support of the people and the bourgeoisie for the war, it is necessary above all for Bush and co. to win the war decisively and with few US casualties. On the eve of the ground war, the result still hangs in the balance. ★

SAUDI ARABIA

In the camp of democracy

ACCORDING to Amnesty International, thousands of Yemeni immigrants in Saudi Arabia have, since August 1990, been subject to arbitrary arrest, persecutions and torture, for no other reason than their nationality, and their assumed hostility to the Saudi government's position on the Gulf War.

Thousands of them have been arrested in the street or in school, at home or at their place of work, notably in Jeddah, where there is a large Yemeni community. Some of them, according to the Amnesty report, have been subjected to torture by electricity, beatings on the head and body, being forced to stand for long periods of time, sleep deprivation, total immersion in water and the *falaqa* — blows on the soles of the feet, a favourite with the Saudi regime. These tortures take place in provisional deten-

tion centres, from which the victims are returned to their country, without any legal proceedings.

Besides, as is well known, Saudi Arabia is a country where the Sharia (Islamic law) is applied; amputations and floggings continue to take place. Arbitrariness and torture are commonplace, as well as the holding of political prisoners, secretly and without legal proceedings. ★

JORDAN

Support for Iraq

JORDAN is one of the Arab countries where the masses have most clearly expressed their solidarity with Iraq. The explanation for this is that the majority of the population originates from the territories occupied by Israel in 1948.

Here is an extract from a communique by revolutionary Marxists in Jordan, issued at the start of the assault on Iraq:

"To overcome this aggression, it is necessary to construct the broadest possible front, supporting the people in arms. Those who are today calling for restraint, under the pretext that they do not have the means to enter the battle, aid the imperialist and Zionist plans for the isolation of Iraq, and are responsible for not having prepared for the war.... Our slogan is: 'no to the isolation of the Iraqi army and people'. Every territory can be a front of the combat and the theatre for the struggle against imperialism and Zionism." ★

SYRIA / FRANCE

THE following communiqué was issued in Paris on February 13, 1991, by the National Democratic Assembly of Syria, which includes the Syrian Communist Party, dissident Syrian Ba'athists and others. Among other organizations expressing support for the appeal are the Communist Action Party of Syria, the Tunisian Communist Party and organizations of immigrants from the Arab region in France.

"We, political parties and Arab associations, signatories of this communiqué, forcefully condemn the aggression against Iraq, and all the more the genocide being perpetrated against the Iraqi people. The media disinformation machine in Europe have tried to make us believe that the massacre of over 500 civilians on Wednesday February 13 was due to an error in the surgery of the imperialist war machine.

"We denounce these warmongering pseudo-democrats who, in the name of human rights and international law, massacre a people, and we call on all those with a democratic consciousness to mobilize to put an end to this so-called clean war". ★

Oil slicks — who is responsible?

WHILST warnings from opponents of the Gulf war about its potentially catastrophic environmental effects were scorned by western governments before January 15, Iraq's alleged pumping into the Gulf of enormous amounts of oil has now become yet another justification for the frenzied assault against the country.

The February 3 edition of *Le Journal du Dimanche*, a French weekly newspaper generally considered on the right of the political spectrum, carried some interesting information on the background to the oil slicks currently threatening the delicate environmental balance of the Gulf.

According to its correspondent Claude-Marie Vadrot, "none of the five existing slicks in the gulf have resulted from a voluntary act of piracy, and four out of five are the responsibility of the allied forces".

The first slick dates from the allied bombardment on January 19 of three oil tankers. The second originates from the Kuwaiti reserves of Arabian Oil, bombed on January 20 by French and British planes. A third slick can be attributed to the bombardment by the Iraqis of the reserves of Al Khafji. The fourth is due to the bombardment by the allies of the reserves of Al Ahmadi, and the fifth stems from the bombing by British planes of reserves close to the island of Boubyane.

Vadrot adds "the films shown since last Sunday and the photographs published do not show the famous Kuwaiti oil slick ... some of the images are those of the small oil slick of Al Khafji and probably date from 1983". The current slicks, estimated at around 500,000 tonnes of crude oil, are smaller than those created in 1983 as a result of the Iran-Iraq war, which reached about 600,000 tonnes. ★

Undermining the “peace constitution”

JUNICHI Hirai, a Japanese supporter of the Fourth International, spoke to Colin Meade about the development of the anti-war movement in Japan. The interview took place in early February.

HOW big a shift of policy has involvement in the war represented for the Japanese bourgeoisie?

Soon after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the Japanese government decided to cooperate with the UN military intervention and they decided to send \$4 billion to support the multinational troops in the Middle East. After that, in September, the government attempted to change the clause in the Japanese constitution forbidding it to send troops abroad (see IV 195). They argued that if Japan did not send troops it would be internationally isolated, that it was necessary for international cooperation to maintain the international order. But this proposal was defeated in the parliament, because in the upper house the government does not have the majority, so they abandoned their plans.

But soon after the Gulf War began the government immediately paid another \$9 billion to support the multinational forces and they decided to dispatch an aircraft carrier. So the law has been changed through a cabinet decision.

■ How did the opposition respond to this?

In parliament the Socialist Party is the biggest opposition party. They said that it was necessary to cooperate with the United Nations, but opposed the sending of aircraft carriers. Only the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) opposed this government decision, but the position of the JCP is that the main responsibility for the Gulf War is with Iraq so they demand Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

So this has meant that the Communist and pacifist initiatives in the trade

union movement and the mass movement are completely paralyzed. When I left Japan in early February no demonstration had been called by trade union national centres or the Socialist party, only by independent solidarity groups and social movements.

Of course the Communist Party has called demonstrations against the war but they can only mobilize their own members, and members of trade unions led by the JCP.

■ So there is no united anti-war movement?

Now we have begun to organize a mobilizing committee against the war. On January 26 the first major demonstration in Tokyo mobilized only 1200 people. In February some independent student groups organized a demonstration against the war. We also supported this demonstration and it attracted about 3000 people.

■ Are these demonstrations reported in the press?

Yes, there is a public discussion. According to the opinion polls about 60% of women oppose the Gulf war and the dispatch of the aircraft carrier and sending of money, but about 60 or 70% of men approve the government position. In the newspapers some people support the government position, arguing that Japan is now an international power so that if we don't cooperate with the US we cannot maintain economic activity. But the other opinion is that the Gulf war is

not our war, but a United States war, so it is not necessary to cooperate.

■ Who puts forward the second view?

Almost all the bourgeoisie support the government position, there are no splits inside the bourgeoisie, but some bourgeois intellectuals and scholars, and some famous bourgeois critics, oppose the government position.

■ Using nationalist or humanitarian arguments?

The latter. After the Second World War there was a very big pacifist sentiment among the Japanese people. The Communist Party can no longer mobilize such pacifist sentiments but they still remain.

■ There seems to be a big gap between the sentiment of the population and the anti-war mobilization.

Compared with the 1980s mass movement I think the reaction to this war has been fairly good.

■ Do the anti-war actions get a good response from ordinary people?

Yes, but the main problem is the lack of any nationwide initiative to mobilize people. In several regions there have been many small demonstrations and meetings organized by regional groups, but it is very difficult to unite these actions.

■ Why is this?

I think the problem is that the Japanese mass movement after the Second World War was totally organized through the trade unions and the JCP, but now this has been paralyzed and no national initiative exists.

■ What about anti-war activity in the trade unions?

Some leftist trade union groups exist but they are not very active in the political sphere. However, they held a demonstration on January 25 which mobilized about 20,000 workers, but I think that if the trade union groups, womens' groups and anti-nuclear groups united and called demonstrations and mass meetings this would mobilize more people.

■ What about student reaction?

In Japan there has been a very good reaction from the high school students, who have participated in demonstrations and organized small meetings, but amongst university students there is complete political apathy. ★



Political trials continue, as does opening to the West

THIS year has seen a new wave of political trials in China. *International Viewpoint* asked Yang Hal, editor of *October Review*, a revolutionary Marxist journal published in Hong Kong about the background to the repression. This interview took place at the beginning of February.

sentences handed down to the students and intellectuals are relatively mild, which suggests that the regime does not want to provoke international outcry. Thus, the main student leader got four years in jail. But it is quite different for the veteran democracy movement activists and for the workers. One of these, Ren Wanding, got seven years. The government has refused to make public the sentence on the leader of the workers' picket line group, Han Dongfang. There are further trials going on now in Beijing.

ening up. The bureaucracy has also tried to re-centralize itself. There were decrees passing power back into the hands of the centre. Nonetheless the main trend remains that of seeking the help of capitalist forces to prop up their rule.

The bureaucrats are hanging on and waiting for the death of Deng Xiaoping and not knowing what will come after that. Despite all the directives, individual bureaucrats are fighting for their own interests. There is all kinds of Chinese shadow boxing going on. Sometimes there is more or less open resistance from provincial bureaucracies. For example, the chief of Guangdong province has resisted attempts to move him back to the centre for over a year. Nobody can make him go.

■ Can you tell me about the campaign to oppose these political trials?

After Tiananmen Square many students went into exile. They formed the All-Chinese Students Federation and other groups outside the country. In Hong Kong, part of the work is coordinated by the Hong Kong Alliance, which was set up in May 1989. This brings together 200 organizations, including *October Review*. There is also an international campaign launched by the Tiananmen University of Democracy (see box). They have collected signatures from many countries. They have been collecting from non-governmental organizations, trade unions and political organizations.

Also, people have been sending delegations into China. For example, students in Hong Kong sent an official delegation to ask about the trials — with no success. There was a four day hunger strike by students in Hong Kong, with delegations to

■ Is there continuing evidence of divisions in the bureaucracy? At the time of Tiananmen Square there was much talk about a leader of a faction in the party, Zhao Ziyang, giving at least tacit support to the protests.

There was a power struggle which was accelerated by the democracy movement. After June 1989 one faction wanted to put the blame for the events on Zhao Ziyang. But nothing has in fact been done to him. He has not been put on trial.

To put it another way, there have always been differences, but the differences are over who to blame, who will be the scapegoat, and whether political control should be tightened more or less, or whether there should be control over bureaucrats who engage in profiteering and so on. These are tactical differences.

The trend at the moment is towards strengthening political control, both over the bureaucracy itself and over the population. So there is much emphasis on Socialism and the defence of Socialism. They say that the country should not move towards capitalism and that we need a Socialist market.

On the other hand, the opening to the West has not been stopped. This means that there are contradictory statements. At the same time as they are talking about strengthening Socialism, they are appealing to the West to come to invest in Shanghai, saying that we are going to develop the Eastern, old, part of Shanghai. This will be the biggest free trade zone in China.

After 1989 there has been a tight-

COULD you give some details about the current wave of repression?

Martial law was declared on May 20, 1989 and it continued for eight months. Nonetheless, student demonstrations continued throughout these months, partly under the influence of events in Eastern Europe.

For example the downfall of Ceausescu was celebrated by the breaking of a lot of small bottles — a reference to the party leader Deng Xiaoping, whose name can be read as meaning small bottles. Wall posters were also put up.

Even after one and a half years it seems that there is still a strong social resistance to the regime. This does not express itself through public acts such as demonstrations, but it shows through in the speeches of the party leaders. In March 1990, for example, at the people's congress, the representative of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) said that a lot of soldiers are confronted with humiliation and insults from the people, and this has caused unrest within the army itself. He said that some comrades in the army were considerably perplexed by questions such as: what is the future of the Socialist system?

Given the repression, precise information is hard to come by, but besides occasional student protests, there are also reports of protests by workers. For example, at the end of 1989, there was a conflict over wages in the biggest steelworks in Beijing, where there are 220,000 workers. They were angry at the stopping of bonuses and the fact that the management forces them to buy state bonds.

With the present wave of trials, it seems that the bureaucracy is trying to bring an end to the unrest. At the same time the

The crime of subversion

CHEN ZIMING and Wang Jungtao, two leaders of China's pro-democracy movement were sentenced to 13 years each in jail on Tuesday February 12, 1991. They were found guilty of bringing together illegal organizations and conducting "a series of activities to subvert the government". These trials come after those of nine student leaders who received sentences of between 2 and 4 years on subversion charges.

Many trials however have not been made public. The human rights' organization Asia Watch has a list of 960 political prisoners, but claims that family members often do not dare seek help from foreigners for fear of reprisals (*International Herald Tribune*, February 15, 1991).

the official Chinese Xinhua News Agency.

Campaigns have continued at various levels throughout the world. For example, before the Hong Kong delegation, there was a joint delegation of people of Chinese origin from a number of countries, such as the USA, Britain and so on. They went to China, where they were treated roughly and told to leave. There has also been a delegation from the French Médecins Sans Frontières group. This kind of unspectacular action has been going on all the time, but it has been overshadowed by the Gulf War.

■ **Are there differences inside the defence campaign, for example, efforts at manipulation by the Taiwanese government?**

There have always been pressures from the Taiwanese government and rightwing forces overseas, but this is a broad movement.

The main sentiment is for democracy in China and liberal intellectuals play the predominant role. But there is also a significant pro-socialist current. When there is an action, people of all political persuasions, and none, mobilize.

■ **What impact do you think the blatant American collusion with Beijing has had on pro-democracy public opinion?**

At the moment the focus is still on the Chinese government, which has been using the Gulf War to cover up its own misdeeds. There were hopes in pressure from the Americans. But partly as a result of the American government's actions over the past year and a half — top level contacts with Beijing, maintenance of most-favoured nation status — people are reflecting.

■ **What are the feelings among defence campaign activists concerning the situation in Tibet and in the West of China generally?**

The state of emergency there has been lifted. But in reality there is still a state of siege. At the same time the Beijing regime has made approaches to the Dalai Lama, who is in exile in India, concerning talks.

In 1989, at the Geneva UN Commission on Human Rights, there was some cooperation between the Tibetans and the Chinese democracy people. But it is not so conspicuous at the moment. In Hong Kong, people want to signal to the Chinese people that they are not isolated, to stop them from becoming demoralized. There is still a good turn out on the demonstrations — 3,000 came out to protest against these recent trials.

The main aim of the signature campaign is to let people inside China know that they have support outside, so that they do not just hear from Bush or Major or whoever. ★

On behalf of imprisoned pro-democracy activists

WE PUBLISH below the preamble to an international petition from non-governmental organizations against the repression in China. It was written before the outcome of the recent wave of trials was known (see box on p. 7). The text of the petition reads:

"We the undersigned individuals and organizations, hereby make the following urgent appeal to the Chinese Government:

"To release, immediately and unconditionally, all those currently imprisoned in China on account of their peaceful exercise of the rights of free expression, association and public demonstration during the 1989 pro-democracy movement, and also all those imprisoned on these grounds prior to 1989.

"To cease forthwith carrying out any further acts of repression against China's peaceful pro-democracy movement, and to take all necessary measures to return China to the rule of law and democratic process."

For further information and copies of the petition, contact *October Review* or the Tiananmen University of Democracy at the addresses in the box below.

DOCUMENT

THE crackdown of June 1989

THE true extent of the human toll exacted by the Chinese authorities in the course of their systematic crushing of the pro-democracy movement in China since June 4, 1989 may never be fully known. Somewhere near 1000 people, most of them peaceful demonstrators or innocent bystanders, were killed by troops or crushed to death by army vehicles on the night of June 3-4. Many thousands more — variously described by the Beijing regime as "counter-revolutionaries", "thugs" or "black hands of the rebellion" — were hunted down and arrested in the weeks and months that followed.

The government-controlled media reported, for example, 2,578 arrests of pro-democracy activists in Beijing alone in the 24 days after June 4.¹ Many more were arrested in the capital thereafter. The crackdown in other parts of China was hardly less severe: during the three-day period July 13-15, 1989, over 3,000 people were officially reported to have been arrested in Jiangsu province for their "crimes" of participation in the movement, and similar statistics were declared by other provincial authorities.

Throughout 1990, arrests of those active in the movement — students, workers and intellectuals — continued to take place, and several major figures were secretly brought to trial and heavily sentenced. Typical examples include Ding Xunzhe, an instructor at Shanxi

University's philosophy department, who was tried in July 1990 and sentenced to 12 years imprisonment for his pro-democracy activities; and Chen Zhixiang, a teacher at the Guangzhou Seaman's School, who in January 1990 was tried and sentenced to ten years imprisonment merely for having displayed protest posters in Guangzhou after the June 4 Beijing massacre.²

The upcoming show trials

Just recently, moreover, in late 1990, several dozens of the top student and intellectual leaders of the pro-democracy movement were singled out by the authorities for exemplary punishment as the "sinister masterminds" and "black hands" of the pro-democracy movement, and show trials of these people are scheduled to take place in January and February 1991. Those about to go on trial in Beijing include student leaders Wang Dan and Zhou Yongjun; well-known intellectuals such as Wang Juntao and Chen Ziming, who have been pro-democracy activists for many years, and Liu Xiaobo, an outspoken literary critic; and workers' leader Ren Wanding, a long-standing pro-democracy activist who in 1978 founded China's first ever human rights' organization, and Han Dongfang, leader of the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation.

The Chinese government has for many years claimed, quite falsely, that there are "no political prisoners in China". According to the authorities, since dissidents are

convicted under the criminal law, this makes them criminals rather than political prisoners. Overlooked is the fact that the charge on which dissidents in China are generally tried — namely “counter-revolution” — is itself entirely political in nature.

The “Disappeared”

TO DATE, the government has announced the release of a total of 881 of those detained since the crackdown began in June 1989. The authorities have provided the names of only a handful of these people, however, and the remainder of the announced releases have not been independently verified. Moreover, the

releases have been carefully timed by Beijing in order to placate international outrage at the repression and to head off economic sanctions by the West.

Of the thousands more whose arrests the authorities reported after June 4, 1989 (usually without giving names), nothing has since been heard. These people have simply disappeared, it seems, into the vast Chinese prison system, either left to languish in the pre-trial detention centers, at the mercy of police wardens whose routine abuse and torture of criminal suspects is well-documented, or else dispatched to serve lengthy prison terms after summary proceedings whose outcome was predetermined by the political authorities.

The Tiananmen University of Democracy

THE Tiananmen University of University (overseas) (TAMUD) was founded in autumn 1989. According to a statement by the University in January 1991:

“... From January to December 1990, we ran over 50 two month courses which range from ABC on China’s social, economic and political problems, the history of democracy movements in contemporary China, the political and social changes in Hong Kong, the transformations of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, the examination of theories of feminism, democratic socialism and civil society, to courses on the use of audio-visual aids to document social movements.

“Another area of our work is that of organizing discussion groups and symposia. So far, we have organized four symposia on the crisis in China, hegemony and cultural strategies, autocracy in China and people’s livelihood in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Over 20 discussion seminars have been held, covering topics such as current ideological trends in China, the Japanese workers movement, the unification of Germany, the Indochina dilemma, the world capitalist system and the prospects for the overseas democracy movement.

“Publication is also an essential means of reaching out and communicating with others. We have our own journal, the Tiananmen Review. We also publish Tiananmen Books. At the moment, we are working on three books, one written by a student leader active in the 1989 Chinese Democracy Movement, one a translation of an anthology of essays by Vaclav Havel, and the third a translation of an anthology of essays by Soviet Marxist dissident Boris Kagarlitsky.

We hope these books will find their way into China....

“Joint activities with other groups are not confined to Hong Kong. In opposition to the expansion of Japanese militarism in trying to put through the United Nations Peace and Cooperation Bill in the Japanese Diet so as to allow for Japanese troops to be sent to the Middle East, Japan’s independent organizations, the Pacific Area Resource Centre, through ARENA, invited local groups in Hong Kong to join in a signature campaign against the Japanese government’s action. The Tiananmen University of Democracy took part in the coordination of the signature campaign in Hong Kong.

“The Tiananmen archives are also being built and we now have quite a good collection especially of samizdat democracy movement materials from China since 1949.

“...the Foundation has as its principle non-affiliation to any political parties or groups. We welcome exchange and interflow with all individuals and groups with genuine inclination towards democracy and peace.”

The permanent address of TAMUD Foundation is:

TAMUD Foundation, PO Box, 166121, Chicago IL 60616-6121, USA. Donations are welcome, Cheques can be drawn payable to Merrill Lynch #626-04254 Name/o TAMUD and mailed to either the Chicago or the Hong Kong address.

The Hong Kong Organizing Committee of the Tiananmen University of Democracy (Overseas) can be contacted at: 28, Stone Nullah Lane, First floor, Wanchai, Hong Kong. Tel and fax: (852) 572-5057.

Or via *October Review*, GPO Box 10144, Hong Kong. ★

In June 1990, the Chinese authorities stated that only 355 pro-democracy prisoners (again, no names were given) remained under investigation in Beijing. Clearly, these various statistics simply do not add up, and according to Western diplomats recently interviewed in Beijing, the true numbers of pro-democracy detainees “is probably still in the thousands.”³

The Chinese authorities have made strenuous efforts to conceal the scope of the crackdown, using all their powers of news censorship in the attempt to divert outside criticism. Often little is known of the detainees other than their names, and sometimes where they were arrested; if even this much is made known, however, then at least those concerned will not become the “non-persons” the authorities would clearly prefer them to be. They will not simply be forgotten.

Suppression of the workers

ALTHOUGH the authorities will shortly put on trial several dozen of the top students and intellectuals who led the 1989 Tiananmen Square pro-democracy movement, the majority of those detained since the crackdown have in fact been workers, rather than students and intellectuals. Most of the fatalities on the night of June 3-4, 1989 were of workers and 45 of the 49 announced executions arising from the pro-democracy movement have also been of workers (the other four executed were peasants).

Han Dongfang, leader of the Beijing Workers Autonomous Federation, has been held in harsh prison conditions and solitary confinement despite a deteriorating medical condition which has required him to be hospitalized six times since his arrest in June 1989. In general, since the June 1989 crackdown, detained workers seem simply to have been excluded from government statements concerning the numbers of imprisoned pro-democracy activists.

China’s long-term political prisoners

THE forerunners of the 1989 pro-democracy activists, those who ten years ago edited bulletins or placed posters on Beijing’s “Democracy Wall”, have paid a bitterly heavy price. People such as **Wei Jingsheng**, **Wang Xizhe** and **Xu Wenli** were handed 14-15 year prison terms and are still enduring solitary confinement in prison for expressing their political views at the outset of the Deng Xiaoping era. They have been adopted by Amnesty International as “prisoners of conscience.” ★

1. *Beijing Youth News*, cited in Agence France Press, December 5, 1989.

2. Much of the information is based on documentation compiled by Asia Watch, a New York-based human rights organization.

3. *United Press International*, August 15, 1990.

Mounting tensions before Communist Party Congress

THE SEVENTH Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) is to be held in May 1991. For a long time, the leadership has been working on the drafting of the preparatory documents. The 9th and 10th plenums of the Central Committee, held in August and November 1990, were supposed to finalize these documents. Two draft resolutions have been submitted for general discussion¹. A new plenum, the 11th, nonetheless had to be convened in January 1991, and it ended on a note of disagreement.

After a six day meeting, only a brief communique was published, announcing that "numerous important ideas had been presented with a view to improving the quality of the draft political report"². Which, clearly, means that the initial document has been put into question. The divisions appearing inside the VCP leadership are profound, reflecting a dramatic national and international situation for the regime, as well as the continued erosion of the authority of the party. The Political Bureau is seeking to smother the movement of democratic reform launched at the previous Congress. Nonetheless, the echo of events in the USSR and Eastern Europe is great in Vietnam.

PIERRE ROUSSET

THE 6th Congress of the VCP was held in December 1986, under the banner of reform³. The draft political report was rejected and replaced by a more self-critical version. Nguyen Van Linh, then a convinced reformer, was elected general secretary. The key formulae of *doi moi* (renewal) and *tu duy moi* (new thought) corresponded not only to the notion of *perestroika* (economic liberalization) but also to that of *glasnost* (openness). The slogan in vogue was "*noi thang noi that*" (speak clearly, speak the truth). The period from 1987 to mid-1988 was one of political and intellectual liberalization⁴.

However, faced with sharpening internal tensions and the evolution of the world situation, the Political Bureau rapidly moved towards a bureaucratic and repressive response.

It denounced Solidarnosc as the agent of the Polish "counter-revolution", and kept silent on the Tiananmen square massacre of June 1989 in China. It seems to have drawn only conservative lessons from the crisis of the East European and Soviet regimes. It is aware that the cessa-

tion of aid from the former "brother countries" heralds difficult times, despite a temporary improvement in numerous economic indices. It is conscious also of the fact that the United States has maintained its embargo against Vietnam, despite the withdrawal of the latter's forces from Cambodia.

On July 18, 1988, Nguyen Van Linh himself declared without ambiguity "we reject the demands of those who call for the free existence of several political schools, as is the case in some socialist countries"⁵. Since then, the VCP leadership has sought to pursue liberalization on the economic plane while freezing everything on the political plane. It hopes that the VCP can maintain this orientation without provoking the same mass opposition as in Eastern Europe.

It relies on the historic legitimacy of the VCP, which has been won through fierce struggle, in the course of the long fight for national liberation and social revolution — something which sets the VCP apart from most of its European equivalents.

The national, revolutionary and historic

roots of the VCP are incontestable. This means that the VCP is radically different from parties like those which ruled Poland or East Germany. But it is not a guarantee against bureaucratic degeneration, "becoming distant from the people", or a general crisis of the regime. The precedents of the Russian, Chinese or Yugoslav Communist Parties are unhappily there to confirm it — all three benefitted from such a legitimacy, and the first among them was moreover armed with a programme of socialist democracy considerably superior to anything the Vietnamese have ever had. Today, in Vietnam, the VCP is no longer judged by its past, but by its present action. It is on this terrain that its authority is being contested.

The VCP leadership is combining measures of political repression with economic concessions benefitting certain social sectors. The peasants have been given more facilities to recover the use of collectivized land. The market in agricultural products is essentially free, and private commerce flourishes. When students demonstrated in May 1990, denouncing their conditions of work, funds were immediately freed to meet their demands.

Reductions in military expenditure

The regime has taken comfort from a certain number of successes in the agrarian, budgetary and monetary fields. Inflation reached 700-1000% in 1988. In 1989, it was brought back to less than 10%. The value of the dong, the Vietnamese unit of currency, has temporarily stabilized against the dollar. Above all, the alignment of the official rate of exchange with that of the free market allowed the halting of the black market in money. Pricing policy was reformed. Transactions in gold were freed up. Military expenditures are being progressively reduced. The Gross National Product has begun to grow again. The most spectacular results have been in the production of rice.

In 1987, Vietnam produced only 15 million tons of rice or rice equivalents. 12% of the population were affected by malnutrition and food shortages. The rectification began in 1988, following the generalization of the "khoan" (the contracts authorizing the expansion of family agriculture), the reforms decided by the 6th Congress of the VCP, the introduction

1. The "Programme for the construction of socialism during the stage of transition" and a text entitled "Strategy of socio-economic development from now to the year 2000 and principle orientations of the five year plan 1991-95".

2. Communiqué of January 14, 1991, cited by Murray Hiebert, *Far Eastern Economic Review* (FEER), January 31, 1991.

3. See IV 112, January 26, 1987.

4. Camille Scalabrino, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1989.

5. Cited by Daniel Hemery and Nguyen Duc Nhuan, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1989.



of long term (15 year) contracts giving better guarantees to peasants, public investment in irrigation and relatively good climatic conditions.

In 1989, Vietnam became the third exporter of rice in the world, behind the United States and Thailand — this against a veritable trade barrage constructed by the US government in defense of its own farmers. In 1990 it produced 21.5 million tons, a record figure. Significant regional contrasts continue to exist. The province of Nghe-Tinh, poor, situated in Central Vietnam, has still been affected by famine. Infant malnutrition has not been eradicated. 90% of the export capacities come in fact from the rich Mekong Delta, in the south. But the Red River delta, in the north, has nonetheless attained self sufficiency.

Incentives for foreign investment

Vietnam has promulgated a law on foreign investments said to be the least restrictive in Asia. It has created free trade zones, despite the fact that the balance sheet of such zones in other countries is far from positive⁷. Recently, more foreign capital has been attracted to Vietnam.

The chief areas concerned are off-shore oil exploration, agriculture and marine products. US capitalists are still placed outside the game by the embargo decreed by their government against Vietnam. The Europeans (British, French, Dutch, Finnish) account for the lion's share, followed by the Asiatics (Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, India, South Korea), Australia and now Japan.

Shell (Anglo-Dutch), British Petroleum (British) and Total (French) are all involved. The export of coal could also perhaps be stimulated by the increase in oil prices. Late in the day though it is, the economic isolation of Vietnam is decreasing. But the US veto still forbids the international financial institutions from unfreezing development aid.

The administration denies that it is pursuing a policy of unrestrained liberalization. Nho Bha Thanh, president of the Union of Women, a lawyer who participated in the elaboration of the law on foreign investments, has said: "We do not

want the anarchy that we see in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe... I see terrible problems of unemployment"⁸. However, the financial rectification took place at the end of an austerity plan which earned Vietnam the felicitations of the International Monetary Fund. There is a great contrast between the social layers which have benefited from the reforms (peasants, traders) and those who have seen their incomes eroded — the wage earners no longer indexed against price rises (workers and employees, civil servants and teachers, managers).

Unemployment is a major problem. Numerous Vietnamese emigré workers in Eastern Europe and the Middle East — 16,000 of them in Iraq — have been expelled or deprived of resources, or have confronted an unbridled racism in the former "brother countries"⁹. The army is partially demobilized. Many civil servants have been dismissed to reduce the weight of a bloated administration. New generations of youth are arriving en masse on the labour market.

Numerous state enterprises have gone bankrupt, deprived of traditional public subsidies, subject to the competition of the new private sector, massive imports of cheap consumer products (notably from China) and smuggling which takes on considerable proportions. With the autonomy accorded to production units, market relations are developing between enterprises.

The share of the state economic sector has fallen. The other sectors (private, family, collective workshops and small cooperatives) represent 90% of the production of rice, 56% of coffee, almost 100% of fruit, vegetables and eggs, and 50% of industrial products¹⁰.

Public services such as health and education are deteriorating. Medicines and school materials are insufficient. As to personnel, remarkably numerous for a third world country, they are often obliged to take on other work in order to make a living. The cost of housing is rising. Some of the principal social gains of the Vietnamese revolution, like free health care, are being put into question. For the first time, the regime has also introduced a progressive tax on income.

Soviet Union withdraws its forces

In these conditions, the social crisis could deepen in the medium term. Corruption is significant, fed by an important parallel economy. Some thousands of cadres have been expelled from the CP for this. Drugs and prostitution are again social curses. Moreover, the recent economic gains could be rapidly undermined.

A series of financial scandals have broken out, starting from March 1990, reviving inflation. The USSR, for its part, is withdrawing strategically from the



peninsula. It is abandoning the use of the aeronaval base of Cam Ranh and ending, this year, the privileged commercial contracts which linked it to Vietnam. Parallel to this, the VCP has symbolically downgraded the level of its relations with Moscow, by suppressing the special section of the Central Committee charged with following this key element of its international policy.

The consequences of the Soviet withdrawal will be heavy. The level of aid will fall by 50% in 1991, and continue to fall afterwards. Henceforth, Vietnamese imports must be paid for in hard cash, at world market prices. Export contracts with the European "brother countries" are less and less significant. In 1989, the USSR accounted for 100% of Vietnam's imports of oil (Vietnam does not possess refining facilities), 90% for steel, 80% for cotton, and 80% for fertilizers. Moscow's new policy could then contribute very directly to a renewed inflation, increased unemployment, a growth of the trade deficit, and the reduction of foreign currency reserves, and could consequently discourage western investors.

Economic rectification faces crisis

The Vietnamese leadership now recognizes that the period opening up is going to be very difficult. But the fragility of the Vietnamese economic rectification has been at the heart of the polemics opened by the triumphalist and repressive position adopted in March 1990 by the 8th plenum of the CC. The daily paper of the Patriotic Front said that there "could not be stability when the democratic rights of the people are gravely violated, when unemployment increases instead of falling, when social differences accentuate themselves and social justice is ridiculed, when scarce resources are invested in

6. Murray Heibert, *FEER*, May 10, 1990; Camille Scalabrino, op. cit.

7. See *IV* 196, December 10, 1990.

8. Cited by Tim Shorock, *La Brèche*, December 27, 1990.

9. See on this subject the dossier printed in *Chroniques Vietnamiennes*, no. 8-9, Spring-Summer 1990.

10. According to the *International Herald Tribune*, August 20, 1990.

11. Dinh Hieu, in *Dai Doan Ket*, no. 20, May 9, 1990. Cited by Phong Quang, *Doan Ket* (Paris), no. 423, May 1990.

non-productive sectors, when a whole layer of people live in insolent luxury through fraud, corruption, shady currency and export quota deals, smuggling of imported merchandise, [...] when officials with established responsibilities risk no more than deferred sentences, when the cadres in whom the people no longer have confidence continue to be named to new posts, when education, health and social security continue to deteriorate everywhere except in the conferences and colloquies...."¹¹.

A lively opposition is expressing itself on the question of the democracy inside the party and its peripheral organizations, as in the administration and the (para)Communist press. It is this which the administration wants above all to silence.

During the summer of 1988, the Socialist and Democratic Parties — satellites of the CP which in 40 years of existence have never yet shown any insubordination — were dissolved. Their newspapers, in which numerous Communist intellectuals expressed themselves freely enough, have disappeared: *To Quoc* (Country) and *Doc Lap* (Independence).

Concerted attack on press freedom

What is taking place is a concerted attack on the freedom of even the Communist press. Nguyen Ngoc, editor in chief of the review *Van Nghe* (Letters and Arts), has been dismissed. Xuan Cang, editor in chief of the trade union daily *Lao Dong* (Labour), has been replaced. To Hoa, editor in chief of the Saigon daily *Gai Phong*, has been made to retire. The writer Bui Minh Quoc, editor in chief of the review *Lang Bien*, has been expelled from the CP.

In Ho Chi Minh City, *Tuoi Tre* (Youth) has been asked to moderate its tone. In Hue, the *Song Huong* (The River of Perfumes), has been forbidden from publication for "administrative" reasons. Other regional newspapers are disappearing. Tran Do, a member of the CC and a general at the historic battle of Dien Bien Phu, has been relieved of his responsibilities in the commission of cultural and artistic affairs¹².

Duong Thu Huong, a writer and a Communist who volunteered, during the war against the US, to work in one of the most heavily bombed provinces of Vietnam, has been expelled from the CP. Questioned in March 1990 by the Central Commission of the organization, she did not hide her opinions. "There is nobody in the Political Bureau today who is capable of responding to the aspirations of the people. No more could one find there people able to assure the transition, to help change the course of history [...] If the state and the party do not undertake true and radical reforms [...] then it is certain that blood will flow. The decades of ranc-

or and repression, the weight of the bureaucracy, oppressive and omnipresent, the despair of the masses (and particularly the youth) before the future, their demand to live at last as it is necessary to live, their hopes raised by the news coming from abroad (and which can no longer be stopped)... all this renders disorder inevitable.

"Our people has spilled too much of its blood, it is necessary at all costs to spare it pointless suffering. This country is everywhere sown with cemeteries. Let us not add more to this spectacle of desolation".

The spectre of the Chinese repression at Tiananmen Square in June 1989 haunts numerous militants in Vietnam. It is condemned in private by VCP leaders, according to Camille Scalabrino, but never in public. Ta Ba Tang, a representative of the Veterans' Club of South Vietnam, denouncing the blocking of political reforms, noted that "Tiananmen must serve as a warning to the party in showing that it is on a dangerous orientation"¹³.

Crisis of pro-Hanoi diaspora organizations

The policy of normalization struck also the "Viet kieu patriots", the Vietnamese of the diaspora favourable to the regime. On January 22, 1990, some 34 members and leaders of associations of Vietnamese abroad made public a "Letter addressed to the leaders of Vietnam, to the Vietnamese of the interior and overseas on the restructuring of the political institutions".

"In the space of seven months, the bloody repression in China and the fall of the Ceausescu dictatorship have shown the total bankruptcy of a certain model of socialism, established by Stalin in the Soviet Union in the 1930s [...] To avoid our country's falling into the tragedy of Tiananmen and Bucharest, it is necessary above all to recognize that the profound crisis with which Vietnam wrestles today cannot be resolved by repression or violence, but by appropriate political methods...".

The signatories called on "the current leaders of Vietnam, who have contributed so much to the cause of independence and of national unity, to undertake without delay a restructuring of the existing political system:

1. Through separating effectively the party apparatus from all the institutions of the state, returning to the latter the totality of judicial, executive and legislative powers, so that no individual, no organization can place themselves above the state or interfere in its functioning.

2. Through installing a pluralist democracy which will genuinely guarantee the security of individuals, as well as freedom of expression, information, meeting, association, formation of political parties, [all Vietnamese without distinction being

able] through free elections, to control the direction of the state.

3. Immediately, through opening a sincere dialogue with the whole of civil society, [...] to build the bases of a regime which genuinely emanates from the people"¹⁴.

The "Letter" only presents the essential elements of any democratic reform of a regime in transition to socialism. But it challenges the traditional conception of the VCP, according to which the "party leads", whereas the state contents itself to "administer" society, whilst the people exercises (how?) its "right as collective ruler".

In place of "sincere dialogue", the regime has had recourse to retaliation. Certain signatories have seen themselves forbidden entry to Vietnam until 1995, the year 2000, or permanently! The accusation of anti-communism has been brandished by the controlled media. According to an internal bulletin for VCP members in Hanoi, two of the signatories are even participants in an "international conspiracy seeking to overthrow the socialist state"¹⁵.

In March 1989, the 7th plenum of the Central Committee in its majority condemned "pluralism" as well as any notion of a "counterweight" to its power. It reaffirmed the constitutional leading role of the VCP — defending thus the regime of the single party and the monopoly exercised by the bureaucracy on political life. On the 60th anniversary of the creation of the VCP, the general secretary Nguyen Van Linh reiterated this point of view, affirming that in Vietnam "apart from the Communist Party, no party representing any class, any social layer, is in a position to assume this [leading] role...In the conditions of Vietnam today and tomorrow, there exists no objective necessity for the creation of opposition parties"¹⁶.

Dramatic Impact of East German events

To the notion of the single party corresponds that of internal monolithism, of solidarity of leadership circles which must settle their differences between themselves, without any appeal to the members or the population. But the pressure of events in 1989 was too strong for

12. See Phong Quang, *Doan Ket*, no. 414-415, June-July 1989 and no. 417, October 1989.

13. The virtually complete text of the replies of Duong Thu Huong is reproduced in French in *Doan Ket*, no. 425, July-August 1990. Camille Scalabrino, op. cit. Ta Ba Tang is cited by Nick Malloni, *FEER*, March 29, 1990.

14. This "letter" is reproduced in *Chroniques Vietnamiennes*, no. 8-9. On the beginning of the crisis in the organizations of the "viet kieu patriots" abroad, see the article of Hoang Giang in *Chroniques Vietnamiennes* no. 6-7, Autumn-Winter 1989. At the end of June, this letter had received 650 signatures.

15. See Tran Minh in *Doan Ket*, no.424, June 1990.

16. Cited by Phong Quang, *Doan Ket*, no.421, February-March 1990.

17. *Doan Ket*, no. 420, January 1990.

the tensions not to appear in broad daylight. The collapse of the East German Stalinist regime was certainly felt in a dramatic fashion — the GDR had been almost a model. For the 7th plenum of the CC, the events in Eastern Europe were only the product of an imperialist conspiracy.

This position becoming untenable, the Political Bureau had to adopt, on December 3, a resolution which made the “brother parties” responsible for the crisis, provoked “firstly” by the policy of “the leadership of the party [...] which gravely violated socialist democracy [...] refused to take into account the role of the people”. Other errors having been committed, the “non-antagonistic contradictions born in the socialist countries [...] became antagonistic”¹⁷.

Quang Dao, president of the National Assembly and member of the Executive Bureau of the CC, came back to this question in a meeting organized by the review *Dai Doan Ket*. Concerning the USSR, he judged erroneous the following orientations:

1. The abandonment of the NEP (New Economic Policy) at the end of the 1920s;
2. The installation of a totalitarian regime: “In place of the dictatorship of class, (exercised by) the whole of the working people, was substituted the dictatorship exercised by the party in the name of the workers. It is the party which decides everything. In reality, it is not even the party, but a party committee and sometimes a group of people, indeed a single person. The result is a totalitarian regime based on privileges, a regime which has produced a layer of privileged leaders exercising power above the people, a regime of social injustice which impels the people towards revolt”.
3. “There has not been a correct consciousness concerning the relationship between the party and the regime [...] After the conquest of power, the party [became] bureaucratized”.

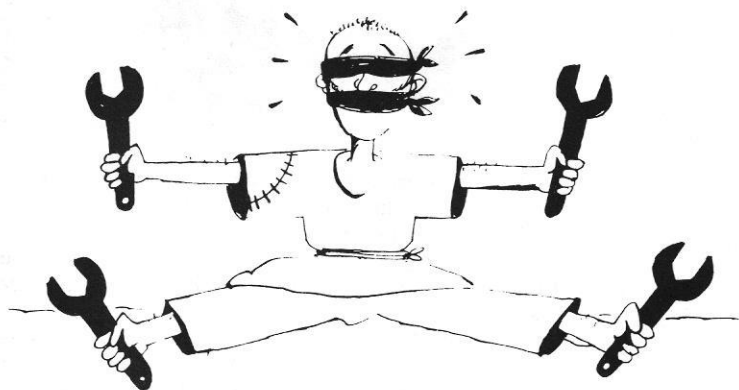
Harsh picture of state of Communist Party

In concluding his analysis, Le Quang Dao drew a very severe picture of the state of the VCP itself, judging that, because of corruption in particular, “30% of party members deserve to be thrown out, 50% have committed no major faults justifying their expulsion, but they serve no particular use. In the period before the conquest of power, we had a theory of the construction of the party. After gaining power, we no longer have it”.

In December 1988 a member of the

Political Bureau, Tran Xuan Bach, publicly attacked the line of the leadership, saying that “those who hide and block information from circulating are the last of the old fashioned. It is necessary to give all the information so that each can choose.

“It is unthinkable that Asia will experience stability whilst Eastern Europe is boiling over [...] All the socialist countries, carried by this movement of progress, know great contradictions; they must break the shackles of the old. Nobody can reassure himself in thinking



himself sheltered. You can pride yourself one day on being above the melee, and be overthrown the next”.

He affirmed that it is necessary to know how to “walk on two legs” and to follow a policy of both economic and political reform. “We must ask the pardon of Marx for having deformed his doctrine. We have chosen a model [of development] and this model is none other than a combination between the Western model [Stalinist] and the Eastern model [Maoist]. The question today is to find a means of abandoning these two dogmatic models”¹⁸. As the price of his indiscipline, Tran Xuan Bach was dismissed from all his functions by the 8th plenum of the CC, in March 1990.

The Vietnamese leadership is, by all the evidence, the theater of intense internal conflicts. Reflecting the struggles of clans and factions, they nonetheless touch on true divergences of orientation. What is happening in Eastern Europe and the USSR shows that they must not be ignored.

The crisis is smouldering in Vietnam and it is still very difficult to predict how the different components of the apparatus are going to face up to it. The secrecy of the deliberations facilitates the various toings and froings. Nguyen Van Linh, yesterday spokesperson of the reformers, is today an ultra of normalization.

Tran Xuan Bach, today a quasi-dissident, was a protege of Le Duc Tho, recently deceased and considered as the arch-conservative. Only some govern-

mental personalities, like Vo Nguyen Giap, Minister of Defence, and Nguyen Co Tach, Minister of Foreign Affairs, have the reputation of having been, in these last years, “reformers” of consequence. Both must moreover regularly face up to strong bureaucratic pressures.

However, the evolution of the orientations and the relations of forces inside the ruling apparatus of the VCP is less fundamental than the reawakening of “civil society” itself.

According to Phong Quang, “the second quarter of 1989 has seen the emergence — better; the affirmation — of the forums of civil society.

“The key event was without doubt the 5th Congress of the Union of Writers of Vietnam which met at the end of October, in the midst of the 7th plenum and the bringing to heel of the Union of Journalists. Some 400 writers (three quarters members of the Party, and all employees of the socialist state) stood up with an astonishing dexterity to 12 members of the central committee (six of them on the Political Bureau), who had come in force to impose the

new leadership of the union, and even the platform of the congress! All these feudal manoeuvres were rejected, to the very great joy of the people of Hanoi who followed, hour by hour, the progress of this assembly [...]”.

“We are witnessing the emergence of [...] a multiplicity of clubs; the Club of the Union of the Associations of Sciences and Techniques in Hanoi, that of the Veterans of the Resistance of Ho Chi Minh City and the provinces, and, at the beginning of January, the Committee of Liaison of the former leaders of the student movement of the south”¹⁹.

Club of resistance veterans formed

The Club of the Veterans of the Resistance of the South has around 4000 members. At a rally in September 1989, it attracted up to 6000 people. Founded by former fighters of unimpeachable record, it has taken up numerous popular criticisms of the regime. In January 1990, notably, it organized a meeting at which 600 people participated, where numerous questions were discussed like the situation in Eastern Europe and the policy of reforms.

The most well known member of this

18. These two speeches, that of Le Quang Dao and that of Tran Xuan Bach before the Club of the Union of Associations of Sciences and Techniques of Hanoi on December 13, 1989, are reproduced in *Chroniques Vietnamiennes* no. 8-9.

19. *Doan Ket* no. 421. On the Congress of writers, see also *Chroniques Vietnamiennes*, no. 8-9.

club was the general Tran Van Tra, an adviser of the leadership. He was coopted, and perhaps neutralized, at the head of a new Association of Veterans constituted on a national scale. In March 1990, the southern Club was subject to intense pressures from the hierarchy of the party. Because of this, the president, Nguyen Ho, and Ta Ba Tang were not reelected to the leadership of the club, and were replaced by non-contestatory elements.

The universities are opening up to international exchanges. Elements of the "third force" from the time of the US war [opponents of the US aggression who worked outside the framework of the VCP-led National Liberation Front], pursue their activities, like the priest Chan Tin. The diversity traditional to the south perpetuates itself, with the vitality of the Buddhist, Catholic and Caodai [a syncretic religious cult which incorporates elements of Buddhism, Confucianism and Christianity — it has around 2 million adherents] communities. Artistic, literary and even environmentalist movements offer divers channels of expression.

In November 1990, it was the turn of Bui Tin (Than Nin) to cause a scandal during a visit to France, by demanding the convocation of an extraordinary political conference (a constituent assembly). A journalist introduced into the ruling circles, Bui Tin was editor-in-chief of the *Nhan Dan*, central organ of the VCP. He was a colonel in the People's Army. With 37 years of service, he participated, in 1954, at the battle of Dien Bien Phu and received, in 1975, the surrender of the Saigon authorities. He has been a member of the VCP since 1946.

Insolent regime of privileges

His "petition" has the merit of highlighting the numerous stakes of the debate. Bui Tin draws a severe picture of



the situation, where "bureaucracy, irresponsibility, egoism, corruption, fraud spread under the insolent reign of privileges and prerogatives". He seeks to define an "overall project to resolve the crisis" currently gripping Vietnam. "We have chosen the road of socialism. This is understood. It was a necessity in the international conditions of the time. Socialism, as it was built in several countries and as it was sketched amongst us, has given some positive results. It gave us strength in our war of liberation and national defence.

"On the other hand, in these countries, like ours, the model realized has also shown its weaknesses, its faults and errors, which prevent the full development of the fundamental principles of socialism. All these countries have thus entered into a grave crisis, as much theoretical as practical. It is clear that one can no longer do as in the past. But how to do otherwise, the question merits being stud-

ied, and a solution will be found only with time".

"In these conditions, it is erroneous to condemn, deny or reject socialism, it is also imprudent and dangerous to pursue the practice of the past, even with more or less important modifications [...] It is convenient in the current time to build an authentically popular democratic regime with a socialist option (of which the content is to be determined) [...] we do not renounce at all the idea of socialism, we recognize simply that socialism is a socio-economic formation characterized by a high productivity, social justice and well being for all, that socialism, in the conditions of Vietnam, demands a relatively long preparatory period". Advocating "unity and national reconciliation" between Vietnamese and "reconciliation with all countries" he proposed:

1. The convocation of an "extraordinary political conference which brings together representative delegates from all the social components — workers, peasants, intellectuals, artists, ethnic groups, religions, diaspora — with the goal of discussing and adopting a new programme of action";

2. The election of a "new National Assembly";

3. The formation of a "government of national reconstruction"²⁰.

Bui Tin has been dismissed from his post as editor of *Nhan Dan*. The leadership demanded his expulsion from the party — which his cell refused to do a first time in January 1991. The BBC broadcasts interviews with him regularly to Vietnam, and these seem to have a considerable popular echo, with tape recordings circulating widely.

The holding of the 7th Congress of the VCP could catalyse all the divergences and tensions which manifest themselves today in Vietnam. The year 1991 will truly be a crucial one for the country. ★



Between state and communalism

THE FOLLOWING interview, with Mihir Desai, a leader of the Inquilabi Communist Sangathan (ICS), Indian section of the Fourth International, was conducted by Colin Meade at the beginning of February.



COULD you give some background to the fall of the Singh government in India in October of last year?

The current governing party is the Janata Dal (S) party, the S standing for socialist. The old Congress government of Rajiv Gandhi was defeated in 1989 by a coalition led by the Janata Dal opposition. Congress was the largest party in parliament with 200 seats; the Janata Dal only got 140 but with the support of the right reactionary party the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) it formed the government. However, that government split in October 1990 when the BJP refused to support prime minister V.P. Singh. He refused to resign and so a section of Janata Dal split to form the Janata Dal (S). Congress decided to support that section of the Janata Dal which had split and so the new prime minister has come to power with the support of the Congress Party.

■ So Congress is back in power?

No, but without its support the existing government cannot remain in power. So Congress is de facto in power but on paper it is the Janata Dal (S).

■ Can you explain the role of the Congress Party in Indian politics? Has it changed over time?

Yes, the origins of the party lie in the original Congress that led the nationalist movement in India, and since independence it has been in power for most of the time. But after the 1975-77 emergency it was defeated by a coalition led by the Janata Party (different from the one currently in power). But that Janata split and elections were called before time in 1980 and they lost their majority. Indira Gandhi and Congress came back to power and in 1984, after the assassination of Indira, her son Rajiv came into power on a Congress plank until he was defeated in 1989. Over the years there has been a decline in support for Congress — it has never received more than 50% of votes in any election and now it is receiving even less. Also it is not a cadre based party like many others so its

main plank has been its historical continuity and secularism, so-called.

■ So is it a kind of two party system of a special type?

No, a two party system of the British or American type is not in our opinion possible in India; what you have is Congress on one side and on the other temporary alignments of various parties which may challenge Congress for some time, but not permanently, because these alignments have such different social bases that they are in permanent conflict with each other. Janata's support, for example, comes from both the urban bourgeoisie and the rural bourgeoisie which are in conflict with each other.

■ Does the Congress have a coherent economic policy?

Until about the mid-70s its policy was one of relative independence from imperialism, that is American, Japanese and British imperialism. But from 1975-76 onwards, and more from 1984 onwards, there has been a constant process of liberalization, whereby it has been made much easier for foreign capital to come in. But the policy of the Indian government is basically liberalization coupled with a strong state sector.

■ Are there any proposals to go further with liberalization?

Yes, each party which contends for power does so on the basis of further liberalization. This has been true for the last two or three years.

■ What would be the impact of this?

Very bad. Although India does not have a massive foreign debt problem, like for instance Latin America, slowly the debt is increasing and a continued policy of liberalization would lead to a Latin American type of situation.

■ Is there a real contradiction between the Congress Indian bour-

geoisie and imperialism?

Yes, there has been in the sense that the Indian bourgeoisie, even at the time of independence, was a relatively strong bourgeoisie compared to most other Third World countries, with indigenous steel, chemical, pharmaceutical plants and so on, and what has happened is that the Indian government immediately after independence, had a policy of concentrating on the public sector to provide the infrastructure for the indigenous bourgeoisie. In that sense there are conflicts between sections of the indigenous bourgeoisie and imperialist capital.

For example, in 1977 Coca Cola and IBM were thrown out of India by the Janata government, who said that unless foreign equity was reduced to less than 40% they would not be allowed to stay in the country. Now the government is trying to help Pepsi Cola establish themselves in India, but after Coca Cola was thrown out a lot of indigenous aerated water manufacturers became very big because there was a vacuum, and these are opposed to the introduction of Pepsi.

■ Is it the case that US imperialism has an interest in the break up of India?

In a certain sense. For instance the Punjabi struggle or the Kashmiri struggle have been extensively financed from Pakistan, which gets a lot of money from the US, so in that sense, yes, but personally I do not see India breaking up. There will be a lot of disruption but the Indian ruling class will not allow a break up of India under any circumstances.

■ What lies behind the conflict between the central government and the state governments? Is there a social force behind the regional movements?

There are two factors at work here, one is the regional big capitalist farmers, the other a regional bourgeoisie that wants to assert itself at the national level. These two

factors have led, broadly speaking, to a Congress type of party in the center and regional parties at the state level reflecting the aspirations of the regional ruling classes, and that is a contradiction. The centre-state relationship has become a very important issue in Indian politics.

■ **What about the rise of communalism and such groups as the BJP?**

It is in our opinion the central problem facing the masses in Indian politics today — the rise of Hindu populism and, as a reaction, the rise of Muslim and also Sikh fundamentalism. Relative poverty has been growing, so has unemployment, and these frustrations have been channelled by these reactionary religious organizations. This has given rise to fundamentalism, which is growing at a very rapid rate, and is a major danger. Our primary task in India is finding means to combat fundamentalism.

■ **Have you found allies in this?**

Firstly, we try to combine with all the left groups in a united front to fight fundamentalism. The only problem is that when rioting is going on we do not have the means to combat it, because the only way you can stop a person being killed is by arming them. We don't have these arms so the people affected go to the Mafia dons of their own communities who become stronger as a result. We are still searching, along with other groups, for ways and means to combat fundamentalism, one of which must be some kind of cultural input and cultural alternative to the religious identity which people have and which is becoming stronger.

■ **How does the question of caste, and the recent initiative of the Singh government in terms of positive action for the lower castes, fit into all this?**

The Indian caste system is divided into four parts, Brahmins, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra which are the lowest caste, and outside the caste system are the outcastes so you actually have five categories. For the outcastes the government has provided since 1950 a 15% reservation in education and jobs, because that is the percentage of the Indian population they represent. At the time they also said they would make reservations for the Shudra but this was never implemented. Finally in 1989 they said they would reserve 15% for the Shudra also, which led to a big uproar, to riots, and about 200 upper caste people burning themselves alive. This is a reaction of the upper castes to frustration in finding jobs and opportunities, but the wrong reaction. We feel these reservations are justified, because these people have been excluded for thousands of years from certain kinds of jobs, from education and so on. They form about 52% of the population but they occupy only about 4% of normal jobs.

One of the reasons Singh took this step

was to divide the Hindu population. The BJP had taken up the issue of the Babri Masjid-Ram Janmabhoomi temple, which was the major issue on which the split between the BJP and Singh took place. It did divide Hindus for some time, but the issue is at an ebb now. It will come up again soon when the Supreme Court discusses the validity of the measures and it will divide the Hindu population down the middle. No political party, not even the BJP, can say they oppose the measures because they cannot afford to alienate their supporters.

■ **What kind of support does the Indian left enjoy?**

In Kerala and West Bengal the Communist Party (Marxist) governments are still in power with the support of the Communist Party of India and other forces. In other areas they do not have very significant support. They made a difference when they came to power about 15 or 20 years ago but in my opinion they are now as reactionary or as counter productive as any bourgeois government, because they use the same tactics, communalization, they go on a caste or community basis. In the eyes of common people communism is still seen in a positive light, events in Eastern Europe have not made much difference.

■ **The CPM has recently been discussing the question of Eastern Europe and Stalinism.**

Yes, there has been a lot of discontent as far as we can see among the young cadres of the CPM following the events in Eastern Europe, Russia, and China.

■ **What about the Maoist groups?**

About 4 or 5 of them remain very strong, with membership in the thousands, at least 3 of them are involved in armed struggle, guerilla warfare, and they have strong bases, especially in central India where the thick forests are.

■ **What kind of people do they recruit?**

Mainly tribal peoples, poor peasants, some students.

■ **Do you feel there are positive forces with which you can work within Indian society?**

Yes, at the level of the left groups we are working with some of the Maoist organizations, and we recognize them as revolutionary organizations, at least in the Indian context. Also we work with lower caste organizations like the Dalit, ecological groups, womens' organizations. The latter are very strong and growing quite rapidly. Recently there was an all-India womens' conference in Kerala, just a month ago, and over 2,500 women attended. ★

The difficult birth of a workers' movement

THE growing prominence of the question of power in the Soviet economy, as well as the accelerated decline in the general economic situation, have had a direct impact on the labour movement. Labour conflicts in the first years of *perestroika* generally centred around issues of wages and conditions, with demands addressed to the enterprise management and sometimes to the ministry.¹

Although these remain important, a new type of conflict has emerged over the past year. Rather than putting forth economic demands and pressuring management to meet them, workers are themselves seeking an active role in the management of their enterprises.

The following article is the second part of a long study on the struggle for power in the Soviet economy, the first part of which appeared in *IV200*. The third part, on the Soviet self-management movement, follows on page 21.

DAVID SEPPO

THESE conflicts, which are more offensive in nature and pose directly the issue of power in the enterprise, have been especially prominent in the crucial machine-construction industry, which, unlike coal-mining, has not seen any coordinated, inter-enterprise strike movement.

At the start of 1990, Moscow's AZLK auto factory, which makes the "Moskvich", seemed to even the handful of activists an unlikely place for an "uprising". Like many of Moscow's factories with large semi-skilled and unskilled labour forces, about two-thirds of the workers here are *limitchiki*, workers from the provinces with temporary Moscow residence permits that can be revoked upon dismissal from the factory. They are therefore especially vulnerable and generally quiescent. But even the settled Muscovites felt the pressure and corrupting influence of the internal distribution system, which expanded as shortages in the state shops worsened.

True, the year before, something unheard of had occurred at the factory's trade union conference: someone complained about the purchase of machinery from Western Europe. Some speakers blamed this on management's decision to send the director's son (travel to the West being a coveted privilege) rather than workers and engineers who had first-hand knowledge of the specifications. AZLK's workers also remembered how the previous year the director had ignored the decision of the work-collective (self-management) council and adopted a 120,000-car plan target. He went so far as to dismiss his popular assistant director, who had insisted that the plant's capacity was only 80,000. In fact, only 74,000 cars were made in 1989, but the workers received their bonuses anyway, since the director is well-connected and was able to persuade the ministry to "correct" the plan.

Foolish decision to consult workers

The adoption of the original plan had allowed him to obtain additional funds, some of which went to buy the machinery that was lying about uninstalled. 1989 also saw the workers reject management's proposed schedule of fifteen "black" (working) Saturdays, when the director, in a nod to the current fashion (since then abandoned, as we shall see), foolishly decided to consult the workers. But otherwise, the workers looked on in their usual gloomy silence at management's inability to rationally organize

production and provide normal work conditions as well as its deepening corruption (the huge sums involved in the shadow economy and the great demand for the attractive new Moskvich have opened up new vistas in this area). Then came an article in *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, written on information provided by factory activists, describing the poor management at the enterprise. If in 1985, 17,500 workers produced 175,000 cars, in 1989 16,900 workers made less than half as many. This was followed by a television report that the factory was being fined one and a half million convertible rubles for non-fulfillment of a contract to build a sports car for a West German

resident; a regular work process, without idle time, "storming" and violation of internal supply schedules; real cost-accounting; and wages paid according to labour (large wage differentials exist from shop to shop for the same kind of work). Some speakers demanded that supervisory and technical personnel be cut and the savings be used to raise the salaries of the remainder in accordance with results.

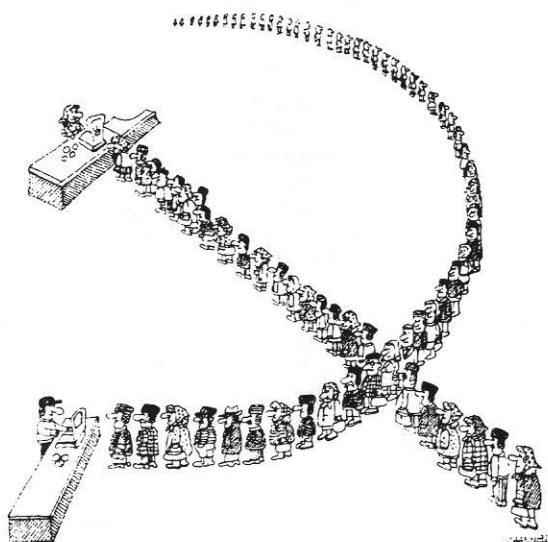
In a letter to *Pravda*, Sergei Novopol'skii, chairman of the assembly shop's work collective council and head of a brigade of mechanic assemblers, explained the underlying impulse behind the explosion: "The main thing is that we are convinced that *perestroika* does not need silent workers of the kind the present management would like to see but workers who think, who understand, and who know how to work in a way that is useful for the country."²

But the director, on his part, attributed it all to the "intrigues of the apparatus" which he accused of abusing the new democracy and *glasnost*. He agreed to hold a referendum on his administration, which he won.³ The main results of the meeting were new elections to the work-collective council and a halving of the price rise.

Explosions of discontent expected

The workers were obviously not prepared for sustained activism. In part, this can be attributed to the influence of the economic crisis and the internal distribution system. However, the latter's arbitrary and corrupting nature, while effective in the short run, is particularly degrading to the workers and eventually adds fuel to the explosions when they finally occur. And most Soviet observers expect these to occur soon. More importantly, perhaps, the autoworkers' demands were addressed to the enterprise management, but many of their problems could be resolved only at higher, essentially political, levels. Any new movement will have to link up with workers in other enterprises if it is to be effective and take on stable, organized forms.

Only a few weeks after the AZLK meet-



firm. The final piece of tinder was the news that the retail price of the Moskvich would be raised 50% to 13,500 rubles, although no substantial improvements had been made. The factory would be allowed to keep 1,000 extra rubles for its needs.

In January 1990, the work-collective council of the assembly shop, led by a group of activist workers (who are also party members), called a shop meeting to discuss the situation. To the surprise of the initiators, workers streamed in from all over the factory and filled up the 800-seat hall and adjacent corridors to overflowing. The following demands were put forward: dismissal of the director and election of a new one; reinstatement of the dismissed assistant director; new elections to the enterprise work-collective council, since the present one was subservient to the administration; no price rises (speakers explained that it might permit the factory to raise wages, but if all enterprises made unjustified price rises, wage gains would soon be wiped out); equalization of the rights of the *limitchiki* with those of permanent

1. See D. Mandel: "Revolutionary reform in Soviet factories: Restructuring relations between Workers and Management", *Socialist Register*, 1989, London: Merlin Press, 1989, pp. 102-29. On the miners' movement, see T. Friedgut and L. Siegelbaum, "Perestroika from below: The miners' strike and its aftermath", *New Left Review*, 1990, pp. 5-32; D. Mandel, "Rebirth of the Soviet Labour Movement: The coalminers' strike of July 1989", *Politics and Society*, vol. 18, Sept. 1990, pp. 381-404.

2. *Pravda*, February 8, 1990. This account is mainly based on interviews and a recording of the January meeting.

3. *Za sovetskuyu malitrazhku* (Moscow), February 5, 1990.

ing, a similar gathering took place several thousand kilometers away at the Sibeletrotyazhmash plant in Novosibirsk which makes large electric generators. Here too workers had never shown much concern for the economic fate of the enterprise. Their complaints were traditionally about the cafeteria's food, bad ventilation and heating, the periodic absence of hot water. In short, it was a typical machine-construction enterprise, except perhaps for the shiny new Toyotas parked in front of the administration building, though these too were becoming a familiar scene in the fifth year of *perestroika*.

Producing less, with more labour

The initiative for the meeting here too came from a group of activists. A few days before, the head of a brigade of turners, himself a member of the factory's party committee, sounded out the shops and met with an enthusiastic response from the workers. The main issue at the meeting was poor management. The director had been elected a year ago but had not carried out his programme: no new forms of work organization had been introduced. Output was half of what it had been twenty years ago, but the work force was the same size. The assembly brigade stood idle for weeks, while workers in the adjacent shop put in two hour shifts for the same wage.

Copper wire worth thousands of rubles was cut up because there were no reels. Technical and production discipline had declined catastrophically. While the director blamed all this on the middle levels of management, which he accused of sabotaging his initiatives, the workers complained that they rarely saw him in the factory and never on the shop floor. While the collective was seething and with the conference already in preparation, he took off to Moscow to attend a branch conference of directors. The chief engineer's assertion that things were not so bad since profits had risen 400% over 1976-88 made no impression of the workers.

But the most insistent accusation against management concerned the cooperatives. These had been created to help the enterprise fulfill the state's directive to increase its production of consumer goods. "Where are these goods?" asked the workers. "We don't see any more [on the market] than before. Who are we fooling? The managers are coddling the cooperatives, and the cooperatives are robbing the enterprise blind. Transformer copper is going to the cooperatives, but who signs it out? We produce no copper waste."

"The superintendent of the first department received 1500 rubles from one of the fifteen cooperatives organized at the factory to produce consumer goods... In essence, this is payment for having ruined the shop — let's tell things as they really

are. The shop is now working to meet the needs of the cooperative, not the factory. Forty welders left the shop for the cooperative, forcing other shops to send their people to help it out. One of the assistants to the chief engineer received 2700 rubles for the construction of a trestle table in his spare time. Where does he get it, if he doesn't have a fixed workday? The party organizer has also dirtied his hands in the cooperatives. He has passed all his work to his assistant and himself is nowhere to be seen. People are sick of all this. It angers us to the bottom of our souls. What is going on around us? We have to change our life, we cannot go on living like this."⁴

The meeting elected a workers' committee (representing only the blue-collar workers) to take power in the factory and decided to hold elections to the work-collective committee (which represents all employees: workers, office employees, engineering and technical personnel as well as management, which has been doing little more than distributing *defisit* [Soviet term for scarce goods]).

The factory's newspaper was removed from the control of the administration, the party and trade-union committees and made responsible to the workers' conference. Managerial, engineering and technical personnel were to be cut in half, and a new director elected. (The workers' committee later decided to give him six more months, after which he would report back to the workers, who would take a final decision).

Characterizing as one-sided the enterprise's relations with the ministry, regional and union governments (it paid them 70% of its income, leaving little for the collective's social development), the meeting decided to negotiate a reduction in its payments. The workers' committee was instructed to study, with the aid of economists, the question of gradually leaving the ministry (the workers were aware that they might be worse off without the ministry playing its redistributive role within the branch).

Cooperatives viewed as parasites

The cooperatives, accused of "pillaging the enterprise's resources and fostering the moral decay of the collective", were ordered off the enterprise's territory, and administrative personnel as well as employees in the financial and accounting departments forbidden from working in them. Full reports on their activities and finances were ordered from the cooperative chairpersons.

The meeting also turned its attention to the nefarious effect on the collective of the internal distribution system and decided that henceforth, the sale of scarce consumer goods, food, cars and so on, would take place only after this had been approved by a workers' conference. Finally, on the issue of Toyotas, a report

was demanded of the superintendent of the transport department on the cost of maintaining the enterprise's fleet of cars and vans and on his budget in 1989.

The election of a workers' committee is characteristic of many of these conflicts. As one observer put it: "in the majority of cases the work-collective committees [elected by the entire collective] fail to show any independence vis-à-vis management.

Hostility between blue and white-collar workers

The work collective committees were basically created on orders from above [until the government issued a special instruction, they were often headed by the director]. The workers' committees [representing only the blue-collar workers], on the other hand, are not obligated to anyone at their birth, that is, they are not the result of initiative from above, but of the realization that we are all responsible for changing things and that if we do not, who will?"⁵ The formation of workers committees reflects in part the deepening hostility between workers and "white blouses" in the enterprises — the reduction of administrative and technical personnel is a very popular demand.⁶

But it is also a response to the fact that technical, like administrative personnel, have no right of appeal against dismissals and are therefore more dependent on the director. One of the workers' leaders explained: "The shop engineers are our brothers; they work in the same dirt and face the same difficulties.... We aren't against them. They should be with us. Our level of knowledge does not allow us to really spread our wings, especially when it comes to economic questions. But for the time being, we have decided to create a workers' committee with representatives only from the working class.... we have a good lever — the strike. Management has to consider that possibility and take the proletariat into account.... But we do include the engineering and technical personnel in the work collective committee."⁷

Another interesting aspect of these conflicts is the initiating role often played by worker party activists. This occurs against the general background of the party's unpopularity among workers, who are leaving it in significant numbers.

At a Vilnius trucking enterprise, whose

4. "Demokratizatsiya na proizvodstve: vlast' dela i vlast'...ch'ya?" *EKO* (Novosibirsk), no. 8, 1990, pp. 85-102.

5. *Rabochaya tribuna*, June 15, 1990.

6. The view is widespread among workers that "those people" do not work. Another contributing factor is the wage reform that began in 1987 and under which the salaries of technical and administrative personnel have risen significantly faster than average wages. V. Pavlov and I. Yurchikova, "Novye usloviya oplaty truda," *Sotsialisticheskii trud*, no. 8, 1990, p. 89.

7. "Demokratizatsiya na proizvodstve" (op cit) p. 96.

8. *Rabochaya tribuna*, August 15, 1990.

existence was threatened in the spring of 1990 by Moscow's oil embargo and the republican government's proposed economic reforms, the workers dissolved the work collective committee and elected a workers' committee, assuming full control of the enterprise.

Workers committee negotiates independently

The committee was instructed to take "all measures to organize the enterprise's complete, normal functioning, which has been undermined of late." Among other things, it independently concluded a contract with the Ministry of Transport of Byelorussia (just across the border from Lithuania) which agreed to supply the enterprise with fuel and parts. "I would never have believed it" commented a member of the administration. "I always thought that the main thing for them was their 19 rubles a day, and to hell with the rest."⁸

At a Voronezh machine-construction factory, the director was misappropriating the factory's equipment and materials for his personal benefit. A small, poorly organized enterprise that was in bad economic shape, it nevertheless maintained seven

well-paid assistant directors. Spurred on by the party committee, a bare majority of the work collective committee called a workers' conference. It elected a workers' committee which it mandated to investigate and restore order in the factory. The director was replaced through competitive election and affairs began quickly to improve.⁹

At a Novosibirsk machine construction factory, the workers shut down a cooperative that management had entrusted with the enterprise's supply and transport services. This occurred after a group of workers forced open the assistant manager's safe and found a contract showing him to be an employee of the cooperative which had been selling the factory's raw materials on the side at two or three times the state price.¹⁰

At the VAZ auto factory, the workers first learnt from an interview with the assistant general director in the enterprise newspaper that, as one worker put it, "our clever managers had already prepared a package of documents for the conversion of VAZ into a concern." In response, the work collective committee declared VAZ and all its production the property of the work collective.¹¹

Conflicts over power in the enterprises, that is over workers' self-management, are destined to grow as the economic and political disintegration of the country continues and factory and ministerial administrations, behind the backs of the workers, who typically suspect the worst, transform enterprises into joint stock companies, enter them into "concerns", transfer departments to cooperatives, establish joint ventures and commercial banks with enterprise resources and funds.

Until recently, however, one could not speak of a self-management movement in the Soviet Union. There were only isolated conflicts over power and committee activity in the enterprises. The organized labour movement, which began with the miners strike of July 1989, has been characterized by a basically, though by no means exclusively, trade unionist orientation. After the 1989 strike, the miners transformed their strike committees into workers' committees, which united on a regional basis. Their main function was to monitor fulfillment of the accord with the govern-

ment, Resolution 608, that ended the strike. The miners have also held two national congresses, in June and October 1990. These resulted in the founding of an independent trade union. Unlike the official union, which embraces all the employees of the Ministry of the Coal Industry, the new union limits its membership to non-managerial personnel employed directly by the coal mines or the coal-enrichment factories. The Fifth Conference of Workers Committees of the Kuzbass, which (along with the much smaller Pechora basin) had been the most militant and politicized region, in September 1990 also set as its central goal the formation of a "normal" trade union movement.¹²

For a movement that arose out of nothing after almost 60 years of very effective repression, these are impressive organizational gains. Nevertheless, this movement is today in crisis. It has not really succeeded in spreading outside of the mines and mining regions. The unions of workers' committees that have arisen in other regions consist mainly of small groups of activists, who emerge out of their isolation only when serious conflict arises in their enterprise.

Independent unions lack mass base

None of the organizations from outside the coalmining areas that attended the Congress of Independent Workers Organizations and Movements in May 1990 in Novokuznetsk (which founded the Confederation of Labour) has anything resembling a mass base.¹³ In the mining areas themselves, rank-and-file activism has declined, and the ties between the unions of workers' committees and the rank-and-file have declined.¹⁴ Many delegates to the Second Congress of Coalminers in Donetsk at the end of October 1990 were not at all certain that the congress's decision to found a new trade union would meet with an active or enthusiastic response back home in the mines.¹⁵

9. *Rabochaya tribuna*, June 15, 1990.

10. A. N. Shkulov, "Na potustoronnei traektorii", *EKO*, no. 8, 1980 pp. 108-9.

11. *Rabochaya tribuna*, December 8, 1990.

12. *Nasha gazeta* (Novokuznetsk), no. 33, October 2, 1990.

13. P. Funder Larsen, "Workers of the USSR unite!" *International Viewpoint*, 187, June 18, 1990 and B. Ikhlov, "Neklassovyi vrag," *Rabochii vestnik* (Perm'), no. 5, May 1990, pp. 4-7.

14. This was noted, for example, by V. Golikov, chairman of the Kuzbass Union of Workers Committees, in his report to the fifth conference on September 29-30, 1990. See *Nasha gazeta*, no. 33, October 2, 1990.

15. This is based upon conversations and on the unpublished proceedings.

16. *Kazanskii rabochii* (Kazan') no. 2, July 1990.

17. People close to the (official) Union of Workers in the Coal Industry claimed that the minister favoured the creation of a new trade union in order to split the workers. While there is probably some truth in this, most of the delegates to the Miners' Congress that founded the new union were of the opinion that any further attempts to reform the old union would be futile.



This is essentially a crisis of political orientation against the background of the deepening economic crisis. The attempt through strictly trade-unionist activity to protect living standards and labour conditions in a collapsing economy has reached its limits. The miners themselves have recognized that the government lacked the means to carry out certain parts of Resolution 608 and that many of those economic gains realized were soon lost to inflation.

Ministry finances miners' conference

Moreover, in existing Soviet conditions, a trade unionist orientation often leads to solidarity between workers and their administration, often at the expense of the rest of the population that ends up with a bill it can ill afford to pay. For example, the one-day mail carriers strike on June 15, 1990 was organized by the Ministry of Communications itself.¹⁶ And the Second Congress of Miners was financed by the Coal Industry Ministry, which had its representatives on the organizing committee. This surely must raise questions about the interests being pursued by the various bureaucratic clans in supporting these movements.¹⁷

The miners' movement did, of course, put forth important political demands relating to the democratization of the state. But the basic question remained unanswered: what to do with this democracy if and when it was won? The most politicized elements (often those most strongly under liberal influence) have tended to advocate a trade-unionist orientation for the labour movement and, to the extent that they put forward a positive economic programme, a market reform borrowed from the liberals. But this is running up against the same reality that the liberals are now being forced to confront.

Representatives of the Kuzbass Union of Workers' Committees, which under the presidency of Vyacheslav Golikov has had the strongest pro-liberal orientation, participated in the work of the Shatalin-Yavlinskii commission that drew up the 500-Day Plan. This is a programme for the wholesale privatization of the economy and the establishment of a market system in which state regulation plays a subordinate role.¹⁸ The Kuzbass union has been a strong supporter of Boris Yeltsin and the Russian parliament, with whom it concluded a social peace accord in exchange for the parliament's support in creating a "zone of joint entrepreneurship" (free-trade zone) in the Kuzbass.

But Golikov, in his report to the union's fifth conference at the end of September 1990, was forced to recognize the "deformations" (as described in my article in the previous issue of *IV*) that were already occurring in the Kuzbass with the expansion of the private sector and market relations in the region. He appealed "not to leave these processes to themselves with-

out the participation of the toilers. While defending market relations in the economy, we do not intend to allow it to be bought by existing structures and their functionaries". Yet he offered no practical proposals for preventing this.

Similarly, the conference's "Appeal to the Toilers of the Kuzbass" observed that "The programme of transition to market relations and, in the Kuzbass, also the creation of a zone of joint entrepreneurship, are on the whole seen positively by the toilers of the region. But at the same time, the shift of the enterprises to cost-accounting and self-financing is already causing job cuts and the closure of unprofitable factories. The transition to market relations will intensify this process by many times." But rather than question the wisdom of this reform, the document merely calls for the creation of "genuine trade unions" to defend the workers.¹⁸

Kuzbass miners may benefit from market

The liberal orientation of the Kuzbass leaders is to a large extent premised upon their understanding that the region is well-situated to benefit from the market. The cost of extracting coal in the Kuzbass is relatively low, since the industry here is comparatively new and the coal close to the surface, often allowing open-pit mining. Export contracts have already been signed with Japan. (Some economists, however, argue that Kuzbass optimism will be short-lived. The region is 6000 kilometres from a port, and the exports are being subsidized by cheap Soviet freight rates. If these rates were raised to the same world levels at which the coal is being sold, there would be no foreign contracts. How long will the railroad agree to subsidize the foreign-currency earnings of the Kuzbass coal industry?)

The future, however, does not look too rosy for the Donbass coalminers. The mines are old, deep — many are virtually mined out — and their production costs are high. The transition to the market here threatens the region with mass unemployment and the extinction of entire towns and villages.

It is not surprising, then, that outside of the Kuzbass and the Pechora basin (which has export contracts with Sweden

through Arctic ports) the miners movement has been rather less enthusiastic about the market. As the inevitable consequences of a transition to the market, as envisaged by the liberal reformers, become clearer, their lack of enthusiasm is turning into alarm. After the publication of the 500-Day Plan, which calls for an end to subsidies and the eventual freeing of prices, dozens of mining associations and enterprises sent angry telegrams to the government.²⁰

A delegation of miners from the Yakutogol' Association came to Moscow to protest against the intended dismantling of the industry's central administration and the ending of subsidies. "Natural and geological conditions vary from mine to mine," they explained. "Therefore they cannot all be equally profitable. In our association the average cost of coal is from one to eighteen rubles, but in Donbass it is 40 to 120 rubles. Without the centralized redistribution of funds, without subsidies, Donbass will not survive...Without centralized management, all sorts of misfortunes and shocks await the branch."²¹

Miners withdraw support for free market plan

Taking note of these concerns, the organizing committee of the Second Congress of miners decided against endorsing the plan. One of its members, a miner from Karaganda, explained: "There are disputes in the collectives and in the organizing committee [about the transition to the market]. The interesting thing is that we ourselves participated in the creation of one of the programmes — that of Shatalin...But we wavered. Why? First of all because the hardest blow will be struck against the extractive industries, and we wanted to first see a separate programme of transition to the market in our branch.

"Of course, a part of the people understand that it will be necessary to adopt certain sacrifices, but there are also many who say: why do I need the market if my interests are violated, if I lose benefits and job seniority? ...We are also worried by the fact that the realization of the Shatalin programme calls for a strong presidential power. Yet just yesterday, we proclaimed the democratization of society and self-management."²²

The organizing committee demanded

18. A summary of this programme appeared in *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, September 29, 1990. For an analysis of this programme and a comparison with the USSR government's "Basic orientations for the stabilization of the economy and the transition to a market economy" see A. Kolganov, "Doloi Nomenklaturnyi kapitalizm!", *Dialog*, no. 17, November 1990, pp. 41-8.

19. *Nasha gazeta*, no. 33, October 2, 1990.

20. The editors of the popular weekly *Argumenty i fakty* rejected, without any explanation, an article by one of their writers about these telegrams. This perhaps has something to do with the fact that five members of the editorial committee are deputies in the Russian parliament, which adopted the 500-Day Plan

with only one opposing vote, even though few of the deputies had seen more than a brief summary of it.

21. *Rabochaya tribuna*, September 25, 1990.

22. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, October 4, 1990.

23. *Rabochaya tribuna*, October 21, 1990.

24. Personal communication. The Confederation of Labour was founded by the Congress of Independent Workers' Organizations and Movements in Novokuznetsk in May 1990.

25. From the unpublished protocols and personal conversations.

At one point, Golikov tried to reassure the Donbass miners, saying that Kuzbass had helped the British miners during their strike: why think they would not help their Donbass brethren?

the maintenance, at least for the transitional period, of the industry's central administration and subsidies.²³ Even the Council of Representatives of the Confederation of Labour, which was subject to strong liberal influence at its founding, also balked at endorsing the 500-Day Plan at its September 1990 meeting in Donetsk.²⁴

The differences in orientation among the mining regions manifested themselves from the very start of the Second Congress of Miners at the end of October 1990 in the debate over the agenda. There were three main items: a report on how the decisions of the first congress had been carried out, the transition to the market in the coal industry, including a report by the Minister, and the establishment of an independent trade union.

Trade unions little use in face of closure threat

Delegates from the Donbass insisted on allotting an unlimited amount of time to the second question. They felt their region was at stake and that trade unions would be little use if the mines were closed. Delegates from the Kuzbass, on the other hand, insisted on unlimited time for the third point, since, they argued, whatever system the workers lived under, they would need strong trade unions to defend them.²⁵

Though the vast majority of delegates were in favour of a new independent trade union (a significant minority wanted to democratize the old one), a split over these differences in orientation was narrowly averted only at the very end of the congress, when the new trade union was established. But the delegates of the congress remained extremely dissatisfied with the report on the transition to the market, even though the minister had assured them there would be no layoffs in 1991 ("If even one miner is dismissed," he declared, "you won't have to ask me, I will resign myself").

The discussion made it amply clear that although many miners fear the market, they certainly do not want to retain the old system.

But the minister offered no new vision, only the need to ask the government for additional subsidies. The delegates responded with the decision to create their own commission of experts to develop a plan for the industry.

This decision was implicit recognition of the limits of the strictly trade unionist approach that some of the Kuzbass delegates, like Gorlikov, were advocating. These delegates argued that the congress's basic task was to create a trade union whose principal function would be to obtain the highest possible price for the labour power the workers were selling to the "employers" (rabotodateli). But most of the delegates obviously felt that the new union could not leave the tasks of managing and restructuring their industry outside its purview. ★

The emergence of a self-management movement

ALTHOUGH self-management has not played a prominent role in the miners' movement, even those leaders closest to the liberals would no doubt say that they support the idea. One often has the impression that their alliance with the liberals is in no small part based on a misconception (fed by liberal rhetoric about "people's enterprises" and "returning property to the people") that the market proposed by the "democrats" is a necessary condition for real self-management.

In fact, the history of market reform in Yugoslavia, which has had the richest experience in this area, shows that self-management poses severe limits to the free circulation of capital and labour, and as such is incompatible with the efficient functioning of the kind of "full-blooded market" that Gorbachev has said he wants to introduce in the Soviet Union. In Yugoslavia, as well as in the rest of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, the "radicalization" of the market reform is being accompanied by a retreat from the self-management idea and the restoration of full property rights, including the right of owners to manage and sell their enterprises.

DAVID SEPPO

BUT although the self-management orientation has until recently been a minor note in the organized labour movement in the Soviet Union, it was never completely absent. At the May 1990 Congress of Independent Workers Organizations and Movements, where the influence of certain liberal Moscow intellectuals was strongly felt, a minority "Bloc of 33" delegates (mostly from outside the mining areas and in particular from the industrial centres of the Urals), argued for an independent labour movement within the broader democratic movement (a position firmly opposed by the liberals¹) and proposed the following platform as a response to what they described as an offensive against labour's social and political rights: "In no circumstances to deprive the workers of the right to manage their enterprises and to realize the principles of self-management; not to allow the economic reform to be carried out at the expense of workers' interests, the reduction of their real wages and the spread of unemployment; to oppose the democratization of

property relations through the sale of state enterprises to private individuals."²

The conflicts over power in the enterprise and the deepening suspicion among the workers that destatization will in practice mean the transformation of their enterprises into the property of the bureau-

1. According to the bulletin of the Workers' Group in the Yaroslavl' Popular Front, "Many intellectual democrats talk of the need for a union of the democratic intelligentsia and the workers. It sounds nice. But what they mean in practice can be seen from the example of the Yaroslavl' Popular Front...They rejected from the very start the idea that the Popular Front should seek a social base in the workers and they observed with gloomy apprehension from the sidelines the activity of the Workers' Group. The Popular Front not only did nothing for the organization of Yaroslavl's workers, but it simply does not want the creation of a real workers' and really independent workers' organizations...They mouth off about 'common human interests' and toss out stupidities from the tribune to the effect that 'the class approach leads to genocide.'" From *Listok Rabochei Gruppy* (Yaroslavl') reproduced in *Rabochaya tribuna*, November 7, 1990. For analyses of the debates at the Congress of Independent Worker Organizations and Movement on this issue see P. Funder Larsen, "Workers of the USSR, Unite!", *International Viewpoint*, no. 187, June 18, 1990, and B. Ikhlov, "Neklassovyi vrag," *Rabochii vestnik*, (Perm') no. 5, May 1990.

2. *Rabochii vestnik* (Perm') no. 5, May 1990, p. 11.

crats and "affairistes" of the shadow economy formed the background for the emergence of an organized self-management current in the labour movement in the late summer of 1990. But the immediate impulse was provided by the passage in the USSR Supreme Soviet on a new "Law on Enterprises in the USSR" at its spring 1990 session.

This law, adopted with suspiciously little publicity, supersedes the 1987 "Law on State Enterprises" that had granted broad self-management rights to the work collectives, including the right to elect managerial personnel and to participate in and monitor the administration of the enterprise through their elected work-collective councils.³ The new law was explained at the time by the need to facilitate the process of democratization and the shift to the market. But the activists who managed to learn of it described it as "depriving the work-collective councils of any real functions in management and in practice reducing them to nothing."⁴ Under the new law, which said nothing about self-management, enterprises are to be managed according to their charters, which are to be established by the owners.

Legislation in secret

A week after the law's adoption, the workers of the main assembly line of the VAZ factory declared: "[We] are deeply angered by the fact that the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, on June 4 1990, passed a 'Law on Enterprises in the USSR', in secret from the people, without first even publishing a draft in the press and submitting it to the collectives for discussion. In essence, a gross provocation has been committed against the toilers of the country. A law affecting the interests of every work collective has been adopted without any consideration for the opinion of the toilers themselves."⁵

In fact, the offensive against self-management, which had never become much of a reality anyway, had begun months earlier with the government's instruction to end the practise of electing managerial personnel. "The absurdity of these elections does not require discussion," wrote the management-oriented journal *EKO*. "This has already been recognized by N. I. Ryzhkov. M. S. Gorbachev, who first proposed them, has not expressed any opinion, but his silence speaks loudly."⁶

The liberal ideologues have also participated in this offensive, though often hiding behind self-management rhetoric. Thus, Gorbachev's personal adviser, economist Nikolai Petrakov, has described the creation of councils of stockholders (who are not limited to the enterprise's employees), which will appoint the directors and make key decisions on investments, dividends and profits, as "a sort of step toward self-management free of higher-standing

links."⁷

The convocation of the first All-Union Conference of Work Collective Councils and Workers' Committees in Tolyatti on August 31-September 4, 1990, was a direct response to the passage of the new law. Attended by about a hundred delegates from enterprises employing some two million, it was almost completely ignored by the national media. *Rabochaya tribuna* (Workers' Tribune — published by the Central Committee of the CPSU) was the only central paper to give it any coverage, and this was really incidental to its main interest in responding to the challenge of Nikolai Travkin, leader of the Democratic Party⁸, who said he would eat his hat if the paper published the conference's resolution critical of the government.

The crew of the national news programme, *Vremya*, also came, but its purpose was to film Venyamin Yarin, an "honorary" worker-member of Gorbachev's Presidential Council. Yarin told the conference that the President had entrusted him with the mission of organizing the representatives of the work control councils around himself and the Presidential Council.⁹ Apparently, the conference's failure to respond to this offer explains why no news about it appeared on Soviet television screens.

While the conference approved of the new law's intention of increasing the economic activity of enterprises, it otherwise assessed it as anti-democratic, directed against the self-management, favouring the arbitrary power of the administration and the ministries and holding back the processes of demonopolization and destatization.

Work councils outmoded?

Some did argue that the work collective councils had been subservient to management and, in any case, they were outmoded now that the government had adopted a policy of privatization¹⁰ that allows for more "progressive" forms of enterprise management. The new law states that enterprises are to be administered according to their charter established by their owner or owners. Since, it was argued, the work collectives are about to become the owners, why make a fuss? If they judged the councils to be useful, they could decide to retain it.

But that was the rub: the majority of delegates were not at all certain that the work collectives would inherit the destatized factories. Certainly this was as far from clear in the 500-Day Plan as it was in the USSR government's "Basic Orientations for the Stabilization of the Economy and the Transition to a Market Economy". Both allow for all forms of property and neither makes specific provision for self-management, let alone for ownership or control by the work collectives. Indeed, if one goes beyond the rhetoric and deliber-

ate fuzziness of sections relating to property and management, their entire thrust is against self-management and for the introduction of full private property rights.¹¹

Work councils to choose

Accordingly, the conference demanded that the work collective councils themselves be the ones to choose the appropriate form of property for their enterprises. Specifically, they should have two options: they could either become collective owners, without payment for the enterprise, or they could decide that the enterprise remain state property that would be managed by the councils. In discussing the first option, some argued for payment, since the enterprises were built, not by the collectives, but by the entire society.

But the majority rejected these arguments, not least because the workers simply lack the means to purchase their enterprises. As for management of the enterprises, all were agreed that under both options the administration should be hired employees of the collective and work under its supervision. The meeting declared "impermissible the transforma-

3. For a brief discussion of the ambiguous self-management provisions of the 1987 law, see D. Mandel, "Revolutionary Reform; restructuring relations between workers and management", *Socialist Register* 1989, London, Merlin Press, pp. 102-29, p. 110.

4. *Rabochaya tribuna*, December 6, 1990. On the 1988 law, see D. Mandel, "Revolutionary reform..."

5. *Sobstvennoe mnenie* (Tolyatti), no. 7, 1990.

6. "Demokratizatsiya no proizvodstve, vlast' dela i vlast'...ch'ya?", *EKO* (Novosibirsk), no. 8, 1990, pp. 85-102, p. 85.

7. *Rabochaya tribuna*, April 22, 1990. See also, R. W. Davies, "Gorbachev's socialism in historical perspective," *New Left Review*, Spring 1990, pp. 22-3.

8. Of the sundry liberal parties, Travkin's has made the most effort to court workers. Travkin himself, who rather dubiously claims he was once a worker (at present he is a businessman and politician), regularly appears at large worker gatherings, spreading his message of primitive anti-communism. So far he has had little success among the workers, who have generally been withholding their allegiance from all political parties.

9. In December 1990, Gorbachev disbanded this largely symbolic advisory council, one of whose main purposes seems to have been to co-opt potential opposition. Yarin, a metallurgical worker, had been co-chairman of the anti-liberal United Front of Toilers. He liked to say that after 30 years at the factory, all the property he had accumulated was what he was wearing. As a member of the Presidential Council, Yarin enjoyed a spacious apartment, trips abroad, a generous salary, and, of course, much official honour. It did not take him long to come round fully to Gorbachev's policies. The United Front of Toilers, whose fortunes have been flagging since its foundation in the summer of 1989 (its worker support is quite thin) recently ousted Yarin (according to Yarin, he resigned.)

10. "Privatization" and "destatization" are often used interchangeably in the Soviet Union.

11. The 500-Day Plan gives the work collective one month to propose a form of property for the enterprise, but the decision remains that of the state authorities. It also allows that 10% of the stocks "may be transferred" (this apparently also depends on the discretion of the authorities) to the enterprise for sale and transfer on preferential terms to members of the work collective (not the collective as a group).

12. This account is based on personal communications from participants and *Rabochaya tribuna*, September 9, 1990.



tion of ministries into concerns playing the role of leasers of joint stock companies." It called on the Supreme Soviet to suspend the law until it could be revised to take into account the decisions of the conference and it asked republican parliaments to ignore those provisions that contradicted the self-management provisions of the 1987 law. A new draft law should be submitted to a national discussion. The conference elected an organizing committee to co-ordinate the activities of the work-collective councils and workers' committee throughout the country and to act as their spokesperson. It was instructed to participate in revising the law and to convoke a full congress of self-management committees in December that would establish a permanent organization.¹²

This was the first organized expression of how at least a significant part of the workers see "destatization". It made clear the underlying differences between the motives of the workers' support for market reform and those of the liberals. As noted earlier, rhetoric aside, a "full-blooded market", the liberals' ultimate goal, requires the establishment of full private property rights. The workers, for their part, support market reform and the enterprise autonomy that it would provide as conditions for a more efficient economy and real self-management by the collectives. Although the conference was silent on this, it was implicit in its position that enterprises that become the property of the collectives (there is no question for those that remain state property) could not be divided or sold.

Successful conference

Despite the organizing committee's meagre resources and the difficulty in finding a large enough hall, 700 delegates

and 300 observers, mainly workers and engineers, self-management activists from large enterprises that together employ about seven million workers, attended the Founding Congress of Work-Collective Councils and Workers' Committees on December 8-10, 1990. Many of the delegates had to pay their own way, and some had even to brave threats from management.¹³ But the main purpose of the gathering, to create a permanent organization of self-management committees, to reaffirm

the Tolyatti conference's position on the "Law of Enterprises in the USSR" and on destatization, and to develop a plan of action, were achieved.

The congress founded the Union of Work-Collective Councils and Workers' Committees and elected a council of representatives from the major regions, with three co-chairpersons.¹⁴ A heated debate took place over the issue of a warning strike at the start of January to support the congress's programmatic demands. Although a strike was not ruled out, it was decided first to try other means, in particular to act through the Republican parliaments. The chair of the USSR Supreme Soviet A. Luk'yanov tried to reassure the delegates that the Soviet parliament agreed that the self-management councils should have the right to decide all the matters that affect the vital interests of the workers.

He invited them to work with the parliament on revising the Laws on the Enterprise and on Property, which, he admitted, had already been overtaken by events. But the delegates were not reassured. Sergei Novopol'skii of the AZLK factory explained that: "It does not depend on promises and declaration and not even on the intentions of the other side, but on our decisiveness. If they do not carry out our demands, we will declare a strike."¹⁵

A dominant theme of the discussion was the danger of a quiet appropriation of state property by bureaucratic clans who are adapting the market to their interests. Much evidence, along the lines cited in my article in the previous issue of *IV*, was brought to support that fear. The Union's programme of immediate measures took note of the "critical situation in the country linked to the attempt by the administrative-command system to consolidate its power through the appropriation of the

property belonging to the people and to leave the toilers in the situation of hired labourers deprived of rights." It called on the councils to convene their collectives to hear reports from the administration on its activity, "including [that relating to] joint enterprises, small enterprises, cooperatives, as well as its participation in associations and concerns...and to stop any attempts to transform enterprises behind the back of the collective into concerns, joint-stock companies and so on."

The Union's basic goals are the achievement of "legal guarantees and the realization in practice of the voluntary and free choice by the work collectives of forms of property and management", as well as "drawing of work collectives into the process of managing their enterprises, as one of the main ways of fighting against the totalitarian system with the aim of overcoming the alienation of the toilers from power and from property and the liquidation of the cruel exploitation of the people by the barrack-bureaucratic state." Finally, the "union unites the labour collectives in the aim of mobilizing their civic activity as a factor for the general improvement of the situation in the country, as a factor of constant positive pressure from below on legislative and executive organs, and finally, as a factor that will block anti-popular actions and facilitate the precise and swift execution of plans and decisions in the interests of the toilers."¹⁶

From a socialist point of view, the programme of the new Union is not unambiguous, and it is worth looking first at some of the potential dangers it presents. As already noted, although the inalienable and indivisible nature of the collective's property flows logically from the programme, this is never made explicit.

No economic conception

More importantly, there is no overall economic conception. The Union clearly supports market reform (although this too is not really spelled out), but is this reform to lead to a system defined by market relations, that is, one in which the market dominates and dictates its logic to society, or to one where market relations are a mechanism of economic regulation and coordination subordinated to the collective, conscious will of the society?

It could be argued that the movement's emphasis on enterprise autonomy and on ownership by the collective can serve as a basis for an eventual restoration of capitalism as well as for the construction of a socialist economy based on self-management, depending on whether the accent is on the market or on the collective power of the workers. If it is on the

13. *Rabochaya tribuna*, December 8 1990.

14. These are a mechanic-assembler from VAZ, an engineer from the new Elabuga auto factory and the chairman of the work-collective council of the Moscow Kauchuk rubber factory.

15. *Rabochaya tribuna*, December 12, 1990.

16. Unpublished document.

former, there seems little more reason to welcome monopolism based upon workers' self-management than bureaucratic monopolism; both involve the pursuit of particular, corporatist interests at the expense of the collectivity.

Gorbachev moves to right

With Gorbachev moving to the "right" (in particular his attempt to shore up the Union and the disintegrating economy through extraordinary presidential powers based upon a greater reliance on the army and the KGB and his appointment of conservatives to certain top posts) and the realization among liberals that "destatization" is not proceeding as they would like (that is, in a way that would give ample influence and reward to the intellectual elite and to a private sector not dependent on bureaucratic whims), some liberals are already proposing the idea of an alliance with the self-management movement, hoping to dominate it.

Gavriil Popov has publicly warned of two possible variants of privatization: "the transfer as property to the bureaucracy (along with the trade mafia) of that which they have, so to speak, already been "managing" so successfully; or democratic privatization, with transfer of enterprises to the toilers."¹⁷ (A supporter of the 500-Day Plan, Popov no more really wants to see the second option realized than do the bureaucrats he is attacking.)

Igor Klyamkin, one of the most insightful liberal ideologues, has now also come round to seeing in Gorbachev the leader of the "revolution from above". Yel'tsin, on the other hand, represents for him "new [unnamed] forces"; Yel'tsin wants a "different [unspecified] kind of market." Klyamkin laments the fact that nationalism cannot serve as a basis for "democracy" (that is, for the liberal intelligentsia and its restorationist project) in Russia, as it does in other republics. He suggests, however, that such a basis might be constructed from the struggles provoked by destatization, and he calls for "a broad bloc of employees and entrepreneurs."¹⁸

The hopes pinned on this tactic of harnessing the popular movement to the liberal programme in the Russian Republic by playing up the opposition of a supposedly democratic republican parliament led by Yel'tsin to the undemocratic central government and parliament led by Gorbachev has some basis.

The tactic has a major trump in Yel'tsin's personal popularity as an outspoken opponent of the establishment — though there are some signs that his star too might be waning. Thus, the workers of the VAZ assembly line, whose resolution was cited above, appealed to Yel'tsin and the Russian parliament to defend their self-management rights against the central government. Their programme of the December Congress called on the collectives to work through their republican par-

liaments and to push for the transfer of their enterprises from Union to republican jurisdiction.

Nevertheless, the liberals' attempt to win the self-management movement to their cause has slight chance of success: their market reform is no more compatible with a revolution from below and genuine self-management than that of the reformist wing of the bureaucracy. And these two groups need each other to realize their programmes, which are really not that different.¹⁹ It was only a little over a year ago that Klyamkin himself wrote that the transition to the market could not be achieved democratically, since the workers are too attached to the idea of social justice.²⁰ Now, after suddenly "discovering" that Gorbachev, in contrast to Yeltsin, has embraced the "revolution from above" he nevertheless still concludes (not at all disapprovingly) that a Gorbachev-Yeltsin alliance is inevitable, though for good measure he concludes that it will be a stormy marriage of convenience.

Ineffective democracy

As Sergei Stankevich, deputy mayor of Moscow and one of the three leaders of the liberal "Interregional Group" in the USSR Parliament put it in the closing days of 1990: "The situation in the country is critical and by ordinary parliamentary methods, using only our newly-born and still-ineffective democracy, it will be impossible to resolve our problems. Therefore, we need a more authoritarian leadership of the reform process."²¹ The liberals' feeble reaction to Gorbachev's shift to the "right" indicates that Stankevich's views are widely shared by his colleagues, or that, in any case, they can find no acceptable alternative to Gorbachev.

Of course, few would deny the need to restore some semblance of order in the economy. The presidential decree reacting and strengthening "workers' control" of trade (to be aided by the KGB!) should be seen as a populist gesture on Gorbachev's part.²² But this measure is not really intended to change the relations of power in the economy.

The unmistakable thrust of Gorbachev's latest shift (certainly not his last — the "revolution from above" has only one possible programme: the market) is towards bureaucratic recentralization, which in practice necessarily means strengthening the power of the economic managers vis-à-vis the workers. The All-Union Meeting of Managers of State Enterprises that took place at almost the same time as the self-management congress adopted a strong law and order resolution. In contrast to the workers' congress, this gathering, held in the Kremlin's Palace of Congresses, was addressed by Gorbachev himself and received broad press coverage.²³

As the liberal-apparatus alliance

becomes more explicit, so the liberals' success in winning popular support as the only real democrats and most fearless enemies of the bureaucracy declines. On the other hand, socialists, who so far have remained relatively isolated from their potential social base, are the only ones who embrace the revolution from below and put forth a consistent democratic programme. The self-management movement thus opens up new possibilities for breaking their isolation.

Summing up political developments in 1990, Pavel Voshchanov, political observer for *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, lamented "a mass shift to the right in consciousness....The discrediting of the democratic idea is one of the political outcomes of this last year." By "democratic idea" Voshchanov, of course, means "liberalism". His use of the term "right" is more ambiguous, since it can refer to conservative "defenders of socialism" as well as to genuine socialists (these two groups are indistinguishable to the liberals, who are in complete agreement with the liberals that socialism has already been constructed in the Soviet Union). But there is no evidence of a shift in mass consciousness towards the conservatives, either of the Stalinist or of the Pamyat' (Great Russian chauvinist) type. On the contrary, the emergence of an organized self-management current demonstrates the continued strength of democratic sentiment among the workers.

Weakening liberal influence

The creation of the Union of Work-Collective Committees is itself a sign of the weakening of liberal ideological influence in an important sector of the labour movement. The recognition of the need for coordinating their activities indicates that self-management activists are beginning to discover the limits of a corporatist approach to their struggle for enterprise autonomy. Such an approach, which has received strong encouragement from liberals, was to a large degree a spontaneous reaction on the workers' part to their experience with bureaucratic centralism. But this seems to be changing under the impact of what they have already experi-

17. Radzikhovskii, "Kapitalizm v otdel'no vzyatoi kvartire," *Nedelya*, no. 48, November 25, 1990, p. 7.

18. I. Klyamkin, "Oktrabr'skii vybor prezidenta," *Ogonek*, no. 47, November 1990, p. 7.

19. In the view of A. Kolganov, a Marxist economist at Moscow University, the "500-Days" are based upon a bloc between the "new rich" and the party-economic bureaucracy on terms dictated by the new rich. The Union programme calls for a smoother, less painful path of transformation of the bureaucracy into new rich, naturally on its own terms. A. Kolganov, "Doloi nomenklaturnyi kapitalizm," *Dialog*, No. 17, November 1990, p. 45.

20. E. Bérard-Zaricka, "Quelques propositions pour une perestroika autoritaire," *Les temps modernes* (Paris), no. 523, February 1990, pp. 11-22.

21. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, December 30, 1990.

22. *Trud*, December 2, 1990.

23. *Rabochaya tribuna*, December 8, 9 and 11, 1990.

24. *Rabochaya tribuna*, December 6, 1990.

enced of the market and the threat posed by growing economic dislocation.

"Certain elements would very much like to split up the workers as potential owners," explained a delegate to the Congress from the Elabuga auto factory. "When they are isolated from each other, it will be easier to manipulate them in the service of alien interests. This is one of the reasons we called the congress."²⁴ Much was said at the congress of the need for a strong central authority capable of restoring respect for laws and harmony among the republics, uniting regions and establishing stable economic relations in a unified economic space. But the congress rejected Gorbachev's authoritarian solution. According to V. Kataev, a delegate from Cheboksar:

"Such an authority cannot be established from above with the aid of a club and decrees. It will be established by the work collectives themselves if they become the complete masters of the socialist property. In that case, as the resolution of the Congress states, the work-collective as owners are prepared to bear full responsibility for the results of the economic activity of their enterprises and for order in the country."²⁵

V. Adrianov, co-chairman of the Union and a mechanic on the VAZ assembly line, expressed the outlook of the self-management movement in the following terms: "The work-collective councils in the enterprises were born of *perestroika*. But from the very start, they were separated from each other. Today the time has come to unite. Why? We are standing on the threshold of the market. We are not indifferent when it comes to who will get that part of the national property that will undergo destatization. The aim of our

union: through common efforts, to win the possibility for every collective to itself choose the form of property, to itself become, if it so desires, the owner of its enterprise without payment. Only the workers, having become the master, the owners of the property, are capable of stopping the advancing chaos in the economy.

"The programmes of transition to the market that have been adopted contain within them the danger of violation of the workers' interests. Exploiting the confusion, the administrative-command apparatus is attempting not only to hold onto the reigns of management, but to become in fact the owners of the means of production, creating concerns, associations, joint-stock companies. As for us, we are left the role of hired labour, the draught force of the economy. We cannot and simply do not have the right to allow that."²⁶

A socialist path

If the workers are really going to prevent this, they will have to take up the fight for a socialist path of development. For it alone holds out the prospect of genuine democratization of economic and political relations. While the liberals form alliances with the apparatus in order to push through by authoritarian means a reform that would leave economic power in the hands of a small élite, the socialists emerge as the only real democrats. In a joint declaration at the end of September 1990, a coalition of left parties and groups in Moscow condemned the official reform programmes as:

"One more social experiment that would maintain power and property in a new form in the hands of the party-state

bureaucracy and the "affairistes" of the shadow economy. The bosses of the [Brezhnev] period of stagnation want to change the form of their domination....And once again, the burden of these transformations will fall entirely on the shoulders of ordinary people....Yesterday's "irreconcilable" fighters against the privileges of the partocracy are prepared today to defend the power of the same nomenklatura, with the only difference that now transactions will occur in cash [pod nalichnyi raschet]....The slogans of justice, humanism, and charity, under which the democratic movement of the *perestroika* period developed, have been replaced with calls for a cruel economy, a firm hand, and the auctioning off of the nation's wealth...

"It is necessary to overcome the false alternative between totalitarianism and a monopoly-dominated capitalist market and to take our own path, determined by the creative activity of the people where they live and work and by the unity of their actions as a people. In this work, our sympathies lie with social, production and territorial self-management, though this too cannot be imposed from above."

Among the immediate measures proposed in the declaration are: the right of work collectives to determine independently, without purchase, the forms of property, management and self-management in their enterprises; the right of local soviets to manage land and natural resources, monitored by public organizations; the right of republics and other territorial formations to independently determine their status as well as the powers they voluntarily delegate to superordinate organizations; the abolition of presidential power; democratic opposition to the creation of authoritarian national states that refuse national and civil rights to their own minorities; the consistent introduction of full human rights, in particular the abolition of the death penalty, of anti-strike legislation, of all forms of forced labour, of the internal passport regime, and of the political police; the right of the local population through their soviets and through referenda to veto the construction of enterprises on their territory.²⁷

Such is the state of *glasnost* that none of the newspapers would agree to print this declaration. But despite the obstacles posed by the liberal near-monopoly of the mass media (tempered only by the minority conservative media), the profoundly democratic nature of the labour movement, and more particularly, the appearance of an organized self-management current within it, give grounds for optimism about the eventual development of an active, mass base for socialism in the Soviet Union. ★

25. Ibid.

26. *Rabochaya tribuna*, December 8, 1990.

27. For an English translation of this document, see *International Viewpoint*, no. 194, November 12, 1990.



Russian Revolution ...

Down with the government of murderers!

WE HAVE witnessed the greatest youth upsurge in the last 20 years in Greece. 2500 high schools have been occupied for more than 3 months. All higher education facilities were occupied for two months. Scores of mobilizations and marches took place in all big cities, the biggest being the marches of January 10 and 11 with the participation of 200,000 people (the biggest demonstrations since 1960). Severe conflicts with the police led to the death of five people.

Greek youth have been facing a deep and abrupt attack on their living conditions. Since last April 200,000 young people have been dismissed from their work. Each year 70,000 young people abandon their studies in secondary school. Less and less children from working families manage to enter university, in contrast to children from wealthier families.

Authoritarianism is becoming more and more severe. It is extremely provocative that, in conditions of great austerity, the only wage increases have been those given to the police riot squads.

Authoritarianism grows in all spheres

At the same time, authoritarianism is growing in all spheres of the social and political lives of youth. The most recent examples are the laws which essentially ban strikes and the so-called antiterrorist law which enables the police to arrest whoever they consider to be a terrorist without even having a warrant.

All this was prepared by the two social democratic administrations of PASOK (1981-89) and the two governments with the participation of the Left Coalition which led to the achievement of an absolute majority by the conservatives (New Democracy).

The full dependence of this government on the USA and the EEC led them to wage war against the working people and youth through broad privatizations, attacks on social security, the closing of problematic enterprises, "terrorist" laws and much more. All this, promoted with the tolerance of the official opposition, has opened a gap between the official political scene and the youth. This was the social basis of the youth upsurge, and not simply the measures of education.

The first stage of our struggle was in mid-September. The first occupations in high schools took place in the country. Within 20 days almost all schools were

THE following statement on the recent youth upsurge in Greece was issued in January by the Central Committee of the KNE, a Greek socialist organization originating from a left split in the Communist Party. It has been altered slightly for space and stylistic reasons.

occupied and there was objectively a problem of coordination in the struggle. From the very beginning the government portrayed the struggle as being promoted by the opposition parties, whereas in fact the opposition voted against the sit-ins or kept a neutral position.

The occupations followed the banning of union activity in schools and the imposition of an authoritarian framework in education, involving even surveillance of the life of students outside school. As far as universities are concerned, a series of faculties were at the point of closing down permanently due to the bad financial situation (art schools, teachers academies, and so on)...

...The sit ins were continued during the Xmas vacation. There was a dramatic change in the movement right after Xmas. The government tried to break the occupations by force and this led to conflicts in many schools with people beyond the school community. This situation reached its most dramatic peak with the murder of a teacher in Patras by cadres of New Democracy, while trying to defend his students from the invasion. On the next day there were demonstrations of 10,000 people in Patras with conflicts.

Mass mobilizations in Athens

At this stage of the struggle the movement acquired characteristics which enabled it to express the interests of society as a whole. There were great mobilizations in Athens focusing on authoritarianism. The slogan "down with the government of murderers" expressed the anger of all the democratic people of the country. On Thursday January 10 thousands of people waged an all night battle

with police riot squads. During this battle, the police caused a fire in a department store which led to the death of four people. Another mobilization followed the next day, as massive and militant, with the participation of working people. This made the government reorientate its tactics by changing the Minister of Education and forwarding a proposition of "dialogue", which nevertheless did not manage to deceive anybody as to the democratic sensitivity of the government.

After the outbreak of the Gulf War, the government tried to suppress the movement and impose a series of anti-popular measures in the name of the emergency conditions. Nevertheless there is now an attempt to bring the movement to a higher level by setting goals of an anti-imperialist character, such as the immediate halting of the war, the withdrawal of Greek military forces from the Gulf and the use of money for educational and other purposes.

The movement can be regarded as a victory. It succeeded in postponing the reactionary laws in education. The laws banning union activity in schools have been completely ruled out. The government has also promised to give an extra 15 billion drachmae for education. Concerning the founding of private universities they have restricted permits to public owners rather than individual entrepreneurs.

Shattered myth of invincible government

The movement shattered the myth that the government is invincible. Thousands of working people joined in these struggles, defying the police riot squads, the official opposition parties and the mass media. Furthermore, a series of sectors of working people (teachers, bus drivers and so on) joined in the struggle through strikes against authoritarianism and for their own rights, despite the fact that according to the new laws this was illegal.

For the first time there was actually a common front of struggle by secondary and university students as well as teachers.

The struggle made it necessary to go beyond the traditional forms of organization and the official students unions which proved to be inadequate. There were new students' coordinations which organized and decided on the struggles, open to all students who wished to join in ... ★

A wave of racism and chauvinism

"A WAVE of racism and chauvinism — in which the Asian community are prime victims — is sweeping Britain as a direct consequence of the imperialist war in the Gulf" (*Asian Times*, January 29, 1991). There have been attacks on black people in their homes, in their places of worship, in the streets and at schools. These attacks also happened before the war in the Gulf started. But since mid-January there has been an increase in physical attacks, detentions and deportations.

FINN JENSEN

THERE are about 100,000 Arabs in the United Kingdom, 3,000 of them students from the Gulf area, including an estimated 1,000 Iraqis. Kuwaiti nationals who were resident in the UK on August 2, 1990 have so far been given "exceptional leave to remain" by the Home Office. In contrast no such promise has been given to any other nationals from the Gulf area.

About 60 Iraqis and Palestinians in Britain were detained in January 1991 awaiting deportation. Deportations are not a new experience for the black community in Britain. They are just being intensified with the war.

Among those detained are people who have lived in Britain for more than ten years. Several of those detained are well known for their opposition to the Iraqi government.

Fifteen Iraqis were deported to Jordan in January 1991. According to Amnesty International it is not safe to return or deport opponents of the Iraqi government to Jordan.

One of the detained Palestinians is Abbas Cheblak. He has lived in London for 16 years with his wife. They have two young children, both British citizens, and he applied for naturalization two years ago. Mr. Cheblak is a well-known academic and journalist who has a long record of fighting against civil rights abuses in the Middle East.

Abbas Cheblak was served with a deportation order and detained at Pentonville prison. He applied for habeas corpus and for bail. The High Court refused his application.

Mr. B. is a 31 year old Palestinian from

the West Bank. He and his wife work for a computer firm. She is pregnant. They have lived in Britain since 1975. In 1986 they applied for asylum but were given leave to remain in the U.K. Mr B. is the nephew of a man described in court as a "terrorist", whom Mr. B has not seen since childhood and of whom he strongly disapproves. Mr B does not support the Iraqi government or the invasion of Kuwait.

Ali el-Salh has lived in Bedford for the past twenty years. His wife was also threatened with deportation but the Home Office backed down after publicity about her children being British.

The British government has the power (under the 1971 Immigration Act) to detain and deport non-British citizens on the grounds that it is "conducive to the public good on grounds of national security". In such cases people have no right to appeal or to legal representation.

All they can do is to present their case to a panel of three advisers (known as the Three Wise Men). The advisers are all appointed by the government. The Home Secretary does not have to follow any recommendations from these advisers. So the Home Secretary is the only one who can overturn the decision to detain and deport — a decision that was taken in the first place by himself.

No right to legal representation

In reality the hearing in front of the Three Wise Men is nothing more than a cosmetic exercise. The person involved has no right to hear the reasons for his/her detention/deportation, s/he cannot present witnesses, s/he has no right to legal representation and s/he will not know what the panel will recommend to the Home Secretary. Presently 10 cases are scheduled to be dealt with a day. This is the British justice equivalent of a four minute mile.

On January 19 the Home Office decided to ban all Iraqis, including asylum seekers, from entering Britain and to refuse those here for any temporary purpose an extension of their leave.

So any Iraqi who is not being deported for national security reasons will be prohibited from entry to Britain if they leave the country, even for a short period, irrespective of how long they have lived in the UK or of their family and other connections here. Are the British government



at war with the Iraqi people or with the Iraqi government? The government wants to give the impression that all Iraqis are a threat to Britain's national security.

The Guardian commented, in an editorial on January 24, that "Truth is not the only victim of war. Human rights, too, are often lost along the way. And civil rights lawyers are right to be concerned about some of the people who have been rounded up this week by the British security services in their effort to pre-empt Iraqi terrorist attacks".

British "justice", "immigration control", and "security" have now all become the same thing. This can be seen in the membership of the three man panel. The chair is a judge, Justice Lloyd, who also supervises telephone tappings by being Commissionaire of the Interception of Communications Committee. Sir Robert Andrew was responsible at the Home Office for liaison with MI5 (the British secret service). He was also involved in removing John Stalker from the shoot-to-kill enquiry in the north of Ireland. David Neve was a magistrate in colonial Uganda and then graduated to chair of the immigration tribunal in the UK where he oversaw deportations and divided families (*The Guardian*, February 2, 1991).

Detainees held in appalling conditions

The Arab detainees in Pentonville prison went on hunger strike on February 2 to protest at the failure of the jail heating system and their being kept overnight in cells well below freezing point. The men are in single cells, locked up 16-20 hours a day, with access to a shower once a week, and having to "slop out". Access to legal advice is restricted. No telephones have been provided for the detainees. One solicitor described it as "unusually filthy, even by the standards of British jails".

Socialists are fighting to get trade unions and student unions to take up the defence of their black members threatened with racist attacks or by the Home Office. Black people have already begun to organize in self-defence. Ishtiaq Ahmed, a spokesperson for the Bradford Council of Mosques, said in the *Asian Times*, "If we are attacked or molested or harassed, as a community we have a right to defend and protect ourselves". ★

Down with the aggression against Iraq!

Imperialist troops out of the Gulf!

IN THE name of justice, a new massacre is being carried out. In the name of liberty, they are murdering once again. In the name of democracy, a whole country is being smashed by bombs. After so many others, it is now the turn of Iraq. Who will be next?

The goal of the assault which is now being carried out by the army of the United States, its imperialist allies, including social-democratic governments, and its Arab and other supporters (fundamentalist monarchies or dictatorships) in the Persian Gulf goes far beyond the so-called "liberation of Kuwait" and the alleged defence of "international law". The actions of this coalition of oppressors of peoples, as always, are quite opposite to the "values" they claim to be upholding.

In reality, for the imperialist powers, it is a question of decisively establishing a "new world order", where every attack on their vital interests will be punished by the same treatment as is being received by Iraq today. This "new order" is more than ever subject to the political-military hegemony of the United States, whose terrorising arrogance now knows no bounds. The policy of collusion with imperialism followed by the Soviet leadership, far from

THE following appeal was adopted unanimously by the XIIIth World Congress of the Fourth International, which took place in February 1991. Further signatures to this appeal are being sought.

FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

opening up a new era of peace, has greatly encouraged the governments of London, Washington and Paris to carry out their most criminal plans.

Unprecedented air attack on Iraq

The aggression against Iraq is the biggest air attack in history. It is the first major electronic war, with Iraq being used as a vast testing ground for the latest murderous gadgets from the imperialist military array.

The immediate aim of this attack is no longer in doubt: it is the total destruction of Iraq's military-industrial potential. American imperialism wants to remove from the scene a regional power liable to challenge its oil interests and capable of counterbalancing the power of the Zionist state, the USA's main ally in the region. In order to achieve this, the Pentagon is prepared to consider anything, including the use of nuclear weapons.

Nothing can justify this barbaric attack on the people of Iraq. Neither the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait nor the nature of the Baghdad regime can justify the US and its allies setting themselves up as police and arbiters of the world. We know all too well to what degree these "dispensers of justice" respect the rights of peoples. Only yesterday, they supported the Iraqi dictatorship in its war against Iran and closed their eyes to the massacre of the Kurdish people. It is these "liberators" who have equipped and financed the Israeli army of occupation in Palestine,

and who are even now multiplying this support, as the Zionist government is openly planning to expel a large proportion of the Palestinian people once more from their own land.

Faced with this offensive, whose real motives are eminently reactionary, anti-imperialist movements cannot be neutral. They are on the side of the people of Iraq, subjected to bombing by the coalition forces. They are for an immediate and unilateral end to the aggression, for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of imperialist forces from the Gulf region, for the right of the Arab peoples to freely decide their own fate without interference from the big powers. In particular, they must defend the Kurdish and Palestinian peoples' rights to self-determination against all their oppressors.

Popular support for Iraq in Middle East

To be anti-imperialist today means being unconditionally for the defeat of imperialism, alongside the peoples of the Arab region and the Middle East, who have massively expressed their solidarity with the people of Iraq.

It means being against the governments of the coalition and against those who take refuge in a embarrassed neutrality and join the blockade of Iraq, rather than supporting its people who are under threat of death.

We will step up our effort to strengthen the world movement against the aggression, creating the broadest possible unity so as to impose a halt to the bombing and the withdrawal of the imperialist troops. We refuse to pay the costs of this criminal war, undertaken in the interests of the oil and financial magnates.

We denounce those who do not hesitate to waste billions in order to crush Iraq, while they refuse to cancel the debt which weighs down the Third World and reduce the provision of basic social needs everywhere.

Together with the workers of the world, we shall unite to block the imperialist war machine.

We will support the youth, the soldiers, the reservists who, in the countries of the aggressive coalition, refuse to take part in this massacre.

Against the oppressors' "new world order", we stand for a new world solidarity of all struggles against oppression! ★

A Europe-wide Demonstration

against the war has been called for March 24 by a group of deputies, including Greens and Communist Party representatives, in the European parliament. The demonstration, which is being organized with the help of the main Belgian peace organizations is to take place in Brussels, and will assemble at 2pm at the Central Station (Gare Centrale).

The political basis for the demonstration includes — alongside calling for an immediate end to hostilities — the maintenance of the embargo against Iraq. However the political reservations of anti-imperialist militants concerning the formal basis of the action should not lead them to abstain from taking this opportunity to show the breadth of opposition to the imperialist war in Europe.

A conference of antiwar local, national and European elected representatives is also planned to take place in Brussels on Saturday March 23. ★