

international

VIEWPOINT

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Another eventful month

Once again the fast pace of world events has caught us off guard. Rest assured that the December issue will carry complete coverage of the encirclement of Haiti, the post-election situation in Poland and, of course, further developments in Russia. — The Editors ★

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Class struggle, you say?

A few weeks back, the president of the Philips corporation, Jan Timmer, declared, "The relative calm and abundance of yesteryear will never return [...] Europe must choose between a high quality of life with costly Welfare States sheltered from the rest of the world by protectionism, or an open economy in which, as elsewhere, industry can produce at the lowest cost with longer work hours." As for the president of the Belgian employers' federation, Georges Jacobs, he has called for "horse medicine".

CLAUDE GABRIEL — 29 October 1993

THEY couldn't be more explicit! Previously, capitalism managed to export part of its crisis to the countries of the Third World. This process has now reached the saturation point. Social deregulation and misery seem to be stretching their tentacles from the "South" to the "North" as an inevitable consequence of capital's new needs.

At the European Council meeting of October 29, there was an entirely different song about unemployment in the European Economic Community (EEC). There was talk of a "European growth initiative", an urgent policy of supporting investments, and so forth. What a strange institution this is, in which everyone — Jacques Delors above all — seems condemned to schizophrenia! This is the same EEC that calls for deregulation, competitive public services and privatisation. It is difficult to do the bidding for Jan Timmer and George Jacobs and at the same time be proponents of a return to social protection and prosperity.

The wealth produced by the real economy goes less and less towards improving the general standard of living. States which get bogged down in indebtedness and budgetary deficits undertake wide-scale privatisation in order to pump some resources into their treasuries. But this return to the private sector provokes massive job losses, which in turn aggravates the social situation taken as a whole.

The political Establishment, social democratic and liberal, is worried. They know that if they go too far they will revive our old friend, the class struggle. And this worry has been justified over the last few weeks. We need only examine a few examples.

In Belgium, the government and employers are having a difficult time organising a social pact with union leaderships

that face tremendous pressure from impatient and combative sectors of the workforce. There was even a call for a strike to coincide with the European Summit in Brussels.

In France, the major strike by Air France personnel against the restructuring plan and job losses has created tremendous hope. It was a popular struggle: in a poll, 70% of those polled said they sympathised with the strike. It was a victorious struggle, too; the head of Air France resigned and the plan was withdrawn. And it was a significant struggle as it took place in the context of a generalised upturn in the combativity of the public sector.

In the Spanish State, there was a demonstration of 100,000 students against fee hikes on 27 October; and there is a call by the two major union federations, the UGT and the Workers Committees, for a day of action on 25 November against the aggressive attacks envisaged by Felipe Gonzales.

In Italy, there were more than 100,000 in Rome on September 25, from a variety of sectors, to denounce the government's social policy; this was followed a few weeks later by a demonstration of 300,000 retirees and major strikes, especially in the south, and a four hour countrywide strike on October 28.

In Switzerland, in the canton of Geneva, recent elections led to the collapse of the "respectable" left and a breakthrough for the Left Alliance — a united, radical bloc — which garnered 19.2% of the vote.

To be sure, all this is not enough to lessen the burden of defeats and fear. The brutal closure of the Seat (Volkswagen group) factory in Barcelona — 9,000 job losses — has not yet provoked a significant enough response to meet the challenge head on. In Spain, as in Italy and other countries, government cutbacks are playing their role of demoralisation and atomisation.

However, keeping a mere tally of "points" scored by each side is not sufficient for understanding the current situation. Companies such as Air France are in sectors that have yet to be seriously affected by restructuring. Its workers have yet to endure a defeat and can still serve as examples of intransigence and courage.

The crisis might create other forms of radicalisation. It could unite employed sectors that have social protection and want to defend their gains, sectors of the population that are excluded from the system of social protection and the right to decent housing, and sectors of students who face unemployment once they have graduated.

Employers have put forward the idea of a kind of "sharing of work" — which can be summarised as the sharing of unemployment, the disappearance of a weekly regulation of working time, the lowering of salaries and an increase in productivity. This is the challenge that has been thrown up by German employers, who have gone on the attack against the famous "social market economy" which was so often celebrated as the virtuous model of consent between the classes.

Meanwhile, the European Council is engaged in a highly academic discussion about unemployment and misery. French President François Mitterrand has proposed that Europe borrow 100 billion European Currency Units (ECUs) towards the revival of the EEC's economy. Why not 200 or 300 billion? After all, the main objective of such a proposal is to give a major face lift to capitalism and to avoid at all cost any kind of radical challenge.

There are a lot better things to do. Now that unemployment and the sharing of work are the topics of the hour, it is up to the workers themselves to take the initiative. The Europe we want to build will be one of a radical reduction of the number of hours worked with no loss in salary, a Europe with a moratorium on layoffs, a Europe in which the unions have the right to inspect companies' account books and in which banking secrets are abolished.

Job losses in the name of competition? Then it's time to abolish competition and quickly find the path of mass mobilisations of solidarity between all working people and youth. "Prioritise social needs. Get the money where there's plenty." This is the direction in which today's mass resistance leads. ★

A Tzar is born

October days

21 September

Coup d'état: Yeltsin outlaws the democratically elected Parliament and suspends the Constitutional Court. After a week of pro-Parliament demonstrations Yeltsin escalates the conflict by blocking off Parliament and establishing a de facto state of emergency in the region around the parliament building, the White House.

2 October

The anger of the protesters explodes in street fighting and the erection of barricades on the Moscow Ring Road. The following day the conservative organisation, Working Russia, leads the way through the cordons of militia and troops to the White House.

3 October

Alexander Rutskoi and the leadership of the Supreme Soviet organise impromptu militias — a rag-tag “army” of Afghan veterans, extreme nationalists, and hard-line Stalinists — to attack the office of the Moscow Mayor and the television centre at Ostankino. Some three hours after the attack had been fought off, three prominent members of the Party of Labour were among a group arrested, either by the “official” militia or the police. Held for twenty-four hours or more, the detainees were subjected to horrific acts of violence. Following the release of most of the detainees, it is feared that one of them may have died having failed to contact relatives or friends.

4 October

Yeltsin launches a full-scale attack on the White House, taking a terrible toll in deaths. The ensuing closure of the opposition press, subsequent arrests, and the banning of practically all opposition parties indicates the trajectory of the former “democrats” under loud applause from the West. ★

FOLLOWING his coup d'état on 21 September, Russian President Boris Yeltsin has promised fresh elections, to a so-called “State Duma”, on 12 December. But electoral boundaries have yet to be drawn. Approved party lists and rules on acceptable media coverage have not been published. As our Moscow correspondent explains, the elections look set to be a farce.

POUL FUNDER LARSEN — Moscow, 19 October 1993

YELTSIN'S coup d'état, which began on 21 September with the outlawing of Parliament, reached its logical conclusion on 4 October in the military assault on the White House and the subsequent ban on virtually all political opposition. Nominally this leaves Yeltsin in the position of a sovereign with absolute power, since he can now in principle decide any matter in the State by decree — a situation which is not likely to change qualitatively after the December elections to what will become a weak Parliament without much legitimacy.

The Yeltsinites have already for some time been trying to gloss over their Stalinist path with attributes of pre-revolutionary Russia; thus the lower chamber of Yeltsin's quasi-parliament is called the “State Duma”. But no amount of glitter or decoration can hide the fact that Yeltsin is no Mikhail Romanov, and that his “dynasty” is not likely to last for long at the head of a State ridden by political turmoil and economic chaos.¹ Indeed, the major guarantor for Yeltsin's survival now, as the dramatic October-days showed, is the repressive apparatus. That is, so long as the armed forces, the police, and the Ministry of State Security continue to stick to the line expressed recently by defence minister Pavel Grachev: “Boris Yeltsin is at the moment and for a minimum of five years the only man whom the country believes and who most of the people believe can lead the country out of crisis.”

Contrary to the myth created by the liberal mass media there was initially no principled contradiction between Yeltsin and the Russian Supreme Soviet, elected in March 1990 and basically reflecting the relationship of forces inside the nomenclatura at that time. To some extent it was the Supreme Soviet itself that “created”

Yeltsin as the unchallenged political leader of Russia, by electing him its speaker and later granting him extraordinary executive powers. The quite heterogeneous, bureaucratic interests in the majority of the Supreme Soviet only began putting up serious resistance after Yeltsin's offensive of the Winter 1991/92 — where Russia unilaterally took over most Soviet institutions and went for harsh price liberalisation thereby paving the way for the demise of the Soviet Union and IMF-styled “shock therapy” in Russia.

This battle became a very protracted one erupting in major confrontations in April 1992 (where the government threatened to resign), December 1992 (where Gaidar fell), and March-April 1993 (where Yeltsin carried out the “general repetition” for his coup). But between these “explosions” many temporary deals were struck, attempts at general compromises were made, and numerous regroupments between the two camps took place (with Rutskoi as a prominent case in point) underlining the non-agonistic character of the conflicts.

Decomposition

But while the ruptures at the top proceeded partially according to their own scenario the global crisis of Russian society accelerated the decomposition of the State apparatus. In turn the confrontation at the head of the State sharpened, as particularly the Yeltsin camp got more and more desperate faced with the disastrous performance of the economy and its own failed attempts to draft a new “presidential” constitution. This led to the dramatic escalation of the conflict in late September-October.

1. Mikhail Romanov (ruling from 1613-33) was the first Tzar of the Romanov dynasty ruling Russia until March 1917.

The political limitations of the parliamentary leadership were apparent throughout the siege that ensued: thousands — at times tens of thousands — of people gathered outside the White House, but the leaders did not make serious efforts to broaden the mobilisation. No systematic work was carried out to win support in the factories — and consequently no one heeded the abstract calls for “political strikes”. This, partly self-imposed, isolation was a major reason why extremist groups of nationalist, and even fascist, orientation could win such influence among the defenders of the White House, with terrible consequences. The exact chronology and immediate causes of the bloody events of 3-4 October is a disputed question and not likely to be sorted out soon (as the aborted August putsch of 1991 still remains riddled with questions more than two years after its defeat). But the political outcome of the situation after groups of defenders of the White House, possibly falling victim to a provocation set-up by the Yeltsin camp, launched their doomed attack on the Ostankino television centre, is quite clear: most of the opposition, which had accumulated some popular credibility during the two week siege, lost in the course of a few, disastrous hours most of its popular backing and left the door wide open for the Yeltsinite backlash.²

After the massacre at the White House (of which the number of casualties is still a closely guarded secret) Yeltsin went on to neutralise his remaining opponents — while security minister Nikolai Golushko “promised” to intensify the monitoring of all “subversives” under the slogan “law and order”. The Moscow City Soviet has been dissolved and opposition parties have been banned — many of which had no connection to the 3-4 October incidents. Thousands of people of Caucasian nationality have been deported from Moscow (while tens of thousands have reportedly fled) in a pogrom-like campaign. The latter was officially presented as a “clampdown on the mafia”, but its arbitrariness and cruelty suggests that it was merely carried out to protect Russian Mafias, closely linked to the notoriously corrupt Moscow city administration, against possible “southern” competitors.

In this political climate, and given the bans and censorship, any talk of “fair” elections is obviously impossible. Since 21 September the law on elections has, for example, been changed four times after negotiations between Yeltsin’s administration and liberal parties.

In some ways it is tempting to draw parallels between the current situation and

that of autumn 1991: The Yeltsinites have re-established a hegemony in the political sphere (only this time it is based more on coercion than on popular support) and they are using this to implement their economic and geo-political solutions — in 1991 at the level of the Union, now at the level of Russia. However after two years of economic “reform” and with a State apparatus in serious decay the Yeltsinite alliance has lost most of its initial momentum, and its popular base is eroding. In spite of several “stabilisation-programmes” inflation will reach thirteen-hundred percent in 1993, and the real number of unemployed might reach the 5 million mark by the end of the year.³

When the latest round of liberalisations, including the abolishment of bread subsidies hit a population, where some two-thirds are already living below the official poverty line, the Yeltsinites might face resistance even from among their key constituencies (for example, the more and more impoverished layers of white-collar workers).

Vocabulary

The myth of liberal reform as the road to prosperity for broad layers of society is facing a final-breakdown, and even the ideologists of the Yeltsin camp are adjusting their vocabulary to catch up with the less rosy realities of “reform” gone sour and “democratic restructuring” turning into dictatorship. In an article with *Izvestiya*, 15 October, Yeltsin’s henchman Genady Burbulis formulates the basis of liberal rule in the following way: “Today the structures of the executive are socially leaning on, and orientated towards, the quickly emerging class of people enriching themselves, even though these may not yet have acquired the spirit of civic society. (...) You can call these layers what ever you like, you can even — and not without justification — talk about the criminal elements they contain (...)” Indeed at the heart of the Yeltsinite alliance you find this convergence between on the one hand the layers of nouveau riche — elements, recruited from among the old nomenclatura, the intelligentsia, and criminal circles, having accumulated their wealth primarily through speculative trading transactions; and on the other the executive, which has on a large scale incorporated the structures and personnel of the old regime. In itself this does not provide a sufficient basis for an authoritarian regime (even if the subjective “will” has been there for a long time), so to accomplish his coup d’etat Yeltsin had to persuade other forces, notably the repres-

sive apparatus, to join in. However, this alliance remains precarious, meaning that even if authoritarian rule will undoubtedly linger for a period its duration, and the degree of repression, is far from being a foregone conclusion.

The one clear winner is exactly the military and the other “power ministries”, whose relations with Yeltsin are contradictory. Yeltsin has presided over cut-backs in military expenditure, and for the bulk of officers living standards have deteriorated over the last few years; but the military top brass has won considerable political influence and a new freedom to act on their own during Yeltsin’s rule. This latter trend has shown itself in a series of conflicts within the CIS (for example, in the Trans-oniestr region in Moldova, in Abkhazia [in Georgia], and in Tadjikistan), where Russian military interests have been active — up to the point of armed intervention — more than once in blatant contradiction to Kozyrev’s official foreign policy rhetoric. At the same time the “power ministries” have not been immune to the general penetration of commercial structures throughout the State, the consequences of which is rampant corruption. Many prominent generals (including defence minister Grachev) have been accused of involvement in large-scale fraud and corruption; which might have provided another incentive to side with the current regime since they are unlikely to investigate such allegations.

So eventually the general staff as well as the police and the Ministry of Security (the former, but largely unreconstructed, KGB) went with Yeltsin — but it happened only after many hours of foot-dragging and indecision on the part of the “power ministries”, indicating serious divisions inside their leaderships. Significantly, the first major policy decision taken by Yeltsin after the attack on the White House was to adopt a new, and more defensive, military doctrine, obviously to appease the defence establishment. Only time will tell if these kind of concessions will suffice, or if the generals in a situation of continuing political instability and social unrest would decide to try and impose their solution to the profound crisis of the Russian State. After 4 October such a scenario has become a markedly more likely one.

It has been one of the persistent features of Yeltsin’s period in power — and a sign of the weak foundations of his rule — that no “ruling party” has emerged, in

2. Even liberal publications, for example *Moskovskie Novosti* (17 October), have supported the hypothesis about a provocation set up by the pro-Yeltsin forces.

3. According to “Novosti”, Ostankino TV, 15 October.

spite of many proclamations to this effect. Indeed the “democrats” have been no less divided and factionalised than the “Communists”. And even though the coup might have encouraged a certain unity among the liberals, whose only truly common denominator remains Yeltsin, this is merely a temporary occurrence.

Contradictions between monetarists and industrialists inside the government persist on a series of vital issues — including the setting up of a new rouble zone (a project strongly opposed by the IMF), the question of state industry (still largely untouched by bankruptcies), and the forms and pace of privatisation.

In the run-up to the elections the different liberal elites are busy trying to place themselves in the most favourable position, also with an eye on the — possibly not very remote — “time after Yeltsin”.

So far three major pro-capitalist blocs have emerged: “Russian Choice”, led by Gaidar, organising the die-hard liberals; the “Party of Russian Unity”, led by Sergei Shakhrai, drawing on pro-liberal regional elites and industrialists; and an unnamed bloc, led by the economist Grigory Yavlinsky, posing as a slightly more Keynesian alternative to the Yeltsinites.

During the week-long open confrontation between Yeltsin and Parliament the centrist alliance the “Civic Union”, dominated by veteran nomenclaturist, Arkady Volsky, and his “Congress of Entrepreneurs and Industrialists”, kept a remarkably low profile. This undoubtedly

reflects a general slide towards more liberal positions on the part of managers as privatisation progresses; but also shows the Volskyites’ interests in keeping good relations with both camps (although the Civic Union is formally in opposition it is also represented in the government!). Volsky clearly retains a favourable bargaining position due to his support in industry, and it is likely to fill at least part of the oppositional vacuum left open after the dissolution of Parliament. In the regions there is also a considerable potential for opposition even though Yeltsin has moved against some of the regional soviets and administrations opposed to him. The regional elites are interested in stability, but not in a too strong centre dic-

tating them its conditions. As the “reform” has proceeded differences among the regions have deepened, spurning regionalism and growing resistance against the decisions made at the centre. This was underlined by the April referendum, where a large part of the Russian regions were returning Yeltsin a vote of no confidence, and it might in the medium term become an insurmountable obstacle to any projects of a “strong federation”.

FNPR

During the siege of the White House the Russian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FNPR — the former “official” unions), came out in defence of the Parliament — a position which singled them out for attacks from the government. The Yeltsinites dictated the ouster of the FNPR’s chair, Igor Klochkov, by threatening to strip the unions of their property

are moving to quit the federation. Meanwhile the so-called independent unions, outside the FNPR, have in general aligned themselves with the liberals, and do not represent any clear-cut alternative to the anti-working class reforms or to the inefficient old unions.

This state of affairs in the union movement — and the general absence of popular movements — obviously poses serious problems for the left. The Party of Labour, which draws support from parts of the FNPR, has not as yet been able to develop beyond being a propaganda group of left-wing intellectuals. The other, smaller anarchist and left-socialist groups are even worse off — fighting to keep their structures intact and their organisations alive.

The different post-CPSU formations are still far larger than the organisations of the far left, and are likely to gain broad electoral support at a later point, as has happened elsewhere in Eastern Europe.

However, this will not happen in the December elections, where most Communist organisations are either barred from participating or calling for a boycott.

The question of a boycott or participation in the election divides many organisations, notably the large Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The Party’s leadership wants to field candidates (on other party slates), while many regional organisations are calling for a boycott. Meanwhile the Socialist Workers’ Party, of Lyodmilla Vartazarova and Roy Medvedev, is presenting a slate including candidates both

from the trade unions and from other left-wing organisations (for example, the Party of Labour).

Undoubtedly, the elections will represent a major challenge for the left for the rest of the year (even if the emphasis is an active boycott) — as will the fight against repression and for democratic rights. The first major test of the opposition forces will be 7 November, the day of the October revolution, where demonstrations have been called. For the time being the opposition in general, and the left in particular, is facing an uphill struggle, but as winter sets in, with continuing economic downturn and no political stability in sight, the fortunes of the Yeltsin “Dynasty” could soon be flagging. ★



The media and "democracy"

For several years before there was even a hint of confrontation between Yeltsin and the Parliament, Russian "democrats" (that is, liberals), openly argued that "market reform" (that is, capitalist restoration), would require an authoritarian political regime. This is because such a transition entails a serious decline in living standards for the vast majority of the people, who would not voluntarily support such sacrifices for an illusive "radiant future". The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development now forecasts that it will take thirty-five years for income in Eastern Europe to reach even half the level of average Western incomes.¹ This represents a drastic drop in relative real incomes from the time of the Communist regimes. Nonetheless, our media portrayed the Parliament's resistance to Yeltsin's policies (the Parliament was opposed to "shock therapy", not to capitalist restoration in principle) as "reactionary" and "Communist".

Mass unemployment

● According to the London *Financial Times*, the crushing of Parliament has opened the way to accelerated privatisation as well as to a severely restrictive budgetary policy that will cause mass unemployment. A recent Western study of Russian public opinion concluded that Yeltsin has failed to "sell" the idea that privatisation would benefit the majority of the people. Seventy-two percent have a negative view of privatisation of large state enterprises.²

● Yeltsin has shut down the entire opposition press, except for one newspaper. He has banned the two largest political parties, which leaves only the pro-Yeltsin rightwing of the political spectrum to participate in any elections. The trade unions, most of which opposed Yeltsin's policies, have been warned not to participate in the elections under pain of losing automatic dues checkoff and possibly worse. (They lost their control of social security on the day following the decree dissolving Parliament.)

● Yeltsin will decide the rules under which a new Parliament will be elected and what powers it will have. Moreover, the new Parliament will have before it

RARELY has press coverage of a foreign country been so distorted as the reporting on the events unleashed by Yeltsin's banning of parliament on 21 September. A mass of information has been fed to the public, but almost always within the framework of a single, simple message: the fight is between the bold reformer-democrat Yeltsin and the "hard-line" Parliament, "a strange mixture of Communists and ultra-nationalists". The beauty of "big lie" propaganda is that it takes only a few words to tell, but many words to refute. However, readers interested in digging out the truth, should find the following facts of use.

DAVID MANDEL — Montreal, 18 October 1993

the recent example of its predecessor, crushed by tanks for showing too much independence. (The Canadian government rushed to offer observers for the proposed elections, thus legitimising Yeltsin's coup d'etat under the guise of a commitment to democracy.)

● The Parliament is portrayed as a holdover from the Communist regime, even though it was elected in 1990 under the same rules as Yeltsin a year later and even though it initially supported Yeltsin's reforms.

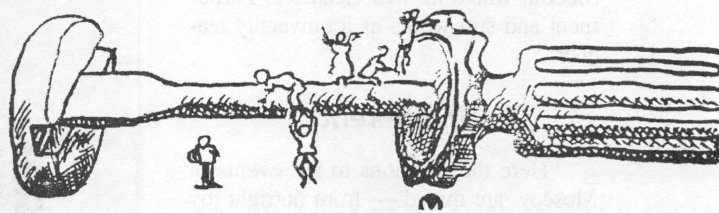
● The press tells us that Yeltsin had no choice but to put down by force the "Communist revolt". According to President Clinton, "It is clear that the opposition started the conflict and President Yeltsin had no other alternative but to try to restore order." We may never know the true origins of the violence preceding Yeltsin's armed attack on Parliament. (A few minutes before his arrest, Ruslan Khasbulatov, parliamentary chair, stated: "We never ordered the television attack. This was pure provocation... All this was organised to discourage our sympathisers."³) But it was Yeltsin who tore up the Constitution and placed the Parliament under armed siege, issuing ultimatum after ultimatum. Under the Communist Gorbachev, who faced growing political opposition to which he finally succumbed, there were no political deaths in Moscow. But at least 127 people were killed and 600 wounded in the recent battle for the Parliament building.⁴ This was a one-sided battle of tanks and heavy machine

guns versus light automatic weapons (there were many unarmed people in the Parliament building, including women and adolescents) against an opposition that already posed no threat to Yeltsin's absolute rule. It was a show of ferocious violence meant to serve as a warning to others and so allow a controlled, partial restoration of the trappings of electoral democracy.

Crosshead

● For the last several centuries, Russia has lived under absolutist regimes, first the Tsar and then the Stalinists. The sorry state to which these "strong" regimes brought Russia is part of the historical record. Yet Yeltsin's crushing of Parliament and the establishment of a "strong presidential regime" is hailed by our media (and "democratic" politicians) as exactly the medicine for what ails Russia.

● In the Russian civil-war of 1918-21, the capitalist powers intervened on the side of the Whites, led by monarchist generals. Eighty years later, the capitalist powers are again intervening in support of anti-democratic forces. The goal is the same: to shore-up capitalism and keep Russia open for business. ★



1. *Financial Times*, 22 September 1993
 2. *Ibid.*, 6 & 7 October 1993
 3. *British Guardian Weekly*, 10 October 1993
 4. *Montreal Gazette*, 6 October 1993

An impossible choice

OLEG Smolin, who is blind, is a socialist member of the Russian Parliament that Yeltsin has dissolved. He stayed in Moscow throughout the two weeks of intense political crisis. At first he was in the White House, but later he found himself locked out of the Parliament building by Yeltsin's troops (alongside around one-hundred and twenty other deputies) and had to stay and work in a nearby district soviet. Poul Funder Larsen spoke to him.

INTERVIEW — Moscow, 15 October 1993

// IN general the left is in an extremely difficult position, and particularly as regards the up-coming elections, which will, by all accounts, be a farce. Personally, I do not feel like participating in this, but we are facing a nearly impossible choice: either to stay out, with our hands clean but with the risk of getting absolutely marginalised — or to participate in something which is designed to favour the liberals.

“We tried to get back in, but in spite of our status as deputies the special troops cordoning off parliament attacked us with truncheons. I myself was hit over the head.

“As regards the violence on 3 & 4 October, contrary to what is being alleged, no worked out plans for armed resistance existed — nor in the White House, nor among the deputies outside the cordons. The demonstration simply got out of control, and Rutskoi and Khasbulatov, totally misinterpreting the situation, made their disastrous decision to attack the television centre at Ostankino. What should have been done was to strengthen the defence of Parliament, but instead they ventured into this armed attack, and we got an authoritarian regime, not to say dictatorship, in return.”

Now Smolin is back in the city of Omsk, an industrial centre in Western Siberia, where he was elected to Parliament and still works as a university teacher:

Indifferent

“Here the reactions to the events in Moscow are mixed — from outright joy to anger and shock, though many people remain almost indifferent. In this country, with its strong authoritarian and patriarchal traditions, a certain part of the popu-

lation will support an iron fist regime, hoping that this will ‘put things in order’. What people often fail to understand is that such a dictatorship will dismantle even the remnants of social protection for the people.

“Many are now in a state of confusion and apathy. People wanted to get rid of the old bureaucratic elites of Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and therefore they voted for Yeltsin. Instead they got even more bureaucracy, misery, and growing authoritarianism. Now they do not know where to turn to. The dissolved Parliament, however, also has to take its part of the blame for these developments. It was the Peoples’ Congress which granted Yeltsin extraordinary executive powers. Powers which were used to dissolve the Soviet Union, and wreak havoc on the Russian economy. I warned against this already at the Peoples’ Congress in May 1991, but at that time the Communists (led by Alexander Rutskoi) supported such a move.

“The opposition is facing serious repression: Another of the deputies from Omsk, the conservative Sergei Bajurin, just came back to town. He was being detained and tortured in Moscow, in the Police headquarters, where they put him up against the wall and faked an execution.

“Apart from the struggle against repression the most urgent question will be the elections to Yeltsin’s so called ‘State Duma’. This can hardly be termed a parliament, as it has very few powers: for example, it cannot decide on issues concerning the state budget unless it has endorsement from the government to do so.

Electoral bloc?

“With most of the communist organisations banned it is a problem to form any serious electoral bloc. We, in the Party of Labour, have been working closely with the trade unions, but they are not likely to dare to run in the elections. The government threatened to dissolve them by decree, and demanded that they sack their chair, Igor Klochkov, who had spoken out against Yeltsin, and refrain from participation in the elections. They have already rid themselves of Klochkov, and will probably stay out of the elections. This leaves us with the choice of running with more ‘soft’, social democratic elements, for example, the Socialist Workers’ Party or with more moderate centrists. This is indeed a situation where there are no one-hundred percent good options.” ★



International appeal

THE state coup that began on 21 September 1993 was taken to its logical conclusion less than two weeks later: the frail sprouts of Russian democracy have been drowned in the blood of the righteous and the guilty.

The cause of this is the entire preceding policy of the presidential power structure that deepened the general crisis in the country. It was no longer possible to carry out by democratic methods the policy of "shock without therapy" in the presence of an opposition.

But a pretext was needed to introduce dictatorship. The authorities exploited the immoral alliance of supporters of Rutskoi with extremists and fascist forces appealing to people's darker instincts in order to provoke violence.

A political analysis and general evaluation of these events is for the future. But it is already clear that they have opened the way for dictatorship. The actions that followed — arrests and beatings of citizens, the majority of whom did not participate in the violence, the closure of opposition publications and the imposition of political censorship, the threat of a "witch hunt", the course toward liquidating the soviets of all levels and of the Constitutional Court — all that is incompatible with democracy.

The threats of the spontaneous disintegration of the country as well as of a centralised "democratic dictatorship" based upon the local power structures, that is the regional army commands, are both real.

In the present situation, despite all the regional differences in further social and political development, one can say with certainty that :

- civil and political rights are being suppressed and will continue to be suppressed;
- local soviets and regional administrations that do not support the President will be crushed;
- entrepreneurial, trade union, social, and political structures that oppose the President are condemned to be suppressed.

In these conditions, one of the ways to save the shoots of Russian democracy and freedom is for all those who refuse to accept the totalitarian perspective that looms over the country to unite into a broad democratic, oppositional, non-violent bloc whose goal will be to defend:

- internationally recognised human rights, and in particular the freedom of speech, conscience and association;
- civil, political, social and economic freedoms;
- trade union, professional, social and political organisations from arbitrary State power;
- legality, democracy, federalism, and national equality;
- the right to oppositional activity within the framework of the Constitution.

We do not impose any organisational structures on the proposed association and we propose no candidates to lead it. But we firmly call for the immediate start of a process of consolidation of all people for whom freedom and the democratic future of Russia are dear.

We are ready to collaborate with the representatives of all ideologies that share our basic orientations.

We reject democracy at whose basis lie mass repressions.

We reject Bonapartism hiding behind democratic rhetoric in the place of real democracy.

Signed:

VG Arslanov, Dr of Art History; AV Buzgalin, Dr of Economics, professor

AV Furman, Dr of History; VA Kelle, Dr of Philosophy, professor

AI Koganov, Dr of Economics; VT Loginov, Dr of History, professor

AB Nevzorov, Honoured Artist, Russian Federation

NS Zlubin, Dr of Philosophy, professor

ALEXANDER Buzgalin, a leader of the Party of Labour and a former left oppositionist in the CPSU, explains how the international appeal (opposite) that he is a signatory to is a necessary reply to Yeltsin's coup d'état:

"An atmosphere of fear and general media 'terror', where people are afraid to put forward their dissent and oppositional views, has been created. Journalists, teachers, scientists and others, who are known not to support the Yeltsin regime, are intimidated. Lists, dividing political organisations into 'sympathetic' and 'non-sympathetic' ones, are drawn-up, and many organisations have been banned. Meanwhile they are preparing for the 'elections' that have been decreed by Yeltsin. That is — the new organs are elected in the way that Yeltsin wants it, with the people that he wants in them, and they will be working in the way he decides. To call this democratic is obviously ridiculous, and it is absolutely necessary to fight the creeping totalitarianism.

"For us, as democratic socialists it is important not only to fight the anti-democratic aspects of the current regime, but also the socio-economic policy of 'shock without therapy'. Because in the final analysis it is the total failure of this policy which looms behind the bloody and authoritarian methods employed by Yeltsin. In reality any further continuation of these policies was impossible within a democratic framework.

"Our initiative group is composed of scientists and artists, and we are now seeking support from human rights activists — including people who were facing repression in the Brezhnev years — as well as from social and political organisations, movements and parties. Hopefully, also some trade union organisations will back us, although they are themselves facing strong pressure from the authorities at the moment.

"In this context the Western left can play an important role. First of all it is necessary to call attention in the West to the breaches of democracy and human rights in Russia. To spell out that Yeltsin's regime is not a democratic one. Because Yeltsin is strongly oriented towards the West, and vulnerable to that kind of criticism. Secondly, to give support to our struggle by petitions to embassies, public statements etc. Finally, we need support for our activities here morally (through visits and exchanges) as well as materially." Interview by PFL ★

Individuals and organisations that want to support the initiatives in defence of democratic rights taken by the Russian left can send donations through:

Soviet-initiativet, Postbox 547, DK-220, Copenhagen N, Denmark.

Postal (giro) account No 1936158 or cheques made out to 'Soviet-initiativet'.

Dilemma facing unions

DOSSIER

The "old" unions are still, in the main, bureaucratic and monolithic organisations. But, although with limited impact, they stood out against Yeltsin's coup d'état. The response from the Yeltsinites was swift — they would, if necessary, completely neuter them if they dared to intervene into political life again. The "new" unions, by and large, have preferred to keep a grip on Yeltsin's coat-tails and continue to back his political project. What then does the future hold for the Russian trade union movement?

DAVID MANDEL — Montreal, 18 October 1993

AN anecdote heard this summer in Russia: An American and a Russian capitalist trade places. The Russian capitalist speeds up production, and his American workers go on strike. The American capitalist introduces obligatory ten hours overtime and fires twenty-five percent of the workforce. The Russian workers comply. A month later, he tells them they have to work twenty hours overtime and to hang twenty percent of the workforce. They agree but ask: "Do we have to buy the rope, or will the union allocate it?"

Change

When I told people in Russia this summer that I was studying the trade unions they inevitably asked: "You mean we really have unions here?" And these were all union members.

In fact, change is occurring in the union movement but it is uneven and chaotic, and it may be too slow to save the only organised mass force in society with the potential to act as a counterweight to the neo-liberal forces of capitalist restoration (that is, the governments and the new capitalist class). The latter are still flying high and acting outside of any effective popular control.

Democratic, militant reform forces exist at virtually every level of the "old" trade union organisations, which still embrace about ninety percent of the workforce. But the reformers remain a relatively small minority among union leaders. For decades the "old" unions were subordinate parts of the political and economic management apparatuses. Their main tasks were to keep workers

in line and working and to "allocate" various goods (hence the question in the anecdote about the rope) and social benefits. (Workers are only now realising just how significant the latter were.)

Most of the "old" unions today remain subordinate to the plant administration. This is not simply a matter of corruption. The cosy relationship has a certain objective basis in the fact that capitalist relations have only very partially been restored in the enterprises. For example, mass layoffs have not yet occurred, even though most plants, thanks to state economic policy, are working at a fraction of their capacity. Moreover, managers really are limited in their capacity to respond to workers demands, since the government, through its tax policy, strictly controls wages and it remains the only available source of funds for investment. In a collapsing economy, many unions — and workers — look to alliance with management to lobby government and thus save their factories and jobs.

Unprepared

The problem is that the old "red directors" are very quickly becoming "white", and the danger is that the unions may find themselves woefully unprepared for the time when management completely turns on them and tries to destroy them, something that is already happening in privatised plants. Unless union reform accelerates, the unions will find they lack experienced activists capable of effectively fighting management. And even if these are found, they would have trouble mobilising rank-and-file workers who lack experience of independent struggle or,

for that matter, any confidence in their unions.

On the other hand, the "old" unions are in opposition to their governments. This is not surprising, given the governments' viciously anti-labour policies. But in practice, the opposition is quite mild. There are two main, interrelated reasons for this: 1. The union leadership lacks its own vision of socio-economic reform, accepting the "necessity" of capitalism, while quixotically calling for a "socially oriented market". 2. In their majority, the rank-and-file union members are demoralised and do not believe in their own power to collectively shape the reforms.

Exception

The most important "new" unions are small, strategically situated groups of workers in transport: longshoremen, air-traffic controllers, pilots, train drivers. The key exception is the Independent Union of Miners. But despite its broad influence among coalminers, it embraces only about a quarter of this group and it has been isolated from the rest of the labour movement. The other "new" unions are local organisations, most often only a tiny fraction of the workforce of the enterprise. They spend much of their time fighting the "old" union, though they can play a positive role in spurring the "old" union to adopt more militant positions and to reform itself.

In Russia, the "new" unions, in contrast to the "old", are strictly independent from management but, on the other hand, quite loyal to the government, especially to Yeltsin. This in no small part is due to government policy neutralising them through economic concessions, with the aim of splitting off the most militant sections from the rest of the labour movement.

Despite this overall gloomy picture, there are some bright spots, particularly in the Ukraine and Byelorussia. This summer, the governments of both republics violated general agreements they had signed with the unions by raising prices without prior consultation. In Byelorussia, the auto-workers' and radio-electronic workers' unions, two exceptional "old" unions in which

reform has gone far indeed, pushed the republican union federation into a protest campaign, including political demonstrations and strikes, to force the government to change economic policy or resign. Still in progress, the level of mobilisation has been significant.

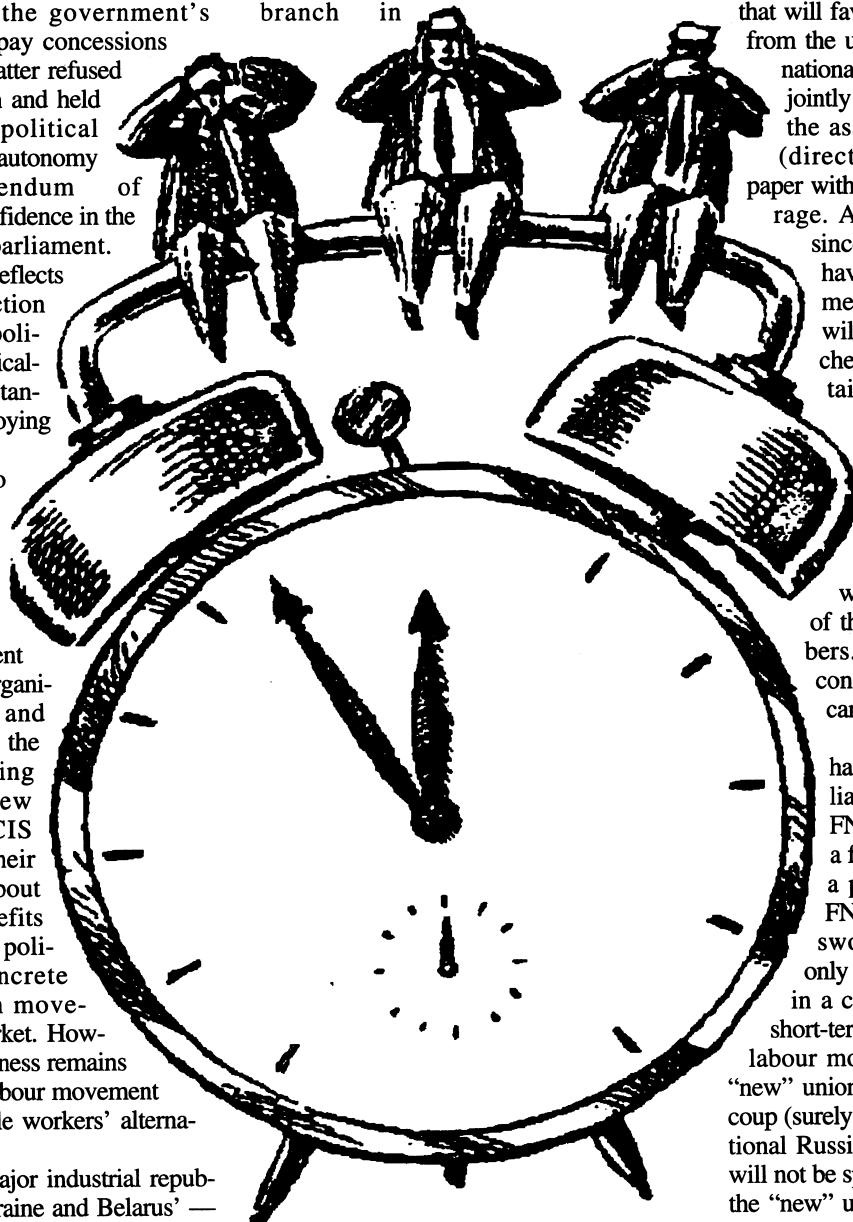
In the Donbass, a key industrial region in eastern Ukraine, the coalminers initiated a strike movement that for the first time drew in the other industrial sectors. Despite the government's immediate, major pay concessions to the miners, the latter refused to be isolated again and held out for common political demands: regional autonomy and a referendum of confidence/non-confidence in the government and parliament. The latter demand reflects the workers' rejection of the economic policies that have drastically reduced living standards and are destroying the economy.

Both efforts to exert control over their governments represent important steps forward for workers, raising the labour movement to new levels of organisation, solidarity and mobilisation. With the economy collapsing around them, few workers in the CIS today hold onto their earlier illusions about the promised benefits of the neo-liberal policies. The concrete demands of both movements are anti-market. However, a major weakness remains the failure of the labour movement to put forth a viable workers' alternative.

Of the three major industrial republics — Russia, Ukraine and Belarus' — the labour movement is by far the weakest in the former. This was true even before Yeltsin's state coup of 21 September, that has drastically narrowed the political space for any effective opposition. In the other two republics, such a move by the state executives is inconceivable at present, not least because of the relative strength of the labour movements. Unlike Russia, in those two republics, the political opposition is not centred in the national parliaments, which

are much more loyal to the state executives than was the case in Russia. Key segments of the labour movements there have played a more independent and active role in the opposition to the government than was the case in Russia before the coup. (In Russia, the most active segment of the labour movement, the miners has been bought off — for now, at least.) Besides that, the heads of the state executive

branch in



those republics lack even the minimal legitimacy of Yeltsin and they cannot count on the support of the armed forces.

The crushing of the parliamentary opposition in Russia was meant to open the way to a more vigorous application of IMF restructuring policy: this means an end to the remaining price controls, accelerated privatisation, the removal of subsidies to industry, mass bankruptcies and unemployment. This, in turn,

requires a taming of the "old" trade unions, moderate as their opposition has been.

The federation of "old" trade unions (FNPR) condemned Yeltsin's coup and called on workers actively to resist the violation of the constitution. (There was apparently no response.) The day after Yeltsin decreed the dissolution of parliament, he removed the administration of social security from the unions, a move that will favour the exodus of workers from the unions. he closed down the national paper that was sponsored jointly by the union federation and the association of industrialists (directors). This was the only paper with at least some labour coverage. A more timid version has since reappeared. Strong hints

have also come from government circles that the unions will lose their automatic dues checkoff (something that certain regional administrators tried before but failed to do in the past) if they involve themselves in politics. Added to the loss of the administration of social security, that measure would lead to the departure of the majority of union members. There is also a threat to confiscate the unions' significant property holdings.

Accordingly, once Yeltsin had won the contest with parliament, the president of the FNPR was forced to resign at a federation plenum. This was a peace offering to Yeltsin. FNPR unions have also fore-sworn politics, arguably the only effective method of struggle in a collapsing economy. In the short-term, the future of the Russian labour movement is bleak. And the "new" unions, who supported Yeltsin's coup (surely a manifestation of the traditional Russian "good Tzar" syndrome) will not be spared either. As the Chair of the "new" union of train engineers at a Petersburg depot told us this summer: "If the old unions are crushed, we won't survive either."

Given the tremendous suffering that Yeltsin's policies are inflicting on the mass of the population, an upsurge in labour militancy is inevitable. The stronger the dictatorship, the more radical that upsurge will be when it comes. But at present it is impossible to predict when that will occur and what role the present unions will play in it. ★

A blood-drenched fiasco

THE trial run for large-scale application of the right to humanitarian intervention by an armed force of the United Nations has turned into a blood-drenched fiasco. In the space of a few weeks of conflict with one of the leaders of the Somali factions, General Farah Aïdeed, American forces have killed or injured 1,500 Somali civilians. They have lost one quarter of the 400 Rangers (twelve killed, one taken prisoner, and 75 injured, severely in many cases) rushed to the region to apprehend the Somali warlord. This is clearly the first time since the Vietnam War that the American army has been humbled in such a way.

FRANCIS CAZALS — 11 October 1993

In an attempt to get out of this mess, President Bill Clinton has just announced a strengthening of US military presence in Somalia (3,500 extra troops along with war planes and tanks) and a calendar for the withdrawal of American troops by 31 March 1994. The French and Belgian contingents of ONUSOM 2 are also supposed to leave by the end of the year. Between now and then, American leaders hope to get a political agreement out of the Somali factions, with the objective of achieving a skillful and honorable exit from the conflict.

One year after the arrival of US marines in Mogadishu in the framework of Operation Restore Hope, in December 1992, things have moved far away from the high principles invoked to justify the intervention. Dressed up in humanitarian clothing, the intervention was meant to appear to international public opinion as a good deed, of a kind that would make people forget the savage "surgical" demonstration of force by the USA and its allies against Iraq.

Intense ideological campaign

The operation was preceded by an intense ideological campaign. To better justify the military course of action, UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali claimed that 80% of humanitarian aid sent to Somalia was being stolen — a figure that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) considered highly exaggerated. Operation Restore Hope was justified with such pious talk that the NGOs that supported it forgot that an armed intervention unleashes a military and police logic contrary to humanitarian objectives. Some NGO heads are now making this bitter

observation. The president of Médecins Sans Frontières-France, Rony Brauman, has recently denounced this military logic in a pamphlet called *Le crime humanitaire* ("The humanitarian crime").¹

After having long supported the dictatorship of President Siad Barre, especially after the war against in Ethiopia in 1977, and after having supplied it with significant subsidies and large quantities of arms, the United States and other Western countries gradually lost interest in him. Somalia lost its strategic interest after the fall of the Berlin Wall. One after another, foreign embassies closed their doors in Mogadishu, while the country slid into civil war.

For Italy, the Siad Barre regime served as a pivotal point for redirecting development aid into the accounts of Italian political parties, to the Italian Socialist Party first and foremost. Italy and Egypt tried to the very last to save the Siad Barre regime. They then tried in vain to guarantee a peaceful transfer of power to very recent opponents of Siad Barre — the Manifesto group, in its majority made up of Hawiye traders. This group is now close to the current interim Somali "president", Mohammed Ali Mehdi, who "governs" the northern part of the capital.

In this way, Rome and Cairo were hoping to avoid the violent overthrow of the "friendly" Somali regime at the hands of the three guerilla groups that were fighting it: the Somali National Movement (SNM) of the Issaks of the northwest (who have proclaimed the independence of Somaliland); the United Somali Congress (USC) of the Hawiye-Habr Gedir of General Aïdeed; and the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM) of Omar Jess (made up of Ogadenis from the south).

Italy and Egypt helped the Siad Barre

regime survive and denied victory to the guerilla groups. In the end, it was a semi-spontaneous uprising that did in the Siad Barre regime.

During the most severe part of the civil war and famine that followed, in 1991 and during a good part of 1992, the international community showed no interest whatsoever in Somalia. In a new book, a journalist for the French daily *Libération*, Stephen Smith, recalls that the Siad Barre regime was overthrown amidst general indifference in January 1991, during the Gulf War. At the time, Smith was the only journalist in Mogadishu and certainly one of the few Westerners there.²

What followed was a power struggle between the two factions of the USC (Aïdeed's and Ali Mahdi's) and a fight by Aïdeed's partisans against attempts by Siad Barre loyalists to return to power. Together, this plunged the country into famine. According to several NGOs, the most dramatic period of this famine was between the middle of 1992 until the autumn. A gruesome statistic: while remaining high, the mortality rate decreased, but only after the most vulnerable sections of the population were decimated. When the UN began its humanitarian intervention, it was already too late. The worst of the famine had already subsided.

But the reports of CNN and the international media on the famine produced the desired result. On the eve of handing over power to his successor, former US President George Bush decided to send GIs to Somalia within the framework of Operation Restore Hope. Their mandate was to be that of protecting shipments of humanitarian aid.

Many have wondered as to the real motivations of the United States. To explain this humanitarian military intervention, some have brought to light the American interest in oil exploration and their desire to reactivate their old airbase in Berbera. However, there is no decisive strategic factor worthy enough for the United States in Somalia. Clearly, we have to be satisfied with an explanation that combines a number of factors foreign to Somalia itself: media pressure (the CNN syndrome); an internal political "coup" (George

1. Rony Brauman, 'Le crime humanitaire', Editions Arlea, September 1993.

2. Stephen Smith, 'Somalie: la guerre perdue de l'humanitaire', Calmann-Lévy, 1993.

Bush wanting a glorious departure); the desire to inaugurate a new version of US global policing; and as a diversion from pressures to intervene in Bosnia.

Negotiated ahead of time with the two Somali factions in Mogadishu, the landing of US marines for American prime time television in the presence of dozens of journalists was without military risk. Followed by a fictitious reconciliation between Aïdeed and his rival Ali Mehdi — in the Mogadishu headquarters of the American oil company CONOCO — Operation Restore Hope resembled something like a Sunday stroll. But in reality it was the prelude to a blood-drenched military debacle.

The American schedule was soon upset by the failure of the Aïdeed-Ali Mehdi reconciliation, a failure which was predicted by observers familiar with the Somali political and military puzzle. From then on, the foreign intervention was projected into the long-term. In order to handle the situation, the torch was passed on to the United Nations for the second UN operation in Somalia, called ONUSOM 2: an international contingent under American command given an offensive mandate of “imposing peace”.

After a few months, this arrangement improved somewhat the distribution process so vital to the reconstruction of the country. But the national conferences organised by the UN proved futile. One of the local military leaders, General Aïdeed, has endlessly manoeuvred to keep his autonomy in relation to the political initiatives of ONUSOM 2. American leaders soon understood that Aïdeed, unpredictable and authoritarian, had his own agenda.

The political impasse of ONUSOM 2 further developed the military logic unleashed by the United States. Yesterday's ally Aïdeed became enemy number one for the USA and UN. Had he agreed to play the game of Somali reconciliation that would let the GIs go home, he would have been the USA's great pal.

But the logic of his role as a military leader and a contender for full control over Somalia led him, among other things, to oppose any reconciliation with the Siad Barre partisans of the Somali National Front (SNF). The SMF is led by Mohamed Said Hersi “Morgan”, the son-in-law of the deposed dictator, also known as the butcher of Hargeisa, a town in the north-west of the country that he had razed to the ground by the airforce in 1989.

This division led to a rise in tension in the spring of 1993 between Aïdeed's partisans and the UN. The political leaders of ONUSOM 2 put forward the idea of a



reconciliation of clan leaders from the centre and south of the country, including Morgan's SNF. But General Aïdeed was opposed to this. Instead of finding himself alone with this position, he was supported by a part of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), which regrouped many Mejerstein and which up until then was opposed to Aïdeed and accepted dialogue. But these talks ejected Morgan and marginalised the UN.

The ONUSOM 2 bureaucrats sabotaged this initiative. It is in this context that the murderous exchange between Aïdeed partisans and Pakistani UN forces took place on 5 June in Mogadishu. This was the pretext Washington used to begin their campaign against the general and his supporters.³

Progressively, this standoff became an indiscriminate war against Aïdeed's entire clan, the Hebr Gedir, which led to a closing of ranks around him. General Aïdeed also received the support of Islamic groups; he became a symbol of the crystallisation of opposition to the presence of foreign troops. This sentiment spread throughout the population, fuelled by the numerous exactions of the UN troops.

Describing the behaviour of American and Belgian soldiers in Belgium in Kismayo as that of “roughnecks”, Rony Brauman says that, “At least several dozen people have been killed during ‘checks’ and roadblocks, without for all that provoking any response from the United Nations administration. Sexual aggression and openly racist violence had become the daily fare in Kismayo under the ‘protection’ of the ‘blue helmets’. There is nothing surprising, then, that during the first months of the year more than one third of surgery beds at the hospital were occupied by victims of the ‘blue helmets’.” Brauman ends his pamphlet asking, “Who will protect us from such protectors?”

Whatever their mission, UN contingents have always behaved as if they were

3. ONUSOM 2 never really tried to disarm the Somali factions; the “legal” basis for its war against Aïdeed (who is accused of committing crimes against humanity) has been criticised, including by the legal services of the UN. It is difficult to agree with Boutros Ghali when he holds Aïdeed responsible for the death of 350,000 Somalis. On one hand, no one knows if this is how many people actually died as a result of the famine; on the other hand, Aïdeed is not the only one responsible for this. What about General “Morgan” who held Baidoa, Somalia's city of death?

in a conquered country. But the difference in Somalia resides in the mandate that gives them the right to use arms to "impose peace". Also, since the beginning suspicious deaths of Somalis have multiplied. We need only recall the French legionnaires who, upon arriving in Mogadishu, killed a half dozen Somalis because their truck did not stop in time at a checkpoint.

In total, these "accidents" have been commonplace and have without doubt claimed hundreds of victims — perhaps more — to be added to the civilians used as targets by the Americans and UN troops in Mogadishu over the last three months. The Belgians are accused of having claimed hundreds of lives in Kisimayo and an internal inquiry is now underway in the Belgian army. The Canadians have acknowledged one murder; Canadian soldiers have been handed court martials and a Somali family has been awarded compensation.

The 400 American Rangers alone have been responsible for 1,500 dead and injured over a period of a few weeks. In Mogadishu, hospitals are overflowing with those injured by the UN's "peaceful" force. As such, the city has gone from a state of emergency for food to one for medical material; NGOs have just sent surgical teams.

An irony of history: the racism of UN troops has not only been directed at Somalis. Take, for example, the organisation of UN troops during many of their operations — the Americans are in their armored cars and the Pakistanis are on foot, and thus most exposed to danger. Another revealing anecdote: during an encounter with Aideed supporters, the "Pakis" (as they are condescendingly called by American officers) called for reinforcements but the nearest contingent, the Saudis, did not lift a finger. In case we forgot, in the oil kingdom Pakistanis are nothing more than immigrant workers.

However, the human cost of ONU-SOM 2 is difficult to determine with precision. The practice of the American High Command has always been to refuse to make any tally of "enemy" and civilian losses. Since the beginning of the manhunt in June, UN troops and US Rangers have carried out a number of operations against civilian targets.

These have been too systematic to be counted as mere accidents. Rather, we are dealing with a gunboat policy. In passing, we can point to the assault on the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the bombing of a hospital and the attack on a marketplace. More comically, a torturer in the old regime, the former head of police under Siad

Barre, was arrested after a commando operation — the Rangers had confused him with General Aideed.

While UN forces control the skies, they do not control the land in the south of Mogadishu, which is in the hands of Aideed supporters. This area is in a semi-insurrectional situation. More than once UN troops have been fired upon by local militia who refuse to allow them into their neighbourhood.

Having chosen the Habr Gedir (a sub-clan of the Mawiya) as a target, US militarism implies a logic of ethnic purification. Aideed supporters are of rural extraction, from the centre of the country. Recruited by the USC, often young, they have separated themselves from their family ties and settled in the city since the fall of Siad Barre. These socio-clan categories have everything to lose in the event of General Aideed's marginalisation.

On the other hand, the other Mawiya clan, the Abgals, which supports President Ali Mehdi and the UN intervention, recruits its leaders from the city's commercial bourgeoisie. This bourgeoisie never stopped doing business under the old government and was involved in various negotiation attempts with Siad Barre. It was more natural for former Siad Barre dignitaries to be recycled in their ranks.

As a result, the clan polarisation that characterises the Somali conflict — and not only in the capital — compromises any attempted national reconstruction. There is no longer a clan-political force that places its strategy in a genuinely national and cross-clan framework, except perhaps for the Islamic groups. There are at best temporary inter-clan alliances among the local populations, which are usually the work of military leaders and leave no space for autonomous and inter-clan political and social activity for the local populations. The few spaces for inter-clan exchange, such as the Idaa women's NGO, have experienced tremendous problems since the UN's militarisation of the capital.

The Somali pipe dream

While he may get his support from pauperised layers of the population, General Aideed does not represent a popular and inter-clan alternative — far from it. The very reconstruction of the Somali State seems to be a pipe dream. The Somali peoples share a common language and religion, but their lifestyle, agrarian and pastoral, and their many deepgoing clan divisions propel them more towards a kind of regional administration — based on the territorialisation of each clan —

than towards a national and centrally administered State.

The Somali State appears to have functioned only to play a coercive, military role, and to manage the unequal distribution of international aid. The functions of the State disappeared as the old regime shrivelled up around the clan of President Siad Barre. When foreign aid started drying up, the centralising role of the administration disappeared along with the Siad Barre regime.

As a result, the reconstruction of a State based on Somalia's borders appears illusory. On the one hand, Somaliland has already seceded in the northwest. At the same time, the territory of the Mejerlein, in the northeast, has a kind of quasi-autonomy. Elsewhere, Somalia has collapsed into feudal forms of political-clan rule, with the resultant ethnic purification based on the relationship of forces — thus upsetting the old division of territory along clan lines. The implosion of Somalia is inescapable — save for an artificial preservation through a long-term UN military presence that would make Somalia a UN protectorate.

Somalia is but an extreme case of the social disintegration of the countries of the region. To varying degrees, the political and ethnic equilibria of the other States of the Horn of Africa are also at risk. The domination of an Issa clan in Djibouti provoked an armed Afars rebellion. Daniel Arap Moi's rule, based on a grouping of ethnic minorities, is strongly contested by Kenya's two major ethnic groups, the Kikuyo and Luo. In Ethiopia, administrative regionalisation was the response of the new authorities to the rise of demands for autonomy — yet this is no guarantee that the country will not go through a painful break-up.

And beyond, the American war against Aideed is seen by Muslim fundamentalists as the first phase of intervention against the Islamic Republic of Sudan. US aggression is stirring up the anti-Western sentiments of the peoples of the region which, given the absence of other radical currents, will probably benefit the Islamic groups. Every time the Americans suffer a reversal in Somalia, the possibility of American military intervention in southern Sudan is pushed that much further into the future.

In order to secure "humanitarian corridors" for the transport of food aid to southern Sudan, several American leaders had planned such an intervention. Henceforth, they will think twice before making such moves. Indeed, in the light of the Somali experience, American strategists will be re-examining both their use of UN cover and previous approaches to the possibility of intervention in the former Yugoslavia. ★

Pan-Hellenic modernisation?

THE victory of the Greek Socialist Party (PASOK) in the recent elections represents a defensive response by working people hit hard by the crisis and by the ultra-liberal policies of the outgoing New Democracy (ND) government of Kostas Mitsotakis. But the rightwing parties managed a respectable score (45%) and the Greek social democrats, previously hounded out of office for corruption, seem tempted by French and Spanish-style "socialism". The following article — written before the recent elections were called — analyses New Democracy's collapse and the deepgoing crisis into which Greece has been plunged.

ANDREAS SARTZEKIS — Athens, 29 August 1993

PRESSURES to bring forward the election date, a measure initially opposed by Mitsotakis and the ND, became increasingly strong within the rightwing itself. The right was going through a major crisis with little room for manoeuvre. The choice was between changing the prime minister and bringing forward elections. In choosing the latter path, the right hoped to save face and perhaps capitalise on the opposition's sluggishness.

As such, PASOK has been returned to government essentially thanks to the internal contradictions of the right.

A wealthy layabout

A sign of the ill health of the right was the "private" visit of the former king of Greece, Constantin Gligsburg. Since the 1974 referendum which ended the monarchist regime and relegated this accomplice of the 1967-1974 dictatorship of the colonels to the dustbin of history, Constantin has been a wealthy layabout. From his gold-plated exile, Constantin, who has never recognised the results of the referendum, has been increasing the number of provocations, demanding, for example, the return of royal properties now in the public domain.

The ex-king landed in Salonica at the beginning of August, taking advantage of the legal confusion regarding his visiting rights, and made a visit as a "simple" citizen with his family.

This excursion gave the monarchist current inside and outside the ND coverage well out of proportion to its threadbare existence: the trip was reported on a major private television network owned by a

monarchist; there was a semi-official welcome organised by some ND deputies; and he met with an orthodox current with fascist tendencies.

The government's behaviour had a tragi-comic flavour to it. Constantin was ordered not to make any political declarations (he made several) and not to get off his yacht, going so far as to send two warships to "threaten" him. Nevertheless, he came ashore to the cheers of a nostalgic crowd of reactionaries.

This provocative visit is above all a sign of the right's inability to appear modern and democratic. A number of its deputies openly displayed their support for a personality who remains widely hated for the role he played under the dictatorship. At the same time, the concessions made to these deputies and the ND's inability to expel the former king show that, whatever it may say, it remains organically linked to the most reactionary currents in Greek society.

The ND's attempted ideological re-orientation is a total failure. Another consequence of the former king's visit was the impression of powerlessness the government gave.

This government, so quick to arrest union and anti-nationalist activists, looked ridiculous during this episode — full of threats yet powerless before the sovereign's haughtiness. This provoked the anger of the president of the Republic, Caramanlis, who even threatened to resign — this, from a president who can hardly be suspected of being a leftwinger!

The "king affair" revealed the existence in Greece of a monarchist current, however weak. Certain regions, such as Mani, in lower Peloponnisos, and the island of Spétsai, are its small bastions.

The visit came at a time of growth of a nationalist and orthodox fundamentalist current which goes beyond the bounds of the ND and has in part destabilised it. The first act of the former king was to pay homage to Macedonia — Greek land — which over the last two years has become the object of a national cult, both opportunist and worrying, against the "pretensions" of the ex-Yugoslav Macedonian Republic (Skopje).

The right implodes

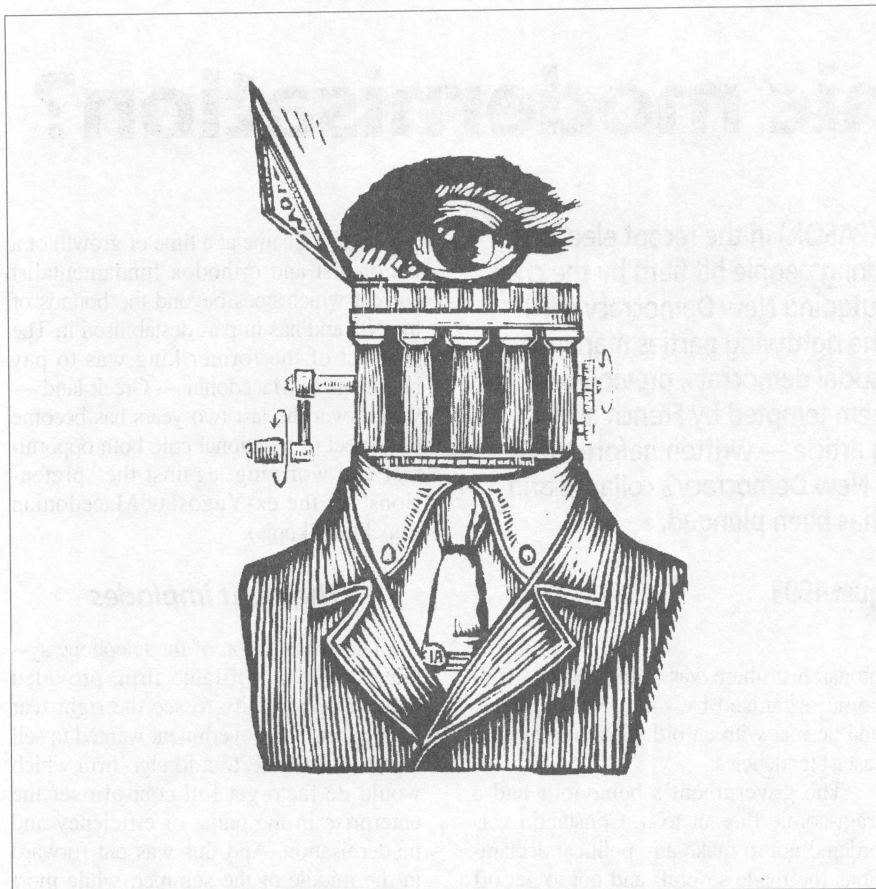
The privatisation of the telephone system (OTE), a profitable firm, provided another opportunity to see the right tear itself apart. The government wanted to sell a part of the OTE to a foreign firm which would de facto get full control over the enterprise in the name of efficiency and modernisation. And this was put forward in the middle of the summer, while most of the workers were on vacation!

Last year the government pulled a similar stunt in the summer when it broke up the last Athens public bus network (EAS), handing a defeat to the workers after a severe struggle which was isolated by the left parties.

All the ingredients had been assembled to make the vote on privatising OTE a mere formality. The demonstrations organised against it (with the support of the banking and electrical workers unions) attracted very few people, although there was growing participation.

But things got more complicated after an unexpected development: the union linked to the government raised a big noise and its leadership opposed the sale of OTE — in the name of defending the national wealth, opposing layoffs, and the fear of having a Turkish company one day control the country's telecommunications network (and perhaps military communications along with it!). This obsessional fear of "the Turkish enemy" is in no way confined to the ranks of the right.

A public debate was then launched, during which former and current heads of the telephone company demonstrated that, in the course of a few years, OTE had clearly improved its network and that, moreover, even a controlled privatisation — under domestic or foreign control — would not bring any technical improvements. The aim of the whole business, the-



accompanied by “inevitable” layoffs, even when, from a capitalist point of view, the sectors involved were profitable.

There have also been enterprise shut-downs, particularly of public firms seen as being unprofitable — the textile industry and shipbuilding (on the island of Syros) have been the hardest hit.

Pockets of misery

While EEC leaders were congratulating Mitsotakis for his realism, Greece was becoming a real “western” capitalist country. In July, there were officially 900 jobs lost for every working day. While the official number of unemployed is less than 200,000, other sources place it at more than 400,000 — in a country of ten million inhabitants.

Veritable pockets of misery have appeared. 40% of workers in Syra, the capital of Syros, are unemployed; there are now soup kitchens in Laurion, in the south of Athens. Traditional “hidden work” is no longer sufficient to contain the daily economic difficulties, especially since 1989 as prices have skyrocketed.

Some do not hesitate to say that the country has been sold to foreigners, to make it a tourist reserve. This sentiment, born of the very history of the country, has to be understood by genuinely leftwing activists who have to be able to translate it into mobilisations of international solidarity, into a critical defense of the country’s heritage and to protect the environment (an area of struggle that has given rise to a series of impressive united struggles).

Even if tourism remains the main source of foreign exchange, in certain fields Greek capitalism is quite enterprising and competitive. And this was not hindered by eight years of PASOK government; on the contrary, they opened up markets in Eastern Europe, particularly in the Balkans. Greek industrialists quickly understood the role they could play. Even in the new stigmatised State of the ex-republic of Macedonia, Greek enterprises are being set up, and their heads have certainly not been thrown in prison for this!

30 to 40% of the capital of several of the most important Greek corporations is held by foreign companies. The Greek State plays a irreplaceable role in the integration of European and American companies in the Balkans. In return, Greece is given support on the international stage, especially within the EEC where up until now it had been criticised and even denounced.

The right seemed to have a number of points in its favour in the run-up to elections, at least in order to present a united

refore, was to fill State coffers — perhaps with some money changing hands under the table, as had already occurred in the past.

Rightwing deputies decided to refuse to vote for the privatisation, more out of opportunism than disagreement. Mitsotakis had to go to great lengths to secure party discipline on the vote. The deep crisis of the Greek right thus appeared in broad daylight; disagreement was not in relation to the economic programme but on government authority and ideological homogeneity.

Scandals and patronage

The Greek right is seen in the light of its scandals and patronage. PASOK lost the elections in 1989 for lesser crimes than that! At that time, it should be recalled, the Stalinists waged a campaign to explain that the right had reformed and democratised, and that as a result it was necessary to make an alliance with it to get rid of the scandal-ridden PASOK.

Nevertheless, the right’s electorate has to recognise that “its” government applied its programme, to the great satisfaction of the European bourgeoisie which would like to see things go further still. The Economy Minister Stephanos Manos declared, “During the eighteen months of my time in office, nothing has prevented me from

going forward. When I draw the balance sheet of my work, I think it will be a positive one.”

“Modernisation” has been the battle cry of the right’s economic policy. The Greek economy was described as “archaic” — due to PASOK, the bureaucracy and insufficient insertion into Europe. Hit by PASOK’s austerity measures and disoriented, many working people accepted the following equation: PASOK equals no modernisation equals scandals and austerity.

A rightwing government took power in June 1989 with a wide margin for manoeuvre. From then on attacks in all the different sectors were carried out in the name of “modernisation”. These attacks included the closure of firms said to be unprofitable, attacks on the public sector and the sale, often to foreigners, of a part of the public sector in an attempt to cut back the enormous State debt.

In four years the government either sold or attempted to sell a great amount: Athens’ buses; islands (!); the telephone system; the part of the Parnassos mountain with the country’s major ski centre; the Xenia hotel chain (property of the State tourism authority); and a new airport near Athens. They are planning to sell the national airline, Olympiaki, and privatise the national electricity board, DEI. The list goes on. This full throttle liberalism was

image. But its policies have created their own contradictions. In the eyes of Greek employers, for example, the government has been too timid with anti-inflation measures, in filling State coffers, with the cutting of the public services, and in its assistance to investment and exports.

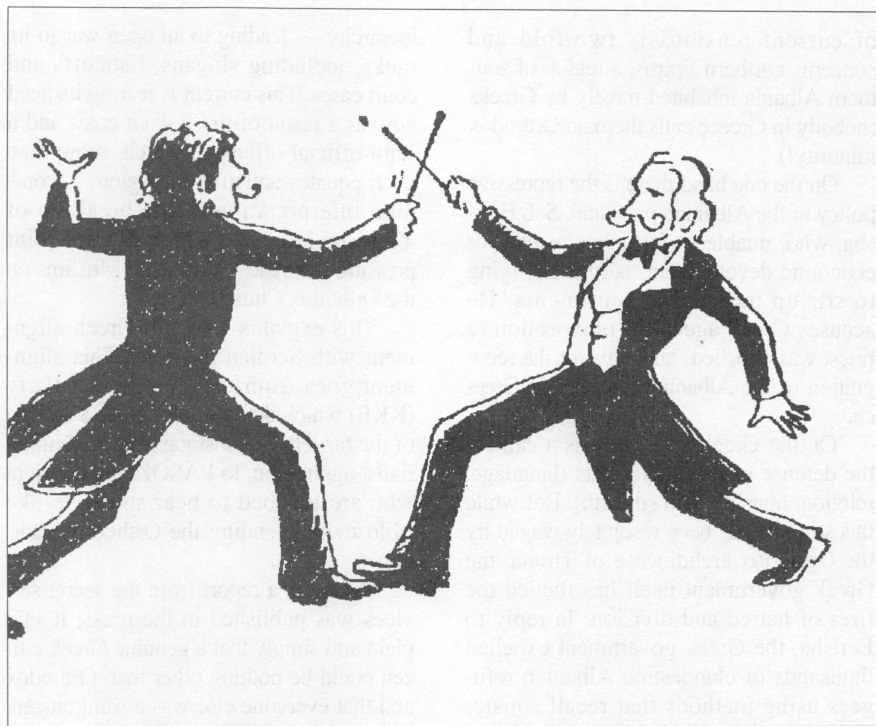
Fearing the reappearance of traditional clientelist hiring practices in the run-up to the elections, employers have warned the government. This is a good example of the contradictions at work. On the one hand, enterprise heads want a "strict control of State spending," and on the other they want household consumption to increase. They have also criticised the government for going ahead with privatisations that weren't fully in their interests! The policies pursued by the right have not created the conditions for a "modern conservative" project.

While struggles against austerity have been difficult — and never victorious — key events were the mobilisation of high school students in the winter of 1990 and the EAS mobilisation last year. Discontent quickly grew in leaps and bounds.

In the face of a possible defeat, the right has been divided over a classic question: how to save the fort without being in disagreement over essential questions. The government has chosen to make demonstrations of force that give cause for concern and reveal its weakness. A repressive arsenal has been put into place: the police against union activists; trials against anti-nationalist activists; and harassment of anarchists, such as Epaminondas Skefoulis who was tried, acquitted and then arrested again. There has also been recourse to para-State practices — revealed by the major scandal around the telephone taps on both rightwing and leftwing figures. This has given rise to the reappearance of the trabouki and other Mafia-type groups.

A section of rightwing youth came into conflict with the ND, seen as too authoritarian and which was responsible for an education policy which led to massive protests by high school and college students. Recently, with tremendous media fanfare, a new organisation, "Political Spring", was formed under the auspices of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonis Samaras, whose only visible quality is that he is in his forties.

The main feature of this movement, described as the political event of the year, is that it is indistinguishable from ND while saying that it is a totally new force. For the moment, it is a refuge for all manner of opportunists, such as the leftwing deputy Lentakis. Given ample coverage by the media and financed by industrialists



worried about the discrediting of their traditional party, this movement might play an important transitional role.

For the moment, it is trying to increase its popularity. Two or three deputies, elected on the ND ticket, have rallied to Samaras. The future of this movement will depend above all on the policy pursued by the left, on the concessions it does or does not make to it — especially on the question of nationalism.

The situation appears less "hot" than one year ago, when all anti-nationalist activists who demanded the right of the new Macedonian State from ex-Yugoslavia to choose its name were arrested and imprisoned. It is not so much international protests that calmed things down as Mitsotakis' conviction that in a few years everyone will have forgotten the debates that have shaken up Greece regarding the "threats" from its northern neighbour of 1.5 million inhabitants. The real interest of the Greek bourgeoisie is to establish good relations with the new Macedonian State.

A classic strategy

The nationalist policy and repression are part of a classic strategy that turns the population's attention away from the real issues, in a climate of chauvinism and class collaboration. From this point of view, there has been some real success. Many workers and youth have fallen into the trap. But there may be too much success; at a certain point the government had to cool things down in order to guarantee the longer term interests of the Greek bourgeoisie in the region. What's more,

the imperialist disorder does not need another conflict in the Balkans.

The slight retreat that followed provided an opportunity to see the extent of the disaster that had been unleashed. Mitsotakis was not only denounced from the right (Samaras resigned), but also accused of capitulation by a part of the left (PASOK). Nearly all political forces were inflexible in their refusal of the "Macedonia" label for the new State.

Deeper than that, a new aggressive nationalism is now out in the open today, throughout Greek society, taking advantage of the Balkan crisis. Turkey is singled out as the "traditional enemy". While it is true that Turkey is entirely responsible for the impasse in Cyprus, Turkey is blamed for all the problems in the Balkans, whether in Bosnia, Albania, or in Greek Thrace where the Turkish minority (officially Muslim) is treated as potentially dangerous and stirred up by agitators in the pay of Ankara. The two Muslim deputies are regularly denounced as Turkish agents, even though they align themselves with the Mitsotakis right.

The second enemy is of course Skopje, the capital of the former Macedonian republic of ex-Yugoslavia, even though there haven't recently been any major mobilisations around this question.

Crisis in Albania

The crisis in Albania, seen through anti-Turk eyes, has recently taken a turn not necessarily favoured by the Greek bourgeoisie, which should be interested by the fall of the Stalinist regime. The origin

of current tensions is two-fold and concerns northern Epirus, a region of southern Albania inhabited mostly by Greeks (nobody in Greece calls them an Orthodox minority!).

On the one hand there is the repressive policy of the Albanian president, Sali Berisha, who, unable to formulate a plan for economic development, is himself trying to stir up nationalist sentiments. He accuses Greek agents of provocation (a priest was expelled) and calls for the recognition of the Albanian minority in Greece.

On the Greek side, there is a call for the defense of minority rights (language, religion, housing, and so forth). But while this struggle has been resolutely waged by the Orthodox archdiocese of Tirana, the Greek government itself has fuelled the fires of hatred and division. In reply to Berisha, the Greek government expelled thousands of clandestine Albanian refugees using methods that recall sinister chapters of the region's history.

While there may have been scattered acts of protest, the government relied on the feeling of insecurity to which the presence of these totally uprooted refugees — with no support structures in Greece — has given rise in the population. A few murders led Greeks to see the Albanians as savages that could never be assimilated.

At the same time, a section of the right demanded, in complete contempt of international treaties, autonomy for northern Epirus. They were joined in this by certain PASOK forces — subsequently silenced, for the moment in any event.

With the background of the crisis in the Balkans, a very aggressive nationalism is making itself felt now in Greece. The fascist current has undeniably benefited from this. Neo-Nazi groups participated in the demonstrations for a "Macedonia which has been Greek for 4,000 years" and have been involved in physical attacks. But their influence (which is also present in various groups of sports fans) is for the moment very limited.

What is more worrying is the crossover of two tendencies. On the one hand, there is a worried and aggressive nationalism (the current form of the traditional notion of Hellenism), in whose name thousands of Greeks were "repatriated" from Crimea — where they always lived — to be settled in Thrace alongside the Turkish minority. Foreign journalists are berated for the slightest criticism of "Greece".

On the other hand, the crystallisation of a fundamentalist Christian Orthodox current, personified by the former priest friends of the colonels' junta, which has secured central positions in the religious

hierarchy — leading to an open war in its ranks, including slogans, fisticuffs and court cases. This current is rearing its head now as a result of the Balkan crisis and a semi-official offensive which, more than ever, equates nation and religion. A common interpretation of the break-up of Yugoslavia is one which blames joint pressure from the Vatican and Muslims on the Orthodox Church.

This explains near full Greek alignment with Serbian positions. This alignment goes from the Communist Party (KKE) which defends, alongside a section of the far-left, Stalinist gains against imperialist aggression, to PASOK and the right who are touched to hear someone like Milosevic defending the Orthodox tradition.

Recently, a report from the secret services was published in the press; it said plain and simply that a genuine Greek citizen could be nothing other than Orthodox and that everyone else was a semi-citizen. The report provoked an emotional response, especially from Catholics (there are many in the Cyclade islands) and the small Jewish community. There are only a few voices, such as a woman leader of a current with origins in the KKE, calling for the immediate separation of Church and State.

Anti-fascist mobilisation

Two examples demonstrate how Greece is at the crossroads. In June, in Corfu, an island in the Ionian Sea, the French fascist leader Jean Marie Le Pen was silenced by a broad anti-fascist and internationalist mobilisation that brought together Albanian and Polish workers. But in August,

the inhabitants of Kefallonia, another Ionian island, invited the Serbian butcher Karadzic and wanted to make him an honorary citizen. How long can such contradictions last? And how will they be resolved?

Since late 1991, the main concern of PASOK leaders has been to avoid any mobilisation which might lead to the early holding of elections. A cold shower awaited the tens of thousands of participants at meetings organised by the social democrats up until that point. The same goes for the EAS (Athens bus system) workers whose determined struggle last year was largely sabotaged by PASOK party leader Andreas Papandreou's calls for calm.

PASOK wanted to re-take power by profiting from the crisis of the right, but certainly not by relying on a powerful wave of mass struggle. To this end, their message, "we have changed!", is both true and deceptive at the same time. But the internal regime has not changed; Papandreou is above criticism, and dissident voices have been silenced. And only the brave come forward with openly social democratic proposals. Indeed, the message is addressed primarily to the European bourgeoisie as if to say, "Don't be afraid. We will no longer dabble in populism; we will be rigorous with our austerity."

A PASOK victory might postpone some of the attacks that would be immediate under a victorious rightwing. But in the absence of significant mass struggles and self-organisation, the situation will surely deteriorate further still. And we can be sure that certain ultra-nationalist PASOK deputies, such as Papatthemelis from Salonica, will lead working people into a blind ally. ★



After the accords

OUR correspondent in Israel, Michel Warshawsky, is currently on a speaking tour through Europe to discuss the situation following the signing of the Israel-PLO agreement in Washington. We caught up with him to discuss the political situation in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

INTERVIEW — Paris, 21 October 1993

W *HAT has happened in Israeli society since the signing of the accords?*

In Israel it is as if the new situation has always existed. And this is perhaps the most interesting phenomenon. This event of historic proportions has been widely accepted and the immense majority of the population is behaving as if it were entirely normal. The far-right demonstrations that took place immediately after the signing of the accords have since calmed down. The settlers and far-right parties are in the process of re-evaluating their response, with the objective of preventing the implementation of the agreement; and there are differences within their ranks. Given the unpopularity of their demands, they do not want to be seen taking a position of outright opposition to the process.

Is there a danger that in this milieu a kind of extra-legal armed force will emerge?

No, it is more likely that there will be direct actions by small isolated groups, which could do great damage. Israeli security forces are on the lookout for these kind of groups. It is not excluded, for example, that small groups — some of whom have connections in high places — will organise a bloody provocation in an Arab village. And this could in turn unleash a dynamic of destabilisation that would jeopardise the entire process. The great majority of settlers, and even the far-right Gush Emunim, have announced that they will not go beyond a certain limit and that they would not commit seditious acts — and I believe that this is their real position. There will be more demonstrations; but since the dismantling of settlements is not on the agenda, they have a problem mobilising people.

They are trying to mobilise people on

the basis of the accords, saying, for example, that they will not obey the proposed Palestinian police force. Bilateral commissions have been set up to discuss the kind of links that there will be between the Israeli armed forces (who will be in charge of the settlers and the settlements) and the Palestinian police force (who will be responsible for the territory). They are discussing how to coordinate their actions.

Can it be said that a section of Israeli society is beginning to question the ideology of Zionism?

For Israel and Israeli society, these accords signify recognition for the first time of Palestinian rights over the land of Palestine. The entire history of Zionism has represented a negation of this right and the will to erase Palestine from the land of Eretz Israel. One of Ilan Alevi's books is entitled "Under Israel, Palestine"; the agreement lifts Palestine out from underneath Israel and gives it a certain place — a place that is far from providing justice to Palestinians; a place that is even far removed from what is minimally acceptable to Palestinians; but which legitimises this place for Palestine beside Israel. This has tremendous significance.

And the peace and anti-war movements? From the outside it almost seems as if there has been a kind of demobilisation after the signing of the accords. How mobilised are they and what is the political content of their demands following the accords?

Indeed, there has been a significant demobilisation which has not only affected the central current of the Israeli peace movement, Peace Now, but also the most radical wing which felt that the government was doing its job. They felt that the

government was advancing both the necessary strategic perspectives and, on a daily level, the demands around which people should mobilise.

I think this is a very dangerous attitude which has given Rabin and his government credit that they do not deserve. There is no doubt now that the government is going to take measures that go beyond the narrow limits set by the Oslo agreement; this can be seen with the freeing of political prisoners which appears to be imminent, and which will give tangible results.

It can also be seen with the rhythm of negotiations. For once it is the Israelis who want things to go faster, and the Palestinians are having certain "logistic" problems with the setting up structures to take over the administration of the Occupied Territories, beginning in Gaza and Jericho. But there is a waning gap between recognising these facts and giving confidence to Rabin; this is a trap to be avoided at all costs.

This is why we, along with others, are trying to put together a series of demands around which a substantial section of the peace movement can be mobilised. Rabin reacts to external pressures, and we are in a position to put the pressure on. For the moment, rightist pressures are much less substantial than what many feared, but I believe they will return and they will have a real influence on the government's decisions and its ability to go forward with the implementation of the very accords that it signed.

What is the climate in the Occupied Territories? Is there mobilisation or demobilisation, illusions or disillusionment? How are the different groups reacting? Concretely, how is the arrival of the PLO leadership being prepared?

In a general sense, a majority of the population is preparing itself for a new situation, and organising its life in accordance with the new framework. There is a bit more freedom and independence, with a certain sense of autonomous power — but no euphoria. People are very much aware of the accord's limitations — independence is a long way away — and the problems that will arise. They know that the occupation will continue. They have

reservations concerning the future Palestinian administration. There is a fight for power, which is more a fight between clans and individuals than between different strategies.

The fact that when autonomy and the new administration are mentioned, there is talk of police sends shivers up the spines of many Palestinians, and not only those of opposition activists.

There is little sign of opposition to the agreements...

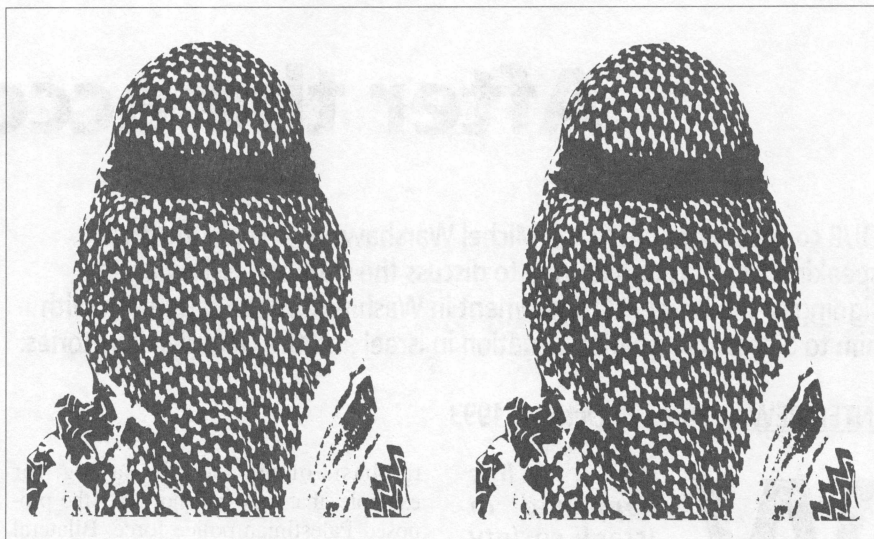
Yes, there is quite a bit of disarray. There is opposition to the accords, which are seen as a step backwards. But in my opinion this opposition has yet to develop an alternative strategy that could translate this opposition into mobilisation. It has abandoned the terrain of struggle, which has been partially occupied by Fatah itself. Fatah was at the head of demonstrations for the liberation of political prisoners, in close and successful cooperation with the radical wing of Israeli pacifist forces.

I think that the opposition should at least have been, if not at the origin of these demonstrations, then involved in them and participated as equals with Fatah and ourselves. The secular opposition is still organising meetings to denounce the accords, with very little attendance.

As for the Islamic opposition, Hamas in particular, it is profoundly divided. Sheikh Yassine is the uncontested leader of Hamas and a spiritual and political leader in the Occupied Territories. He is currently in prison and Yasser Arafat has demanded his immediate release. He sent a letter to Arafat, which was quoted in the press a few days back; it is considered to be very moderate by those close to the Fatah leader.

Rumour has it that Hamas is divided. On the one hand, there is a pragmatic current which is ready to negotiate its place in the new framework, to participate in elections and to not oppose the setting up of the autonomous Palestinian administration. On the other, there are the hardliners, represented by the spokesperson for those deported to south Lebanon, Doctor Rantisi, who want the accords to fail and to "punish the traitors".

In administrative terms, it is clear that the setting up of the PLO administration will create enormous problems. Given the bureaucratic and corrupt character of the mini-State apparatus that the PLO is, how is recruitment taking place?



I spent a few days in the police recruiting centres in Jerusalem and Fatah's area of Bethlehem, but not in the PLO centres or in the Palestinian national centres. Let's just say that it wasn't exactly the political and intellectual elite. While those in charge of recruitment were former political prisoners that have earned their stripes in the struggle against the occupation, the same cannot be said of their assistants, especially of those who have just recently mobilised. Many go there in the hopes of finding work; others are looking to secure some power. I believe that the scramble for power is at least as present as the thirst for independence and freedom.

This can be seen everywhere. As such, in the women's movement, there was a call from PLO headquarters in Tunis for the establishment of the foundation of a ministry or office for women's issues. There has been no discussion on a working paper or legislation concerning women's status under Palestinian autonomy. Instead, according to certain members of this movement, there has been a violent battle to see who will represent the movement in the Palestinian State or semi-State structures.

What tasks can progressive anti-imperialist forces in the region set for themselves? Are there concrete demands that can be made?

I firmly believe that the new situation, and the situation that will be created by the implementation of the accords, will create new openings for political activity, for mass mobilisation within the framework of autonomy in Gaza and the process of setting up a Palestinian autonomous territory in the West Bank.

The Israeli army is withdrawing from Palestinian daily life. There are laws and

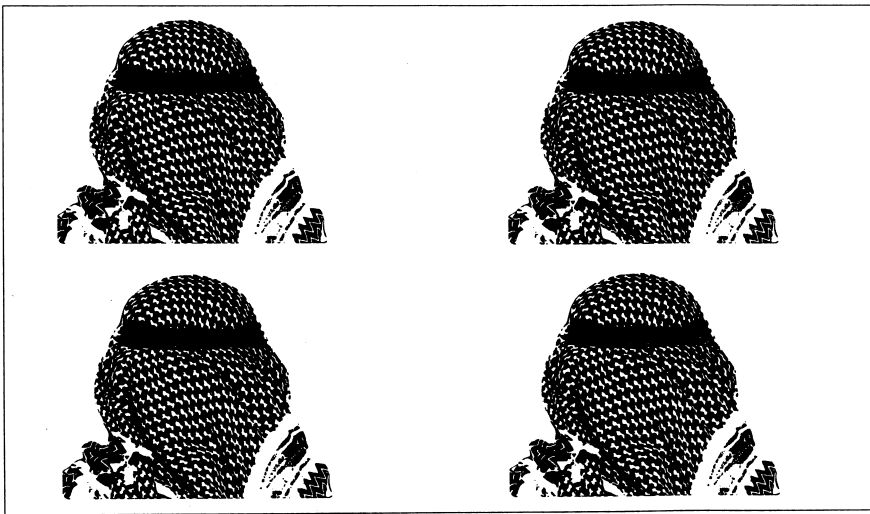
military decrees banning all forms of organisation, all forms of political, cultural and social expression, all types of demonstrations, any kind of political debate. These will all disappear. There are those who will say, "yes, but there will be a Palestinian police force that will restore the same order." I'm not convinced — this too will depend on the struggle, and if this terrain is abandoned, democratic hopes will be even more limited.

Nothing is certain. I don't see how Arafat will be able to easily do what the Israeli army itself could no longer do — or, at least, only with great difficulty. The unions, women's movements and political parties have some space opened up before them, space which they can use to mobilise the population. Firstly, they can demand more than what is in the text of the accords and go beyond the accords in the area of the rights acquired therein. Secondly, they can address the ultimate objective of independence and make their mark on the kind of State and society that the accords will produce.

We don't have the right to say that the jig is up. This is politically false; but it also a bad reading of the reality before us. I repeat, nothing is certain. There is a relationship of forces, one of whose elements is the creation of these spaces of "freedom" which can, if they are properly used, improve the relationship of forces. I'm not saying that the relationship of forces can be radically altered, but it can be improved.

To be concrete, there is nothing preventing union confederations from organising congresses and meetings. They don't have to wait for autonomy to do that. And if the Fatah union confederation doesn't want to do this, I'm sure that the others can do so, and create a charter for the defense of workers, for example.

They can demand, for example, the



return of the more than two billion shek that the Israeli government took from Palestinian salaries to finance a social security system to which Palestinians never had access. The money can be reinvested in the only thing that the Palestinians would do well to copy from the Israelis: a social security system.

This is a clear programme, around which people can be easily mobilised. It is very concrete; every worker has paid a sum of money and this money still exists — it has been calculated by an Israeli organisation, Kav Laoved, that defends Palestinian workers and which has managed to demonstrate exactly how much money has been stolen from Palestinians, money which is theirs by right.

The Palestinian delegation — instead of begging in New York one day, in Paris the next, and in Brussels the next — should demand this money. This is a demand that the unions can put forward, clearly spelling out what the money is meant for: to build a Palestinian social security infrastructure.

Why not plan — there is nothing utopian about this, it is concrete, it can be done tomorrow — a Palestinian women's congress. And if the Fatah women's organisation doesn't want to do it, do it without them. This would be very popular with hundreds and thousands of women which are calling on Fatah to begin a national debate on the status of women under Palestinian autonomy. Is this a struggle whose defeat is foretold? Certainly not.

Many people fear the inevitable cooperation between Israel and the PLO to control the money that comes in, and to determine the relations between the Palestinian police force and the Israeli army. In this field, are

there specific demands that the left can put forward?

The control of economic factors will be the most difficult. On the other hand, it will be easier to affect the type of democracy that is put in place. After 25 years of occupation, the idea of a human rights charter in the Occupied Territories is something that speaks to every woman and man in the Territories. Not so long ago, Faisal Hussein was saying that the first act, the first decree would deal with human rights and not police. This should be forcefully taken up by the popular organisations and the human rights organisations which carried out courageous work during the occupation. There is no reason for them to let their guard down now.

It is much easier to set up structures for local administration than it is on the national level. There should be a demand that they have a say, and that they should form the base of Palestinian autonomy, or at least be able to negotiate their place in the Palestinian administration. This is something concrete, which can easily be achieved starting immediately.

There are already popular committees and networks; there are still activists, there is a memory and accumulated experience. Why not reactivate them right away and integrate them into a process of developing Palestinian autonomy? Why not point to what were the beginnings of Palestinian autonomy — at the beginning of the intifada we always spoke of autonomous territories, liberated territories, in which there was Palestinian self-administration — and rebuild the popular and relatively democratic structures that were repressed by the Israeli army, structures that were inclusive and the fruit of a united front between different political and social forces.

On the economic level, at least as far as social services are concerned, there will have to be a series of struggles to demand that the PLO and the future sources of

financing, including the EEC, finance the existing network of clinics that was set up within the framework of resistance to the occupation through popular mobilisation, by voluntary groups, and by NGOs. This is the infrastructure for a quality popular healthcare system which, in a way, has already proved itself.

In the PLO, in the Palestinian medical corps, people want to privatise right away, or replace the popular health networks with State medicine based on the hospitals of the military administration — hospitals which are in a state of decay and in no position to meet people's needs. A mobilisation of a part of the medical corps and healthcare users can be mobilised to defend the clinics and get funding — for a more just and rational sharing of funds, instead of the creation of new private clinics. This is another possible area of struggle.

There is no shortage of issues, just a lot of work that needs to be done and can be done. But this a conscious decision that has to be made by the mass organisations, the NGOs and political formations that have a political programme that goes beyond obtaining places in the police force. A strategy centred around this type of mobilisation has to be drawn up.

How are Palestinians with Israeli citizenship reacting? Are they even more cut off from Palestinians in the Occupied Territories or, on the contrary, closer to them?

They responded to the accords with demonstrations that were relatively large, even enthusiastic, in comparison to the downturn that preceded the signing of the accords. For them, too, it was the first time that they could freely fly the Palestinian flag. It is clear that Gaza and Jericho, or even Palestinian autonomy, will have only a very limited impact on their situation. For the moment, it is something rather external to their own situation.

If we were dealing with Palestinian sovereignty, in one way or another that would give them a point of reference for their national identity. But the fact that the Palestinians of Gaza, even those of the West Bank, have self-administration does not concern them, except very indirectly.

Because they have a superior status?

No, because they have a very different status.

What danger is there that of a split in the Palestinian community between those who are outside and those who are inside Gaza and Jericho? How can abandonment, division and separation be prevented?

For the last 15 years, the Israeli dream, above all the Labourite dream, has been to separate the Palestinian question in the Occupied Territories from the Palestinian national problem in general — in order to atomise the Palestinian national question. This was the main reason for refusing to recognise the PLO, because recognition would mean recognition for the whole Palestinian question as a national question. There would be specific problems all over, but they would be treated as part of a national problem, with a national movement, requiring a national solution. Instead — and this was the framework defined at the Madrid negotiations — Israel was ready to negotiate with a representation, even a genuine and national one, of Palestinians from the Occupied Territories.

There are two possible readings of Israel's recognition of the PLO. Either Israel had to accept the fact that it was impossible to solve the problem of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories outside the framework of the PLO, without the Palestinian leadership itself taking up the matter. This would represent a big victory.

The other possibility is that Israel finally obtained what it wanted from the PLO, transforming it from a Palestinian national movement into a leadership of the Occupied Territories. This is how Fatah and PLO dissidents read what is happened. In these ranks can be counted founding members of Fatah such as Hani El Hassan and Khaled El Hassan, Mahmoud Derwish and the former PLO ambassador to Beirut, Shafik El Hout.

According to them, after the Oslo compromise, the PLO no longer represents all Palestinians but only the Occupied Territories. If this is true, it represents a tremendous setback. For Palestinians on the outside, this would constitute a real danger of the "Kurdisation" of the Palestinian question, and the dismantling of a national question into a number of local questions: the problem of the Palestinians of Jordan, those of Lebanon, and so forth.

I don't think that matters are fully settled. But there is a real danger, which would have historic significance. For the Palestinians of the diaspora — the majority of the Palestinian people — this would be a massive setback. ★

A new phase in the struggle

WALID Salem is both a Palestinian academic living in East Jerusalem, and a political activist in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967. He has been arrested several times for the role he played in the leadership of the intifada, and was accused of being a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Early this year he was released from his latest detention — 18 months in the Negev prison, built by Israel after the outbreak of the intifada and considered to be the toughest of all the detention centres. We asked him for the opinions of the Palestinian left. In future issues we will return to the debate in the Palestinian left, particularly in relation to the question of alliances with the Islamic fundamentalist current.

INTERVIEW — 21 October 1993

S **UPPORTERS of the Gaza-Jericho accords often point to the unfavourable relationship of forces for the Palestinians. Do you think these accords were inevitable?**

The PLO president Yasser Arafat contends that the Madrid process was incapable. The reasons were, on the one hand, the collapse of Soviet Union and the countries of the socialist bloc and, on the other, the Iraqi defeat. But Arafat's claims are contradicted by a number of facts.

First, Palestinians are living in a revolutionary situation. They are not confined to the framework of a State. In general, revolutions are less sensitive to changes in the relationship of forces than States, which are outlets for diplomatic relations. But Arafat is behaving as if the PLO was a State apparatus, while the Palestinian people itself has no State.

The upheavals on an international and Arab level are very negative. But in Palestine we had the weapon of the intifada. The PLO could have seized upon it, broadened the uprising and given it a programme for action, in order to changing the relationship of forces on a Palestinian level. While there may be an undeniable regression on an international level, it is not for all that inevitable that it should affect the situation in all countries and all revolutions.

There have to be nuances made between the particular and the general, between the absolute and the relative. In other

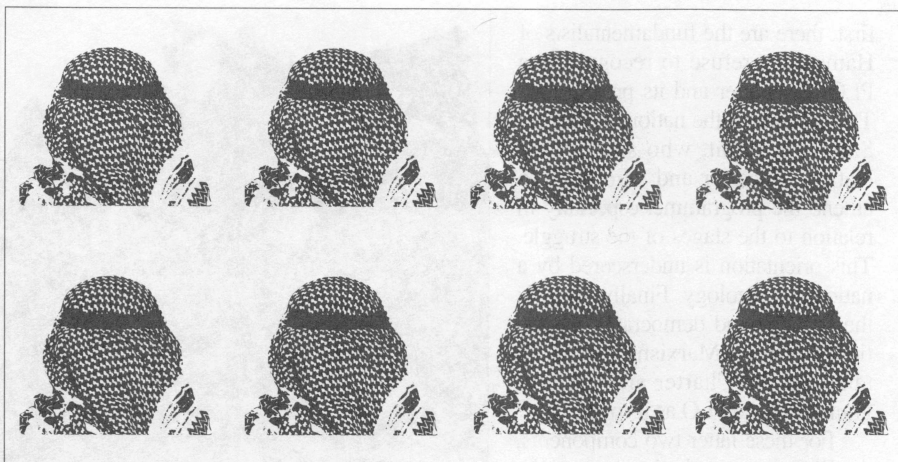
words, the deterioration of the relationship of forces does not necessarily lead to a gloomy situation in Palestine. It was possible to create a relationship of forces in Palestine that would fulfill the rights of the Palestinian people: the right to return, to self-determination and to an independent State.

It should also be noted that the objectives of the intifada went well beyond those Arafat had at Madrid. These included a call for the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the territories occupied in 1967, to be placed under international jurisdiction until independence.

Why did Yasser Arafat not take on the demands of the intifada as his own?

While the intifada called for independence, Yasser was attached to the idea of autonomy. But this is not all; he also helped put down the intifada, to abort it. I am not exaggerating when I say that Arafat's renunciations contributed more to the crushing of the intifada than Israeli repression, which at least could be fought by resisting. Renunciations are a much more formidable weapon. Instead of using the gains of the intifada to create a more favourable relationship of forces, Arafat renounced the intifada and set more and more minimalist objectives until he called, as he recently did during his visit to China, for a halt to the intifada.

The imperialist countries have promised to "help" Gaza and Jericho. How real is this aid?



Let me first point out that these promises have created many illusions among Palestinians in the area of job creation and salaries. The economic plan developed by the PLO for the next five years has called for 12 billion dollars, while the World Bank has spoken of a programme that requires 14 billion dollars. And today, in the wake of the Washington Conference, we know that aid will not even reach the sum of two billion dollars.

The 42 countries present in Washington weren't able to come up with any more than that — and we know that even these two billion dollars will not be fully handed over. And all the money promised by the EEC, Japan, the USA and the UN before the signing of the accords has to be subtracted from the final sum [to calculate the amount secured as a result of the agreement].

But the needs of Gaza alone in the area of infrastructure and job creation for the whole active population have been evaluated by experts at a sum oscillating between five and six billion dollars. Arafat was only able to get two billion!

In the west, the prevailing feeling is that people can be bought with money. It is forgotten that a people has its dignity, a conscience, a sense of belonging and commitment to a national struggle. Suffice it to say that Arafat does not have the means to buy the Palestinian people. The Gulf countries, his traditional source of financing, have not given a single penny.

How is the aid process going to unfold?

It will be supervised by the World Bank and the PLO will be nothing more than a tool in its hands. The plan drawn up by Abou Alaa, the head of the PLO's economic department, calls for full World Bank control of the development process. Thus there is an official Palestinian request for the World Bank to be the main actor. This is an unheard of situation, in which

the leadership of a country itself proposes to be dependent.

The Harvard Plan was drawn up jointly by Palestinian economists that support the negotiations process alongside Americans and Israelis. This plan also calls for active World Bank involvement. In practice, the World Bank already controls the process. It has gone ahead and done economic evaluations and asked that a banking establishment be set up. Thus, it has already begun to control economic trends in Palestine.

There is talk of a kind of common market between Israel, Jordan and the Occupied Territories. There is talk of lifting the boycott of Israeli products. How real is this project? How can Israeli products compete with Arab products in Arab markets? We know the difference in production costs, if for no other reason than the high level of salaries in Israel.

The Palestinian commercial bourgeoisie will be a comprador bourgeoisie that floods Israeli products onto Arab markets. It will play the intermediary role of "commissionary" as we say in our Palestinian tongue. This is a project that goes beyond the Arab region. It is called the "Middle Eastern common market", and would include Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Turkey in mixed projects, trade, a regional development bank and a system of pricing agreements. The setting up of such a system also has political objectives. The first such objective is that of isolating certain countries like Iraq, Libya, Sudan, Iran and Yemen — all the countries that were opposed to the USA during the Gulf War aside from Jordan, which cannot be excluded.

The second objective is that of compromising Arab unity and preventing it

from coming to fruition. All these Arab countries are going to develop relations with Turkey; Egypt, for example, which will do so without having relations with brother Arab countries like Tunisia and Morocco.

Another objective of this common market is to make the Israeli presence more acceptable, more natural. Israel will be able to develop its economic potential and become a country of the centre, whereas now it is a country halfway between the centre and the periphery.

Finally, the existence of this Middle Eastern common market would strengthen US imperialism against the EEC and the Asian dragons. It is fundamentally an American project which perpetuates imperialist hegemony in the economic, military and political spheres.

How do you explain the contradictions inside Fatah, its contradictory declarations, the volte face of Hani El Hassan, the positions of Haidar Abd El Chafi, and the assassination of leaders like Abu Chaabane and Assad Saftaoui?

Contradictions inside Fatah are based on a complex array of factors. You have to go back to their historic origins. Fatah had three historic leaders: Arafat, Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad. When I say leaders, I mean those with a base, with their own group within Fatah. This was the case for the three men I mentioned; with the killing of Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad, only Arafat remains. People like Hani El Hassan and Khaled El Hassan are not in the same league; they don't have a base and their criticisms cannot lead to splits in Fatah. Arafat can easily elbow Hani El Hassan out of the way. As for Khaled El Hassan, he recently founded a party, the Party for the Right to Return, for Palestinians abroad. It is difficult to say how much influence this group has, but I'm sure that it wouldn't be able to mobilise on a large scale. Another member of Fatah, Abbas Zaki, is trying to replicate the experience of Abu Jihad and Abu Iyad through the building of his own base. He has set up groups in the West Bank, Nablus and Galilee. He has a conciliatory position; he began by challenging Arafat, and has now taken a few steps back.

In Gaza it's a different story. There are not political struggles but rivalries for positions of power. Abu Chaabane founded the "Fatihoune" in order to establish his position.

Not all Palestinians have been

taken into account in the accords. Jordan considers Palestinians to be Jordanian "citizens". What does the future hold for those "forgotten" in the accords?

The agreement signed by Yasser Arafat does not mention the refugees of 1948; this implicitly means they are seen to be settled in the countries where they currently reside. The Palestinian leadership has quite simply abandoned them. As far as the 1967 refugees are concerned, the agreement mentions the possibility of repatriating a certain number of them, a number which remains to be specified by the Israelis and Palestinians. Subsequent Israeli declarations have discussed the possibility of return for those that left in 1967 with an exit permit but did not return within the prescribed time. But the accords do not include those who were forced to flee by the 1967 war. Israel destroyed three Palestinian villages, obliging their inhabitants to flee abroad; the same thing happened to people in the camps around Jericho, whose inhabitants were forced into exile.

Arafat said that he will demand the right to return for 1967 refugees. The Jordanian regime has officially declared that it is willing to give Palestinians the choice between returning to the Territories and remaining in Jordan. Those that remain in Jordan would get Jordanian citizenship. As for Lebanon, the question has not been settled; but there are signs that things are moving in the direction of the settling of Palestinians where they are. During the last round of negotiations, Lebanon asked Israel if it could take charge of the upkeep of inhabitants in the certain northern regions of Palestine, as Lebanese citizens. This represents a change in the position of the Lebanese government. This question of settling Palestinians was already posed in the 1950s by US and European imperialism. Today, alongside Israelis and the Arab reaction, they feel that this is the time to proceed with this plan. There would be a "Kurdisation" of Palestinians, spread out across several countries and thereby losing the unity of the people.

What then are the perspectives in this new context?

The Palestinian struggle has entered a new phase. It needs a new, alternative leadership. It needs a new programme, alternative to that of the bourgeoisie. Currently, in the face of the failure of the bourgeoisie, we have three programmatic orientations that are trying to provide this alternative:

first, there are the fundamentalists of Hamas, who refuse to recognise the PLO, its charter and its programme. The second are the nationalists in the Salvation Front, who support the National Charter and who hope to amend the programme, especially in relation to the stages of the struggle. This orientation is underscored by a nationalist ideology. Finally, there is the socialist and democratic orientation, based on Marxism and which takes on the Charter and the programme of the PLO as its own.

For these latter two components, the PLO is an institution, an activist force, a Charter, a programme and, finally, the representation of the identity of the Palestinian people. The PLO as such has disappeared. The Charter remains, as does the programme, the moral reference point and the identity, represented by those forces who remain attached to the programme and the Charter and to this political and moral entity. These forces must rebuild the PLO with new people and new structures, which can represent the legitimacy betrayed by Arafat and the supporters of the accords.

Recently there were calls from opponents of the accord to form an Islamic national front...

There was a debate within the "ten fractions"¹, the framework that includes the three orientations I just mentioned, including the fundamentalist current. They agreed to set up a "Islamic Democratic National Front" — not only a National Islamic Front, but Islamic and democratic. Its first objective is to scuttle the accords, and the second is to rebuild the accords. This means that Hamas has agreed to this final point, too, the rebuilding of the PLO. And Hamas is in agreement with the Charter, as they clearly said in the communiqué released after the meeting of the "ten" in Damascus four days back.

As such, the Palestinian struggle has produced a new leadership, the Islamic Democratic National Front. It remains to be seen what perspectives they will give the Palestinian people following the accords. Henceforth, future perspectives are linked to this front, since Arafat has abandoned the struggle.

But we have to recognise that the struggle has become much more difficult for a series of reasons. First, Arafat will want to prove his good intentions toward the Zionist State in the regions under his control — by preventing activities against Israel by Palestinian activists. The accord



says that the Israeli army will have the right to intervene in Gaza and Jericho in order to hunt down the authors of such acts. In order to prevent the Israeli army from entering, Arafat will have to prevent these acts from happening in the first place in order to avoid giving Israel a pretext for intervention. This is going to complicate the struggle.

Moreover, the Israeli army is going to be redeployed outside populated Palestinian areas. Certain Israeli objectives are going to be more difficult to achieve than before. Finally, a third element of complication, the struggle against the Zionist entity is going to have a new dimension. It will no longer only be a mass struggle and a military conflict with the Zionist army. It will also include against Israeli exploitation — but now the capital will be both Israeli and Palestinian. I have confidence in those forces that constitute the front; they will come up with solutions.

Thus, to the national struggle a democratic struggle has to be added, for human rights against repression, for women's freedom, for ideological and political pluralism. As for the intifada, it is on a downward slope. It will continue to struggle against the occupation. Now that Arafat is within reach of power in Gaza and Jericho, we are entering a new phase of the national and democratic struggle, different than that of the intifada. ★

1. The ten fractions make up a kind of front of opposition to the Madrid process and the accords. Its main elements are the PFLP, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), the Popular Front (General Command) of Ahmed Jibril, and Hamas.

Backlash against compromise?

FOR the black majority in South Africa the scope of the compromises made during three years of negotiations will mean that next years proposed elections will be more symbolic of Uhuru¹ than delivering real power to transform society. Perhaps this is why the major trade union federation, COSATU, has called for a general strike in mid-November to oppose some of the deals that are emerging from negotiations.

MARK HARPER — Cape Town, 22 October 1993

ON Friday 15 October the Nobel Committee awarded the 1993 Peace prize to Nelson Mandela and FW de Klerk — a measure of the satisfaction felt by the main Western powers with the course of the negotiations and their confidence that these two leaders will continue to make the necessary concessions to ensure that the non-racial election, planned for 27 April next year, can appropriately crown the process.

The peace prize award comes in the wake of the passing by the white Parliament of four laws that make provision for the setting up of the Transitional Executive Council, an Independent Electoral Commission, the Independent Media Commission and the Independent Broadcasting Authority. For the African National Congress (ANC), and its president, this signalled that the transition from apartheid was now irreversible. Immediately, as if by unwritten agreement Mandela went to the United Nations calling for an end to all non-nuclear and military sanctions.

These laws will come into effect after the interim constitution and a Bill of Rights² has been adopted by negotiators and passed by another session of Parliament.

Yet the response of the mass movement has been muted. There has been no real sign of enthusiasm for what has been achieved so far — although the only substantial opposition to the agreements has come from the rightwing.

The process has been going now for more than three years. Apart from when dramatic crisis occur, information on what is being discussed, what has been agreed and the implications of these agreements is so scant that the vast majority are blissfully ignorant of what is taking place.

It is worth quoting David Welsh, a leading liberal political scientist and a very strong advocate of the negotiation process. In the *Cape Times* of 7 October 1993 he says: "It is also a remarkable anomaly that debates of the Negotiating Forum are not published in the form of a *Hansard* (parliamentary recordings of proceedings). Major legislation is about to be rushed through Parliament without the general public having had an adequate opportunity to scrutinise bills and debate major issues. Like CODESA, the Multi-party Forum is in danger of becoming an exclusive club. This bodes ill for the style of government we can expect in future."

What the oppressed masses know is what they experience: continuing violence, economic hardship and rapid decay of the social fabric of ghetto life.

Principles

What is not so well known is that the so-called constituent assembly (CA) that will be brought into being by the 27 April election will be bound by no less than twenty seven constitutional principles drawn up during the negotiations! All decisions which the CA wishes to make will be evaluated by a constitutional court to ensure that it does not conflict with the letter and spirit of these principles. Whilst the constitutional court has not been established it is clear that the vast majority will be former Supreme Court judges and members of the legal Bar. In other words, people not very sensitive to the needs and interests of black workers or the rural poor.

The interim constitution which will operate during the sitting of the CA and the adoption of a new constitution requires specially enlarged majorities. It is likely therefore, that smaller parties will block together and impose vetoes on any contro-

versial decisions which the majority party might want to pass. The implication is also that the interim constitution which will have been negotiated in the Multi-party Forum where no-one has been elected, will be adopted, perhaps with minor changes as the final constitution for the country.

Thus the negotiating process will have stripped the CA of its sovereignty making it resemble a constituent assembly only in form but without the content.

It has also been agreed that there will be a "government of national unity" for at least the first five years following the April election. All parties obtaining more than five percent in the election will be represented in this government. Even if the ANC and its allies were to win the election outright they could face considerable obstacles to pursuing their own policies where these are not expressly blocked by the adopted constitutional principles. It means that the National Party, the far right and Buthulezi's Inkatha Freedom Party will be able to obstruct any progressive social programmes that an ANC government might want to implement.³

The interim constitution will contain elements of federalism and regionalism. Initially, commentators felt that the desire by the National Party for strong federal and regional government was a further attempt to restrict the powers of the CA and exact a minority veto in a different form.

Yet the proposals on regional government surprisingly do not make huge inroads into the powers of central government. Their powers, in fact, do not go much beyond the powers of the former white Provincial Councils.

Those areas where the regional government has exclusive power concerns rather trivial issues such as tourism, town planning and so forth. On issues such as housing, education, agriculture, policing the centre and the regions are to be given concurrent power. Where there is conflict the centre will prevail.

1. Uhuru is an African word meaning freedom.

2. The Bill of Rights is meant to be the fundamental base for the protection of human rights without discrimination. It also deals with property rights.

3. The Inkatha Freedom party exercises strict control over the bantustan, KwaZulu. It is a conservative and reactionary force that allows a privileged layer of the Zulu people to exploit the socio-economic advantages of apartheid.

The danger with the agreement reached so far on regional government is the extent to which the regional boundaries may correspond with ethnic interests and designs. Provision has been made for nine regions: Western Cape, Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, Natal, PWV (Pretoria, Witwatersrand, Vereeniging), North West, Orange Free State, Northern Transvaal, Eastern Transvaal.

Negotiations are continuing on the regional boundaries and the powers of the regions and de Klerk has promised Buthelezi that he will push harder to ensure strong decentralised regional government. This could provide a means to get Buthelezi back in the negotiations and a way of satisfying demands of some members of his cabinet for closer relations with Inkatha. The National Party will probably only pursue the strong regional option if there is movement by Inkatha towards them at an electoral level. Up to now de Klerk has been quite prepared to sacrifice federal solutions at the altar of power-sharing with the ANC.

Like the demand for a constituent assembly the ANC's original demand for an interim government has had its content watered down. The interim government was intended to replace the Nationalist government in the period leading up to democratic elections. While its primary task was to "level the playing field", that is, to ensure conditions of free political activity and to foresee that no political party was privileged by means of its influence over broadcasting and the media, nevertheless it was conceived to rule the country for the interim period.

The Transitional Executive Council (TEC), while it pre-figures the power-sharing arrangement that will be ushered in after the elections, does not replace the National Party government or the present cabinet. Its role is restricted, in the main, to monitoring the government and operating alongside the existing cabinet. The TEC will be made up of one representative of each party that has been part of the negotiating process and is willing to submit to its authority.

So, while the Pan African Congress has been actively participating in the negotiations and supported the setting up of the TEC, it will not be represented in the TEC or any of its sub-councils because it refuses to submit its armed wing, the Azanian Peoples' Liberation Army (APLA), to monitoring by the TEC sub-council on defence.⁴

TEC decisions require a seventy-five percent agreement. However, three of its seven sub-councils: Defence, Intelligence and Law & Order will have eight mem-

bers and any decision must be agreed by eighty percent of the members. This means that 6.4 members are needed to enforce a decision. Since the National Party will be represented by at least one member it has virtually a veto power in these sub-councils. In the case of de Klerk calling a state of emergency for example, a vote of eighty percent will be needed to rescind the decision.

Thus the TEC falls far short of the interim government demanded by the ANC at the start of the negotiations. Nevertheless, a certain level of power-sharing will occur in the TEC. In most cases the government will be loath to bludgeon through decisions for fear of alienating the ANC and other parties. Even before the advent of the TEC the government has been consulting the ANC on many important decisions and in some cases it would actively seek out the support of the ANC.

"Unrest areas"

One recent example was when the regime declared certain areas of the East Rand in the Transvaal "unrest areas" and sent in the military to quell the level of violence. De Klerk first obtained the support of Mandela before undertaking this course of action. It was only when Mandela came under fire from rank and file activists in the affected townships who were bearing the brunt of South African Defence Force (SADF) repression that he attempted to distance himself from deployment of the SADF.

The most recent and most significant joint Government and ANC initiative has been over the rescheduling of its debt and the application to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a \$850 million loan purportedly for drought relief but in reality destined for debt servicing. A joint delegation including government and high-ranking ANC officials negotiated the debt rescheduling deal and jointly put the IMF loan proposal together.

On the other hand there have been two recent cases where the government has ignored the opposition of the ANC and other sections of the popular movement and forced through its decisions. In the first case the government went against a decision of the National Economic Forum⁵ which proposed that the seven percent increase in the price of petrol be postponed till December when it should be reviewed. The government, although under the threat of mass action, confirmed the increase. In the second case the government awarded contracts for the production of cellular telephones unilaterally. This was strongly opposed by the ANC and the Congress of

South African Trade Unions (COSATU) who wanted the issue determined by the TEC.

A further example of the government's continuing authority was its decision to raid a civilian house in Umtata which was alleged to be a APLA base killing two children and three youths.

Negotiations are proceeding in spite of the withdrawal of the rightwing parties. Inkatha walked out of the negotiations in June in protest at the decision making mechanisms that set the 27 April election date. The Conservative Party and the Affrikaner Volksfront, an alliance of rightwing organisations also no longer take part in the Kempton Park negotiations. The walk out by the homeland government's of Bophuthatswana and the Ciskei has subsequently given rise to a new alliance on the right called the Freedom Alliance which includes all these parties.

Given the desire by both the government and the ANC to get broad endorsement for the negotiated settlement and so avoid a crisis of legitimacy after the elections, the proposals made at Kempton Park are canvassed with the Freedom Alliance. It seems that this two-table process of negotiations will gather momentum with talks continuing at Kempton Park while the Alliance is addressed separately in bilaterals.

While de Klerk is keen to get Buthelezi's Inkatha party back inside the negotiating circle, having the Freedom Alliance on the outside threatening civil war is proving a useful lever for extracting further concession from the ANC.

The low intensity war continues to reap an average daily death toll of eighteen. In August three-hundred and fifty people were killed in the small area that makes up Katshehng, Thokoza and Vosloorus.

While the centre of the violence is now located on the East Rand it has by no means abated in Natal with the 1990 levels remaining fairly consistent.

A shift has also taken place in the directors of the low intensity war. While it was obvious that the National Party government put in place the strategy of low intensity war to weaken the mass movement it now seems that they have lost control over their own creation. What is happening now is that those rightwing forces based in the security apparatus are

4. The PAC originates in a split from the ANC towards the end of the 1950s. It has grown in the recent past through a radical stance against the negotiations. It is in reality divided on the question.

5. The National Economic Forum has been set up by the unions and the government to negotiate economic restructuring and post-apartheid economic policy.

continuing the low intensity strategy more or less independently.

Both the National Party and the ANC realise that there will be only limited foreign investment and economic recovery while the levels of violence remain so high and are both desperate to bring the violence under control.

Mandela told the World Economic Development Congress recently that the high levels of violence would deter investors and that the ANC's first priority was to curtail the unrest. This has meant endorsing security operations in the East Rand townships and cooperating with the security forces. Ironically, the police and army directed its intervention at the support base of the mass movement: the self-defence units and ANC strongholds.

The levels of violence which pre-figures more intensive civil war possibilities has pressurised the ANC to make deals to the advantage of the white establishment.

One such deal has been the agreement reached at the Multi-party negotiations that all civil servants will keep their jobs after the 27 April election. The job guarantee will apply to all departments including those in the TBVC (Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei) and the "self-governing" territories. Supposedly to soften the response from the mass movement a policy of affirmative action is to be implemented to ensure more black people are incorporated into the civil service. It was also agreed that a guaranteed "no vendetta" clause against civil servants will be written into the interim constitution.

This deal has its origins in Communist Party (SACP) Chair, Joe Slovo's document on Sunset Clauses in which he argued that the ANC and the SACP must be prepared to make significant compromises with the regime to avoid a bitter civil war.

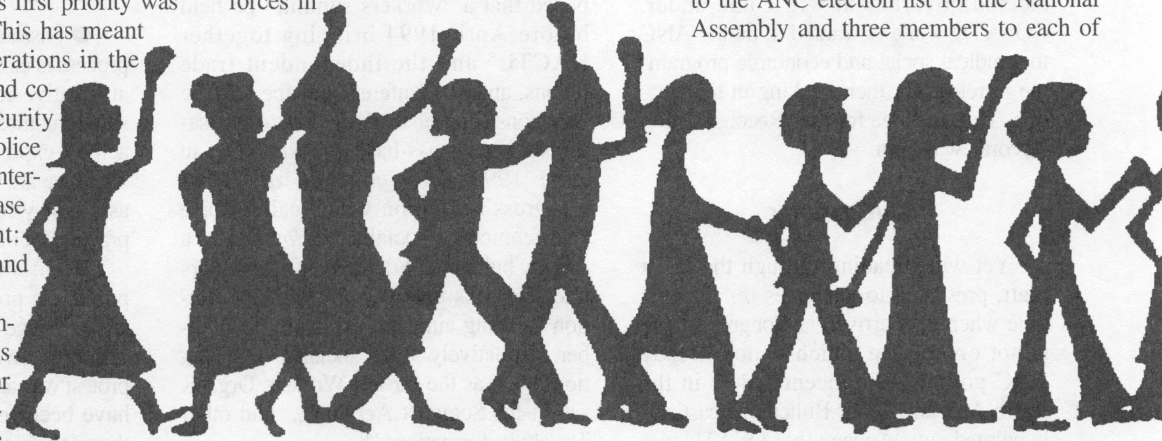
Not long after the ink had dried on the civil servants agreement the new COSATU Central Executive Committee announced it was planning a general strike for 15 November to oppose this agreement and a further agreement by which employers will have the right to lock out workers guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. This took the ANC and the SACP leadership totally by surprise as they were party to the agreement and opposed to the COSATU action. Hastily convened meetings between these three organisations has not resolved the issue. However, Trevor Manuel, head of

the ANC's Economic Department warned that the planned strike would be as disastrous as Umtata raid was for attracting foreign investors to South Africa.

The constituent assembly stripped of its sovereignty, an interim government which in the last instance will not be much more than an advisory or consultative body, the five year power-sharing arrangement, the deal on the civil service are all products of the particular balance of class forces in

Nowhere was this more clearly expressed than at the recent Special COSATU Congress which was held over 10-12 September. This Congress had to spell out COSATU's election position and to draw up a reconstruction programme. Unlike previous COSATU congresses which were characterised by vigorous debate this Congress was carefully managed to create an image of maximum unity.

The Congress elected twenty members to the ANC election list for the National Assembly and three members to each of



South Africa.

In previous issues of *International Viewpoint* there has been occasion to review the balance of forces in South Africa. We shall not repeat that here. Suffice it to say that the fall of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe and the exhaustion of the uprising during the 1984-1987 period has conspired to produce a negative and even defeatist perspective amongst ANC and SACP leaders where a historic compromise with the Nationalist regime under which the machinery of the state will remain in the hands of conservative Afrikaners and economic power in the hands of the monopolies is seen as unavoidable.

Profound optimism

For many followers of the South African political situation there was a profound optimism about the prospects for radical solutions to the conflict. Even in the midst of the dark days of the PW Botha era of repression the solidarity movements all over the world were inspired by the breadth, combativity and socialist rhetoric of the workers movement.

Today the story is very different. As the designated date, 27 April, for non-racial democratic elections approaches the political perspectives articulated in the popular movement is dominated by the notion that there is no alternative to capitalism. The perspective of reforming South African capitalism and the sharing of political power with the white ruling class has become the dominant position on the left.

the nine regional lists. Most debate at Congress was spent on this aspect of the agenda.

The ANC had promised that the COSATU nominees would appear in the top fifty-one percent of both the national and regional election lists, thereby almost guaranteeing them a place in Parliament. The list includes such people as Jay Naidoo, COSATU's former General Secretary; Moses Mayekiso, General Secretary of the metalworkers union NUMSA; Alec Erwin, NUMSA's education officer; John Copelyn, General Secretary of the clothing and textile union SACTWU; and Marcel Golding, assistant General Secretary of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM).⁶

It is interesting to note the tensions that have arisen between COSATU and the ANC since attempts are being made to back away from placing all COSATU nominees in the top half of the list.

Difficult as it has been, COSATU has established no means to hold their nominees to the ANC list accountable to the organisation. They will operate on an ANC mandate and there is no way that COSATU can hold them answerable for their parliamentary performance.

6. Moses Mayekiso and Alec Erwin are two of the most longstanding and principled leaders of the independent socialist and union left. John Copelyn was in the past also associated with this current before moving towards positions that favoured worker-management collaboration. Marcel Golding too was also a supporter of the union left—the mineworkers union—and opposed to the ANC and SACP.

Sam Shilowa has been elected to replace Jay Naidoo as the new COSATU General Secretary. Since the federation's 1991 Congress he has served as the assistant General Secretary, he is seen as one of COSATU's worker leaders who has risen up through the ranks. He is also on the SACP's Central Committee and is regarded as being loyal to the main line of the Party.

Understanding the pressures that an elected government will come under, COSATU workers wanted to tie the ANC to a radical social and economic programme in return for their backing in the election. Thus the idea for the "Reconstruction Accord" was born.

ANC policy

Yet when reading through the latest draft, presented to delegates for the first time when they arrived at Congress, there is not one clause which is not already ANC policy. As a recent article in the South African Labour Bulletin sarcastically pointed out: "Apparently COSATU was trying to bind the ANC to the ANC's own policy."⁷

The shift from strong socialist positions to one where no alternative is seen as possible other than committing the federation to the reconstruction of post-apartheid capitalism is captured boldly in the document. It mirrors the same shifts undertaken by the ANC and the SACP.

The latest draft, for example, says: "Macro economic stability is vital to the success of our programme. For this fundamental reason, coherent, strict and effective monetary and fiscal policies will be a cornerstone of our 'Reconstruction and Development Programme'."

Taken with a clause in an earlier draft, subsequently dropped, which said: "An accord also implies duties, obligations and possibly compromises on behalf of the trade union movement as well as the ANC, based on the realities, we face (...) the likelihood of wage restraint..."; and with the call in the most recent draft, "to redirect government expenditure within existing constraints", you get the impression that the authors from COSATU Head Office are converts to conservative monetarist economic policies.

The document abandons established COSATU policy, such as nationalisation of the commanding heights of the economy. The strong left shift in the NUMSA conference in July where the union adopted resolutions calling for nationalisation without compensation, the ending of the alliance with the ANC after the 27 April election and for the formation of a mass

workers party received no echo in the COSATU Congress.

This fourth draft of the "Reconstruction and Development Programme" was accepted by the Congress as a working document with some sections referred back for reworking. In addition resolutions were adopted on violence, constitutional negotiations, economic restructuring, tax and building working class unity.

To build working class unity it is proposed that a "workers summit" be held before April 1994 bringing together NACTU⁸ and the independent trade unions, and a "Conference of the left" be held consisting of working class organisations with a mass-based constituency in June 1994. This amends the 1991 Congress resolution which called for a "conference on socialism". *Southscan*, a weekly bulletin of Southern African affairs interprets this new version of the resolution as being aimed at excluding "a number of relatively small socialist organisations such as the far left Workers Organisation for Socialist Action (...) and other Trotskyist formations."⁹

The compromises and the shift to the right has not gone unchallenged. Opposition at the grassroots of the mass movement is growing even if it is not yet co-ordinated and coherent.

● The NUMSA Congress earlier this year represents a clear rank and file statement of their opposition to the ditching of radical working class positions. How this will find expression in the next few months is unclear as already there are indications of leadership elements trying to smother and deflect Congress decisions.

● The exasperation that is indicated by COSATU's call for a general strike on 15 November to oppose compromises made at the Negotiating Forum is another indication of growing unease with the settlement being constructed at Kempton Park.

● The Police and Prisons Civil Rights Union (POPCRU) strike in the Eastern Cape where hundreds of black policemen and women are striking in solidarity with suspended black policemen and women further illustrates the continued combativity of the mass movement.

● Rural women's organisations have threatened to boycott the elections if the motion of the Western Cape Women's Coalition¹⁰ calling for the exclusion of rural women from the Bill of Rights for two years is accepted. Under the Bill of Rights presently being debated women of "white", "coloured" and "Indian" descent are granted equality but African women falling under customary law are excluded. This means the majority of rural women

would be excluded from the Bill of Rights clauses relating to equality.

Of course many traditional leaders are working hard to prevent rights being extended to African women. They fear it will interfere with hereditary chieftainship and property inheritance. This in turn would lead to challenges to the social position of men.

Galling

● Dissatisfaction with the negotiating process is also expressed in the demand for affirmative action to Africanise the leadership structures of the ANC. As one ANC activist expressed it: "It seems galling that when we are demanding affirmative action as a policy for South Africa, we have not practiced it ourselves."

● Disenchantment with the political process is probably best illustrated in the ten day siege of the ANC's Southern Natal office by twenty-seven MK cadres. The protest was aimed at the way in which they have been forgotten and left to fend for themselves with no prospect of jobs, no financial assistance from the ANC and no involvement with the discussion on restructuring the defence force.

If space permitted many more examples can be cited. The challenge for socialist activists whether they are in the ANC, SACP or in independent organisations like WOSA is to find ways of relating to these impulses, to begin co-ordinating their efforts and organising themselves into rank and file currents that can start to challenging the dominance of reformist thinking.

It is unlikely that this will have gathered momentum in time to ensure co-ordinated election activities but is sure to gather momentum thereafter. ★



7. Roger Etkind and Suzanna Harvey, 'Reconstruction Accord the Workers Cease Fire', *South Africa Labour Bulletin*.

8. NACTU is another union federation, smaller than COSATU and dominated by the PAC.

9. *Southscan*, Vol 8 No 34, 17 September 1993.

10. Regional structure of the National Women's Coalition in which the ANC and other progressive women's organisations are in the leadership.

Eighteen years of resistance

THE November 1992 arrest of Xanana Gusmao, the central leader of the East Timorese struggle for self-determination, has put this Southeast Asian people back into the world spotlight — after 18 years of resistance to an Indonesian occupation that has claimed 200,000 lives.

WILL McMAHON

— 17 October 1993

THE Indonesians invaded East Timor on 8 December 1975, one day after US President Gerald Ford's visit to Jakarta.

Due to a confluence of political factors, President Suharto and the military came to view the absorption of East Timor as almost a foregone conclusion.

The United States saw the struggle for East Timorese independence as the emergence of another pro-Soviet affair after the defeats they suffered in south-east Asia and Africa and as a threat to their access to the Ombai-Wetar Straits, a strategic deep-sea submarine passage between the Pacific and Indian Oceans.

East Timor groups

ABRI Indonesian armed forces

Apodeti Associação Popular Democrática

ASDT Associação Social-Democrática

BAKIN Indonesian Military Intelligence Coordination Agency

CNRM National Council of Maubere Resistance (formed in 1987)

Falintil Forças Armadas de Libertação Nacional do Timor-Leste

Freitlin Frente Revolucionaria do Timor-Leste

OPSUS Special operations unit of the Indonesian government

UDT União Democrática Timorese



The Australians favoured integration since it would give them access to oil and gas deposits in the East Timor Gap at a time when the world economy was still reeling from the OPEC price hikes of the mid-1970s.

The new Portuguese regime had its hands full in Angola and Mozambique. Although it appears that the Armed Forces Movement (AFM) representatives in the East Timorese capital Dili — favourable to East Timorese self-determination — were given a free hand, in Lisbon some sectors felt that East Timor would be integrated into Indonesia much like Goa had been in India.

Thus, the fall of the Caetano regime on 25 April 1974 in Portugal triggered a series of fateful events for the future of East Timor.

Events in Portugal precipitated the formation of the three main political parties in East Timor. Apodeti was clearly the creation of the Indonesian military and as such has always been a well-financed and organised shell of a real party. Both the UDT and the ASDT, which in September of that year changed its name to Freitlin, had genuine roots in the East Timorese nation.

This early period of political development saw Freitlin win a substantial mass base in the countryside as a result of literacy and rural co-operation programmes and through the use of East

Timorese culture and its main language, Tetum, as mobilising tools. Such a strategy was the product of the Marxist wing within Freitlin which traced many of its ideas to the political debates in both Portugal and contemporary struggles in Latin America.

In January 1975, the AFM representatives in Dili organised the formation of a coalition between the UDT and Freitlin with the aim of delivering self-determination.

The local elections, which were organised under the aegis of the new Portuguese government between March and July 1975 revealed the depth of Freitlin's support. It won 55% of the vote.

Jakarta's worst fears

In the first half of 1975, it was becoming self-evident that Freitlin was rapidly becoming the majority current of the East Timor independence movement and that it was taking on an increasingly Marxist hue which had led to the eclipsing of the original social democratic leadership of Jose Horta. This only confirmed the worst fears of Jakarta and Canberra where alarm bells had been ringing for some time.

A section of the Indonesian military-political leadership had always viewed East Timor as an integral part of a greater Indonesia. But the issue had failed to sur-

face since the coup of 1965, an event whose success the Indonesian ruling class needed time to digest.¹

As early as 1969, the issue of East Timor began to re-emerge. OPSUS, the Special Operations Unit of the Indonesian government, began producing documentation which argued that an independent East Timor might pose a security threat to Indonesia. Yet, despite various schemes being drawn up by the security services, right up to the summer of 1974 leading ministers were arguing that Indonesia supported East Timorese independence. In June 1974, Adam Malik, the Indonesian foreign minister, wrote to the leaders of the ASDT assuring them that Indonesia had every intention of respecting East Timor's right to independence.

By the end of 1974 the tide had turned in favour of integration. By mid-1974 BAKIN, the Military Intelligence Coordinating Agency, had already finalised a plan for integration known as Operasi Komodo (Operation Giant Lizard). The coup in Lisbon and the creation of Freitlin on 12 September had given further impetus to the integrationists' campaign.

At the same time, Australian Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, went out of his way to urge the integration of East Timor in a meeting with Suharto and other military leaders. As a result, Adam Malik changed to a pro-integration position.

In November 1974, there were regular articles in *Berita Yudha*, the military's newspaper, "exposing" the Chinese arming of Freitlin. It accused Freitlin of "seeking communist support". Jakarta radio broadcasts began to claim 70% support for Apodeti.

Early 1975 saw the Suharto regime develop a plan to split the Freitlin/UDT coalition. BAKIN began to meet with UDT leaders and to stress the dominance of Freitlin in the coalition and the "unviability" of East Timor under a radical leadership.

This strategy was unsuccessful. The results of the 1975 local elections and the developing radicalisation of the East Timor independence movement led many of the landowners and urban sectors of the UDT to argue for an alliance with Apodeti and the Indonesians to prevent a Freitlin takeover.

The formation of Revolutionary Brigades, in mid-June 1975, which had a presence in every village in order to implement literacy and health campaigns, exposed the balance of forces inside East Timor for all to see.

The refusal of Freitlin to attend the Portuguese-organised Macao Decoloni-

East Timor facts

Weather conditions vary enormously due largely to the influence of the mountain range on winds and rainfall. The island has the longest dry season in South-east Asia with rainfall distribution dividing the country into four rainfall zones. The southern coastal plain catches two wet seasons making two harvests possible, but conditions in the north are much drier.

The main cash crops are coffee and sandalwood. Food crops include corn, rice, wheat, potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, sago and a variety of vegetables, tubers and tropical fruit.

The island of Timor is a racial meeting point, populated by waves of migrants who were predominantly Malay and Melanesian. In the past two centuries, Arab, Chinese and African faces have also become part of the Timorese crowd.

The last pre-invasion population figure was 688,711, the figure of the Catholic church published in 1974. The official language was Portuguese, whilst Tetum had become a sort of lingua franca in East Timor.

The majority of Timorese still adhered to their traditional beliefs. After the arrival of the Portuguese, many were converted to Catholicism. By the 1970s, about 30% of the population was Catholic.

Before the first Europeans arrived in Timor, the island was divided into many small kingdoms; the rulers were called liurals (mainly in the east) or rajas (mainly in the west). Long before the Europeans appeared, Chinese, Arab and Gujarati traders had frequently visited East Timor, especially in search of sandalwood.

Although the Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in East and Southeast Asia, the Dutch followed soon after and succeeded in gaining control almost everywhere. The only places where the Dutch failed to expel the Portuguese were Macao and Timor. In 1702, the Portuguese started to set up a colonial administration in Timor but it was not until the middle of the 19th century that the struggle between the Portuguese and the Dutch for the control of the sandalwood trade was more or less settled. The Dutch ruled in the western half of the island which became Indonesian West Timor after the Republic of Indonesia was established. The Portuguese remained in control of East Timor until the Democratic Republic of East Timor was set up on 28 November 1975. ★

source: Liem Soei Liong & Carmel Budiadjo, 'The War Against East Timor', Zed Press, 1984.

sation Committee in mid-June, because of the attendance of Apodeti/Indonesian delegates, enabled Apodeti and the UDT to take centre stage and to seal an alliance between them.

The result of these events was an attempted pre-emptive UDT coup in Dili. On 9 August 1975, the UDT staged demonstrations calling for the expulsion of all communists from the country; by 11 August the police headquarters were occupied and the UDT was attempting to seize power through the barrel of a gun.

Although it was supported behind the scenes by Jakarta, the UDT was defeated militarily in a month. Mop up operations lasted until 24 September, when UDT remnants crossed the border into West (Indonesian) Timor. As they crossed they signed a petition calling for the integration of East Timor into Indonesia.

As Freitlin established an effective administration it became apparent that an independent East Timor was a viable option. Indonesia initially tried a strategy

of border incursions throughout September and October 1975, the aim of which was to nibble away at East Timorese land and to destabilise the Dili regime. This became bogged down and suggested that if integration was going to take place it would have to be immediate and total rather than piecemeal.

In mid-November, the Indonesians launched an attack on the town of Atabae which was strategically important for any march on Dili. Atabae fell on 24 November. On 28 November Freitlin declared East Timor an anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist republic.

Mass killing

The attack on Dili, Operasi Seroja (Lotus), was swift and brutal. According to the former Bishop of Dili, Costa

1. In 1965, Suharto seized power and unleashed a vicious reign of terror. Many of the victims were members of the Indonesian Communist Party, the PKI.

Lopez, "The soldiers who landed started killing everyone they could find. There were many dead bodies in the streets; all we could see was killing, killing, killing." Entire households were murdered for displaying the East Timorese flag.

ABRI, the Indonesian army, quickly took many of the coastal urban areas in East Timor through force of numbers. It is estimated that the first few months of the invasion cost 60,000 lives.

By the end of 1976 there were 40,000 troops in East Timor which were only capable of controlling urban areas with a population of 150,000. Freitlin had moved substantial sections of the population up to the mountains where they could be better defended. In mid-1977 a situation of military stalemate had developed. The Indonesian leadership decided on a three-pronged strategy to finish off the resistance once and for all.

After significantly re-arming with Bronco counter-insurgency aircraft supplied by the United States, Hawks combat aircraft supplied by Britain and submarines supplied by West Germany, ABRI launched wave after wave of bombardment, encirclement and then heavy troop deployment against the rural strongholds of Falintil. This continued throughout 1978 and substantially destroyed Falintil's military capability. Yet at no point did ABRI completely destroy Falintil.

Terror as a political weapon

Unable to secure a comprehensive military victory, the Indonesians used terror as a political weapon. Disappearances became common and the practice of "mandi laut" (going for a swim), when oppositionists were dumped into the sea with weights attached to their legs, played a role in terrorising the urban population.

Massacres of resistant villages, imprisonment and torture, which included beatings, burning with cigarettes, sexual abuse, electric shock treatment and the crushing of limbs, all became part of the ABRI portfolio of terror.

Armed resistance was restricted to the south and easternmost sectors of East Timor. Military defeats in the late 1970s led to political splits and defections. A notable example was the surrender of Alarico Fernandes, Freitlin's minister of information, who gave key information as to the location of key commanders, leading to a mopping up of the Falintil leadership in 1979. By 1980 most of the original leadership had been eliminated.

The March 1981 National Conference of Freitlin re-organised the military strategy basing itself on attacks on supply lines, the capture of weapons and the maximum possible mobility. Such a strategy depended on the ongoing support of a terrorised population.

Cultural assimilation

This explains the development of the third prong of the Indonesian strategy.

The captured population in rural areas were herded into resettlement camps with the aim of cutting them off from Falintil. Malnutrition was and still is a common feature of life in the camps and human rights abuses are common. Once the population had been imprisoned the Indonesians aimed to make them forget they were ever East Timorese.

During the 1980s the Indonesians attempted to culturally assimilate the East Timorese. Jakarta often boasts about the number of primary schools that have been built in East Timor. In effect, the schools were supposed to be the site of the elimination of East Timorese identity.

In East Timor, Tetum and Portuguese are banned. Bahasa Indonesia is spoken and the Javanese culture is inculcated. Pancasila, the national ideology of Indonesia, forms the basis of the East Timor primary school curriculum.

In addition to cultural assimilation there has also been a programme of biological population control. Through the use of Depo Provera there has been a "Family Planning Programme" running throughout the 1980s with the aim of the slow extermination of the East Timorese population through birth control.

By the end of the 1980s it seemed that the Indonesians were unable to defeat the much reduced but still persistent Falintil forces. 1983 witnessed many local ceasefires as a result of war weariness. Continuous waves of Indonesian offensives throughout the 1980s indicate that while ABRI may be able to tempora-

rily overwhelm Falintil with the use of the "pajer betis" (wall of legs) strategy, there was still an essential inability to crush them.

By 1989 Falintil was operating in one third of East Timor (south and east) with between 1,000 and 1,500 in action facing up to 15,000 Indonesian troops. Although the number of Falintil has fallen since then, it is difficult to get an accurate current assessment of their fighting strength. Estimates range from 200 to 1,000.

By the late 1980s Suharto felt confident enough to begin to open East Timor up. Such openings have been exploited to the fullest extent by the CNRM, the broad-based resistance movement created in 1987 as a successor to Freitlin.

The emphasis of the CNRM has been to work towards a political solution while not abandoning the military aspect of the struggle. Since 1989 there have been a series of events which have created the political space for the CNRM to place East Timor on the political agenda.

On 12 October 1989, the Pope held a mass of 100,000 just outside Dili. This proved to be a focus for a demonstration in favour of independence. Despite this, and in persistent belief of their own propaganda, the military has allowed restricted visits of East Timor under the guise of normalisation.

Unarmed resistance

Two further demonstrations followed in January 1990 and September 1990 which resulted in clashes between students and troops. Such unarmed resistance came to play a more prominent role. A long-promised delegation of Portuguese MPs was finally arranged for the beginning of November 1991.

The East Timorese began preparing to use the visit for a show of political opposition. At the last minute, the Indonesians cancelled the visit under the pretext that they opposed the inclusion of an



Australian journalist in the delegation.

Despite this, on 12 November a mass pro-independence demonstration took place on the street of Dili leading to the Santa Cruz cemetery. The Indonesian military gunned down 200 demonstrators in front of the world's television cameras.

On 20 November 1992, Xanana Gusmão was captured by ABRI in a Dili suburb. Put on trial in a kangaroo court and sentenced to life imprisonment, subsequently reduced by Suharto to 20 years (see box opposite). This put East Timor in the headlines once again.

The effect of these events has been threefold. Firstly, the United Nations became more fully, albeit temporarily, involved in negotiations around East Timor. Secondly, the possibilities for organising an international movement in solidarity with East Timor has been markedly improved.

Thirdly, and currently most important, the massacre strengthened the hand of those forces within the Democratic Party in the United States for a change in strategy in regard to both East Timor and Indonesia.

The United States has clearly begun to adopt a different strategy in relation to East Timor. The blocking of transfers of F5 fighters in August 1993 and the recent Feingold amendment to the Foreign Aid Authorisation Bill, which links human rights to arms sales in East Timor, has begun to increase the diplomatic pressures on Jakarta.

The reasons for the US change of position are fairly clear. Needless to say, human rights considerations are operating as a convenient cover for the rather more concrete interests of the American ruling class. The end of the Cold War reduces Indonesia's strategic importance to the US Navy and East Timor no longer appears as another domino set to fall to the communists.

Another factor is the long-term lobbying human rights activists have carried out in the democratic Party over the last decade. Most important, however, is the Clinton administration's assessment of the situation inside Indonesia itself.

Having learned the lessons of the Marcos and Somoza regimes, the US is now planning for a post-Suharto Indonesia. The behind-the-scenes debate within the higher echelons of the Indonesian political and military world revolves around who will succeed Suharto. Within such a context East Timor becomes a lever in the debate which the US is prepared to exploit to its advantage.

Xanana Gusmão declaration

"I am Kay Rala Xanana Gusmão, leader of the Maubere resistance against the cowardly and shameful invasion of 7 December 1975 and the criminal and illegal military occupation of East Timor over the last seventeen years.

"I reject the competence of any Indonesian court to try me and particularly the jurisdiction of this court, implanted by the force of arms and crimes against my homeland East Timor... The ones who should be standing before an international court are: in the first place, the Indonesian government for crimes committed in the past seventeen years in East Timor; second, the US administration which gave the green light to the invasion (...) and has since given military aid and political support for Indonesia's genocide in East Timor; third, the governments of Europe and Australia for their complicity; and finally, the Portuguese government for its grave irresponsibility in the decolonisation of East Timor.

"A government which was established to the accompaniment of the sound of shelling by sea and land of a defenceless population, to the sound of advancing tanks and cannons, can such a government claim any juridical standing? In my opinion it has the same standing as the advance of Iraqi troops into Kuwait, the advance of Russian tanks into Kabul and the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia.

"May I recall that Saddam Hussein reminded the international community that there was already a precedent for disregarding the principles of international law, expressly mentioning East Timor. What value does Indonesia give to the resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly (of the United Nations).

"The Indonesian generals should be made to realise that they have been defeat-ed politically in East Timor. Here, today, as the commander of Falintil, the glorious forces of national liberation, I acknowledge military defeat on the ground. I am not ashamed to say so. On the contrary, I am proud of the fact that a small guerilla army was able to resist a large nation like Indonesia, a regional power which in a cowardly fashion invaded us and sought to dominate us by the law of terror and crime, by the law of violence, persecution, prison, torture and murder.

"Who is afraid of a referendum? Why are they afraid of a referendum? I am not afraid of a referendum. And if today, under international supervision, the Maubere people were to choose integration, I would make a genuine appeal to my companions in the bush to lay down their arms and I would offer my head to be decapitated in public. Whoever is afraid of a referendum is afraid of the truth.

"As a political prisoner in the hands of the occupiers of my country, it is of no consequence at all to me if they pass a death sentence here today. They have killed more than one third of the defenceless population of East Timor. They are killing my people and I am not worth more than the heroic struggle of my people who, because they are small and weak, have always been subjected to foreign domination." ★

A political failure

At the same time, such is the severity of East Timorese resistance to integration that there are clearly sectors of the Indonesian establishment that question whether East Timor is worth the resources being ploughed into it.

Such doubts can only have been reinforced by the re-emergence of popular protest in the 1990s led not only by old activists from the 1970s resistance but by youth and students — those whom Jakar-

ta spent the 1980s persuading that they are Indonesian. If ever there were a sign of political defeat, this is it. ★

Round and round

AROUND this time of year every year since 1990, the international negotiations — known as the “Uruguay Round” — of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on the liberalisation of world trade are front page news. Time and time again, the media discuss the vexing question, “will the accords be signed or won’t they?”¹

NICOLAS BENIES — Rouen, 14 October 1993

In a study released at the General Assembly of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, held at the end of September and the beginning of October, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) claims that the signing of the accords will lead to a growth in world trade. This kind of study is highly respected in certain quarters. For example, the French Finance Minister Edmond Alphandéry didn’t even feel the need to make any comments about it — greeting it, according to the French daily *Le Monde*, with a broad smile. At least, we can remark that this growth in world trade would primarily profit the big developed capitalist countries.

Last year, too, a similar catastrophe-forecasting study was produced by supposedly serious institutes infected by a liberal theory which obliges them to hide the truth about the world economy and promote free trade as the ultimate virtue.

Nevertheless, as we indicated last year, the accords were not signed and there was no catastrophe. The United States has come out of recession and will on its own rack up a 2.4% growth rate this year. Signed accords or not, the economic

situation would have remained the same.

These studies are based on one simple idea: that is, by lowering tariffs and quotas and by developing common standards all countries will experience a growth in wealth.² In other words, the common interest is equal to the sum of specific interests.

The Ricardian theory of “comparative costs” illustrates this basic liberal notion. Ricardo himself took the examples of 19th century Portugal and England: England, a major industrial power, and Portugal, an exporter of primary goods, including port. According to Ricardo (the greatest “classical” economist), if Portugal wanted to build a textile industry it would have to spend great amounts. And it would have to close its borders in order to protect itself from English competition, which would destroy its nascent industry.

On the other hand, England cannot produce port, or can only produce a bad product. Thus, the two countries should exchange their respective merchandise for the mutual good: the English can drink port and the Portuguese can inexpensively clothe themselves. Both countries gain and world trade makes it possible for both countries to develop themselves. The

result of this theory is the specialisation of each country in the areas where it has a comparative advantage, or rather where it is “competitive”.

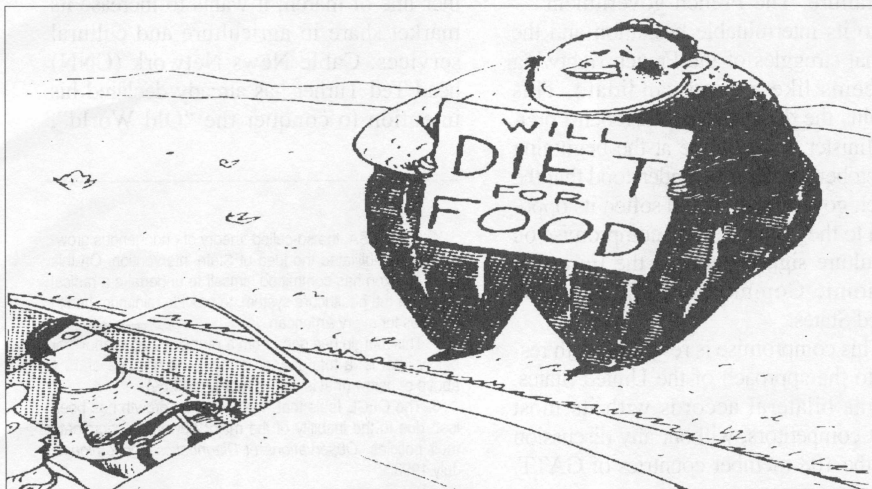
Development of under-development

The reality of the world economy does not match this vision. It does not function following this rule, but rather that of the “combined and uneven development” described by the Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky. In other words, all countries experience development but some develop more than others, and the gap that separates developed countries from the others does not cease to grow. To cite a famous title of a book by Andre Gunder Frank, it is the “development of under-development”, in particular for producers of primary goods.

Currently, the biggest defenders of liberalism are the governments of Third World countries, particularly Mexico, Brazil and Argentina, recently joined with great enthusiasm by Eastern European leaders, Boris Yeltsin above all. They believe they can develop through world trade.³

But experience proves that this is impossible. A country that specialises in the production of primary goods is held back by the game of unequal exchange. A manufactured product is sold at a relatively higher price than a primary good — thus leading to a transfer of value from the Third World to the industrialised countries, just as there was a transfer of value from the countryside to the town, to industry.

Unequal exchange is aggravated by the overproduction that has characterised the market for primary goods. The price of cocoa went up slightly at the beginning of October, but as the proverb goes, “one swallow does not make a summer.” Even the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) is going through rough



1. See our article “GATT: a battle in the trade war”, written last year around the same time which examined the negotiations up until that point. Very little has changed since then; the background remains the recession and the crisis of European construction. *International Viewpoint* No 240, 7 December 1992.

2. In France, for example, the number of Japanese cars entering the country cannot surpass 2.5% of the total number of registered cars. Standards are a kind of disguised protectionism; a State need only create different standards in order to prevent foreign products from entering its territory.

3. “Les destins du tiers-monde”, collection *Circa*, Nathan 1993.

times; the price of oil is very much on a downward swing on the so-called free market of Rotterdam and could go as low as ten dollars per barrel, while it cost \$18 per barrel during the Gulf War in January 1991. During the last OPEC meeting, a policy of quotas was discussed and Kuwait was asked to lower its production.

The African continent finds itself almost pushed off the economic map. The demand for primary goods is on a downturn. For Africa, this means a lowering of export earnings, leading to the deepening of poverty for the majority.

The traditional example bandied about before Third World countries is that of South Korea. But as Thomas Coutrot and Michel Husson have demonstrated, the industrialisation of this country was due first and foremost to the massive American aid it received to outstrip North Korea, and also to protectionism and the role played by the State which was the main force for capital accumulation and in the spreading of capitalist relations of production. This is the inverse, from start to finish, of what liberal theory preaches.

A reversal of roles

Liberal theory is losing ground in developed capitalist countries, which are looking for a new ideology adapted to the conditions of recession. State intervention is once again in vogue, for example.⁴ This turn has not yet been taken in other countries. Thus we have a reversal of roles: developed countries are the most reluctant to open their borders and want to protect their industry and agriculture; Third World and Eastern European countries are the most enthusiastic supporters of liberalisation. The ground is prepared for a round of painful disappointment, all the more so since nationalism and chauvinism are waiting in the wings of the world over.

This is actually a false debate, for the simple reason that these agreements don't have the objective of liberalising world trade, but of establishing new rules. The best proof of this is the issues that are being negotiated: agriculture, services (with a new dimension, cultural services such as television programming), industry, and the transformation of GATT into an organisation that really plays the role of settling disputes between its 108 member States.

This last point is also an area of conflict. Many developed countries do not want an additional organisation. True enough, it is difficult to see exactly what role it would play, insofar as even the already existing organisations cannot manage to define common policy. The

GATTastrophe

IF GATT negotiations are concluded, in the year 2002 there would be an additional \$213 billion in annual world trade. If the liberalisation of world trade is complete, the increase would be in the order of \$450 billion! These are the conclusions drawn by a team composed of representatives of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank.

An extraordinary prophecy? No! This is the product of a grinding bit of labour that, while requiring gifted minds, tries to make our world fit into a econometric model. It took four years of work and the use of 77,000 equations. A prodigious bit of work, yes, but prodigiously foolish.

The OECD and the World Bank dole out fortunes to "experts" in the area of forecasts. Having been wrong in their short-term analyses, the hope is that they might do better in relation to the medium and long term. In any event, this kind of enterprise reeks of a dogmatic defense of free trade and the virtue of the market. The report's conclusions are already laid out in the contract signed by the "researchers" before their work even begins.

One can imagine what could have been done in a "Third World" country with the money thrown around for these studies. But this is not the end of the story; there are the figures, and then there are the conclusions. Our researcher friends have clearly indicated that the large part of these gains will go to OECD countries while the poorest countries, especially those of sub-Saharan Africa, will have to suffer an annual loss of \$7 billion.

As *International Viewpoint* readers know all too well, a good critique of the world capitalist market, of its unequal exchange, of its hierarchy and dependence, leads to the same conclusions, without a need for 77,000 equations.

This is why more and more voices are being raised against the real reasons for the confrontation between the United States, Europe and Japan over GATT and free trade. Each bloc hopes to broaden its commercial domination, in the process strangling the most dependent economies. So we can have a good laugh, and relegate this new study to the anthology of tributes to the glory of economic liberalism. — **Claude Gabriel** ★

inability of the Group of Seven most industrialised countries (G7) — USA, Japan, Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, Canada — to propose a common revival, necessary from the point of view of the interests of the capitalist mode of production, does not bode well for other negotiation fora.

In the best of cases, the "Uruguay Round" will be put off for prolonged for another year; in the worst, it will simply be buried. The little games of the major powers — relayed by competing media — consist of finding a scapegoat for the eventual failure. The French government — due to its interminable hesitation and the internal struggles of the French rightwing — seems like a good candidate. This explains the declarations of French Foreign Minister Alain Juppé at the beginning of October. He let it be understood that the French government would soften its opposition to the "Blair House" compromise on agriculture signed between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States.

This compromise is revealing with respect to the approach of the United States. It signs bilateral accords with its most direct competitors, without any discussion with the 108 member countries of GATT.

These partial agreements are multiplying in number, for example in the field of textiles. The "multifibre agreement" — signed between the USA and the EEC to create nothing less than a free trade zone between them — is clearly directed against Southeast Asian producers. This agreement is now the object of a flurry of negotiations between the USA and their former Southeast Asian partners.

Logically, however, a "round" presupposes that all countries come to an agreement together — and do not sign separate agreements. But the USA is pursuing another line of march; it wants to increase its market share in agriculture and cultural services. Cable News Network (CNN) head Ted Turner has already declared his intention to conquer the "Old World",

4. In the USA, the so-called "theory of endogenous growth" has rehabilitated the idea of State intervention. On this basis, Clinton has committed himself to undertake a radical reform of the healthcare system, to provide minimum health services for every American.

5. This margin has gone from a range of 2.25% above or below (that is, a total margin of 4.5%) to a range of 15% above or below (that is, a total margin of 30%).

6. The OFCE feels that "the secret for growth has been lost" due to the inability of the major powers to coordinate their policies. *Observations et Diagnostics Economiques*, July 1993.

Europe. This has provoked a broad campaign from the French cultural world demanding that culture be excluded from the GATT agreement — either with no trade-off in other sectors or with negotiations on a point by point basis.

The US administration played its cards well and divided Germany and France without too much effort. The Franco-German couple is on the verge of a divorce.

Europe has been in an open crisis since August 2. On that date, the European Monetary System (EMS) was transformed, losing all its usefulness through the broadening of the margin of fluctuation between European currencies.⁵ European currencies can now fluctuate like the dollar and the yen. The European exception in the monetary sphere is finished. It also signals the end of the Maastricht Accord on European Union and the common currency.

The crisis continued on September 20. Officially, the question was whether or not the governments of the 12 countries of the EEC would ratify the Blair House compromise. The French Prime Minister Edouard Balladur had made grandiose pronouncements beforehand to the effect that he would use his right to veto — another obstacle to European unity — to protect his farmers, the government's new social base and a noisy lobby.

Unofficially, though, the French government was testing the Germans to see how far they were prepared to go along the path of European unity with France. The debate showed that the German government reasons in terms of

defending its own interests, and does not take into account the French stance. The Franco-German basis of European construction has breathed its last.

But the debate is not over. The ruling class now has to determine its strategy and decide if it still needs Europe — and, if so, what kind — to replace the United States as the world leader. Already the European Currency Unit (ECU) has disappeared even before it got a chance to live as anything more than an account book currency. This debate is going on in Germany, France and the other countries of Europe.

This crisis explains the absence of the EEC from the international negotiations. The EEC no longer speaks with one voice.

A failure foretold

The new deadline for the Uruguay Round is set for 15 December. Clearly, even if only for technical reasons, it is impossible to meet this deadline. But as usual the technical reasons are not the most important.

There are two explanations — one economic, the other political — for the probable failure of these negotiations. The current recession, the worst since the beginning of the crisis in 1974 for all the Western countries and Japan, has created a situation in which the global motto is “everyone for themselves”.

Protectionist trends have returned with a vengeance. In France, this is personified by the rightwing deputy Philippe Séguin who has called for a mix of protectionist measures, a fiscal policy of revival, a

monetary policy of lowered short-term interest rates and the depreciation of the French franc to win foreign market shares. This is a policy which favours French capitalists but which would lead to the disappearance of European construction, and pose the problem of France's participation in the international negotiations.

This debate on what economic policy to adopt in a time of recession is taking place within the ranks of all the ruling classes in the developed capitalist countries. They have yet to find an answer. Liberalism has failed; and keynesianism (the revival of economic growth through state expenditure) has been rendered ineffective by globalisation and the interdependence of economies.

The solution could reside, as proposed by the economists of the French Observatory of Economic Conjectures (OFCE — an economic thinktank linked of the French State), in a series of “Marshall Plans” for the countries of the Third World and Eastern Europe. In this scheme, the G7 countries would transfer wealth to these countries, leading to an increase in global demand, a way-out of the crisis, and the revival of durable growth.⁶

This proposal comes up against two obstacles. First, the amounts put forward would have nothing to do with the first Marshall Plan of 1948, the American donations for European construction. Second, the common enemy of all the capitalist countries, the USSR, has vanished from the scene; this incentive for the defense of common capitalist interests no longer exists. As a result, the dominant feature of the period is the various differences between capitalists, the exacerbation of international competition.

The struggle for a new division of the world, based on the relative decline of American imperialism, is now underway. Thanks to unification and the building of its zone of influence in Eastern Europe, Germany, like Japan, is becoming one of the big political and economic powers and wants to take its place as a world leader. For this, it no longer needs France's support; like Japan, it is a candidate for the UN Security Council. If this bid is successful, it would signal the end of the political period opened up at the end of the Second World War; the vanquished would have become major political powers.

The failure of the Uruguay Round, like the G7's failure to define a common policy of economic revival, demonstrates the deep crisis of imperialism. A new dominant economic model has yet to see the light of day. ★



SRI LANKA

A protest campaign has been launched against the construction of a Voice of America (VOA) shortwave relay station near the village of Iranawila, on the west coast of Sri Lanka. The Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP, Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International) is actively involved.

The \$35 million project would give the VOA a reach of between 1,600 and 2,400 kilometres, extending from East Africa across to Cambodia and Indonesia. Plans include the construction of three 500 kilowatt transmitters and curtain antenna, with the option of going in for a fourth. As part of the government agreement with the VOA, 160 hectares of coastal land have been leased to the VOA for a 20-year period.

When construction work began last year, the local population was denied access to its traditional fishing areas. As a result, 300 families have found themselves cut off from their source of livelihood. 2000 local Catholics were also prevented from carrying out their weekly "Way of the Cross" procession. There are also fears regarding the possible effects of radiation from the installation and possible military and intelligence uses.

The multi-faith people's protest, organised in the Iranawila People's Solidarity Forum, has been spearheaded by radical clergy from the Catholic Church with support from Buddhist, Muslim and Hindu clergy. Several thousand protesters joined in a march on September 18.

Faced with police threats to fire on the march, the day culminated in a mass rally declaring the beginning of "a spiritual journey to root out the VOA menace". In the past, mass mobilisation have defeated plans to erect a huge tourist complex in the area.

Ongoing protest activities have included pickets in front of the US embassy in Colombo. For further information and to send letters of support, write Iranawila People's Solidarity Forum, c/o SEDEC, Kynsy Road, Colombo-7 Sri Lanka. ★

CUBA

ON 1 to 3 October, over 280 labour activists from across Canada and the United States gathered in Toronto, Canada for an historic conference with union leaders from Cuba. Nearly half of the participants came from the US,



where there is no opportunity to meet with Cuban unionists due to travel restrictions imposed by their government.

The conference was sponsored by Worker to Worker Canada-Cuba Labour Solidarity Committee and the US-Cuba Labour Exchange. It was endorsed by an impressive list of unions and labour councils from the Toronto region as well as the New York City local of the Hospital and Health Care Workers union.

Material aid

The meeting endorsed ongoing projects of material aid to Cuba, such as the Pastors for Peace Friendship Caravan, which recently challenged restrictive US government border crossing policies and filled scores of trucks in both the US and Canada with aid destined for Cuba.

In the final plenary session, participants voted unanimously to demand that Washington lift its blockade and remove all bans against trade and commerce with, or travel to Cuba. — **Barry Weisleder** ★

BRITAIN

PATRICK Sikorski, a long-standing Fourth Internationalist and the elected secretary of the rail union's (RMT) London Transport District Council (LTDC), was dismissed from his job as a guard on the London Underground railway following a "verbal altercation" with a local manager.

Sikorski had been carrying out his union duties in defence of fellow guard Ray Stelzner. Stelzner had been dismissed for allegedly causing criminal damage by removing security tags from train seats.

Both men have won full reinstatement. This of course is good news in itself but as the "victory" leaflet from the RMT's LTDC emphasises, "(t)he reinstatements were won through strike action, determined picketing and widespread campaigning."

Convinced that a serious miscarriage of justice had occlude members called on the union for action. The RMT executive responded by ordering a strike ballot of its Central line traincrew.

Sikorski's case was placed before the union lawyers who went to an Industrial Tribunal on the grounds that he had been unfairly dismissed for trade union activities. The tribunal took just minutes to decide in Sikorski's favour. Armed with this decision, a union officer met with management. An offer was made to give Stelzner a job on a lower grade and Sikorski a job on another line. Both men would remain "guilty". Both refused this poisoned chalice.

Following a four to one ballot result a marvellously supported one day strike took place. The RMT decided to spread the strikes and ballot all London Underground members.

In the meantime concern over the sacked guards was growing. A defence campaign quickly found broad support in the labour movement nationally.

The only open support the management enjoyed was from the dustbin grubbers of the rightwing, mass-circulation London Evening Standard who vilified Sikorski in particular. Management were forced into an almost total climb-down. Following final arbitration both men were reinstated back at their East London depot with Stelzner completely cleared of the original charges against him. Sikorski has, unfortunately, had to accept five days suspension. But he is back as a guard and as a union representative — a situation that Underground management are clearly unhappy with given that he has, after many years on the job, established himself as a prominent and respected militant.

As the union's "victory" leaflet concludes: "These people had nothing material to gain. They fought for their rights against management's wrongs. They have reminded us all of the importance of strong, free, independent trade unionism capable of defending rights at the workplace." ★