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South Africa :

A new phase begins

Debt :

Solidarity between peoples

Dossier:

Mexico : The new Zapatistas



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WE have received a number of letters from North American subscribers, expressing displeasure at the long time it takes IV to arrive from Paris. After investigation, it seems that we have been the unwitting victims of public sector "rationalisation" of one sort or another! Please don't hesitate to write if there are any other such problems. — The Editors ★

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Chaos

WHAT is the link between the major events of the last few months, such as the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement by the US House of Representatives, the results of the Russian elections, the conclusion of a deal between the European Community and the United States of America on the Uruguay Round of the GATT negotiations, the devaluation of the CFA franc, and the insurrection of indigenous peoples in the state of Chiapas, Mexico?

SALAH JABER — 26 January 1994

Would it be a new by-product of Chaos Theory in its most vulgar form which postulated a relationship between the fluttering of butterfly wings in one part of the planet and an atmospheric disturbance in another?

But would the metaphor not recall the classic image of a global socio-economic system conceived as a dynamic system in which price changes on the London and New York stock markets have direct repercussions for the daily life of peasants in this or that remote region of the Third World?

Link

In fact, the direct link between different socio-economic events and their political consequences on a world level is much easier to establish than the relationship between microscopic phenomena in the field of meteorology. There is, indeed, nothing mysterious about the common denominator of the events listed above. Those who are responsible for them are not indiscernible.

The common denominator has a name, and it is "free trade". Its managers are those who make the most from it — the rich industrialised countries, or, to be more precise, the rich in these countries and their partners in the dependent countries. And the exasperated reactions of the poor — such as those in Chiapas, or those who express their desperation through the ballot box — only confirm the tendency towards disorder and chaos embedded in this "dynamic system" which is the globalised capitalist economy.

Those who claim to be the system's expert managers regularly show them-

selves to be nothing more than sorcerers' apprentices. They only manage to increase the tendency towards pauperisation (not only relatively but absolutely), which is manifesting itself in a spectacular and frightening way on a planetary level.

Indeed, ever since the global economy entered into its long depressive wave twenty years ago, there has been an inexorable growth in the proportion of the wretched of the earth. In a period of near-zero (if not negative) growth, the "underclass" no longer have the right to even the crumbs which were once their means of survival. The "icy waters of selfishness", as the *Communist Manifesto* described it, lead to the rich letting the poor die of hunger in increasing numbers, or else sinking into a barbarism which already gives this "fin de siècle" an anguished character.

"Free trade"

The fact that the post-Stalinist States have converted to the religion of "free trade" has considerably accelerated the above tendency. In the ex-USSR and even in China, the "shock therapies" of economic liberalisation have produced social inequalities which, in many respects, are worse than those of many dependent countries.

Moreover, global competition between the two superpowers undeniably benefitted the underdeveloped countries, or at least their leaders. They were courted, and received favours as an incentive to remain firmly in one of the two blocs, or even to maintain a friendly neutrality. The smallest of these countries acquired strategic importance in a global confrontation which neither bloc could win.

Now, however, while the available credit from the wealthy countries — lac-

king both the cash and the will — has decreased, the debacle of the Stalinist state system and its "Third Worldisation" (Russia included) have considerably increased the number of credit-seekers.

The barons of the Group of 5 (USA, Japan, Germany, France and Britain) no longer fear the "Communist peril", and thus are giving fewer and fewer "gifts" to countries in difficulty. The conditions imposed on them when they do so are increasingly draconian; the aid is increasingly meagre; and the recipients are subjected to increasingly rigorous selection criteria.

Low-income countries, as defined by the World Bank, which have no immediate political or military strategic interest, are, quite simply, abandoned. It is now, more than ever since the Russian revolution, purely economic calculation which determines the orientation of the imperialist powers' foreign economic policy and loans are only given to rich countries, or those which are potentially so.

Brutality

The five events mentioned above fit in perfectly with the new set of programmes developed in institutions like the Group of 7, the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, which have imposed "structural adjustment" on poor countries over the last few years with unprecedented brutality (See pages 17-23). The devastating effects of NAFTA on the poorest layers of Mexican society, and particularly the rural population, were already felt even before it took effect. The rebels of Chiapas provided their own welcome to NAFTA's inauguration on 1 January (See pages 4-12).

The Europe-America deal on GATT was made openly to the detriment of the interests of the poorest and most populated countries. India is one of the main victims. And France abandoned outright its misery-ridden African protectorates by imposing a sharp drop in their purchasing power, and by firmly ordering them to submit to the dictates of the IMF and World Bank.

Isn't the "New World Order" just wonderful? ★

The new Zapatistas

DOSSIER: Mexico

THE Zapatista National Liberation Army demands "work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace" for the people. This is a struggle which will not cease until they enter the Mexican capital. Our correspondent reports.

SERGIO RODRIGUEZ LASCANO — Mexico City, 13 January 1994

Introduction

ON 1 January the indigenous people and peasants of the state of Chiapas in Mexico rose in armed struggle, organised by the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). Their decision surprised the whole world and clearly showed the poverty and degradation in which live thousands of Mexicans.

On the same date the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed by the United States, Canadian and Mexican governments, formally came into force, an agreement which the Mexican government has tried to present as part of the strategy which will lead the country towards the "First World".

Why did the uprising take place? What does the EZLN represent? What situation will now open up in Mexico? How much solidarity is there internationally?

The dossier which we publish this month tries to answer these and other questions. The supposed economic successes of the Mexican government are now in question. But the popular uprising of the indigenous Chiapanecos has also raised the question of the relationship between the Mexican left and the indigenous people; and in particular the whole of the Latin American left must now reconsider a subject which had appeared closed: the validity or otherwise of armed struggle.

But one thing is certain. Latin America continues to be caught up in a process of political and social instability, a situation which will not change until neo-liberal policies are abandoned and the democratic longings of the people are answered.

Alfonso Moro ★

SINCE the uprising began there has been no cessation to the armed confrontations. After the initial surprise, the response of the Mexican government was to attack indiscriminately the indigenous areas of Chiapas, including by air bombardment. The government response to the situation in Chiapas has awoken throughout the country the indignation of a broad section of society, who are demanding a political, not military, resolution to the conflict. The general repudiation of the government's action, the crisis in its Cabinet, the fall in the stock market and the questioning of the recent nomination of Luis Colosio as the government candidate for the Presidential succession, indicate that this year could become the one when the Salinista project collapses.

As the ruling class were raising glasses of champagne to toast our entry into the first world (on 1 January the North American Free Trade Agreement — NAFTA — signed by the United States of America, Canada and Mexico formally came into force), and as the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) felt that it had succeeded in nominating its Presidential candidate without large internal ruptures,¹ as the fifteen richest families in the country were celebrating the capacity of the State mechanisms of control to dominate the "awkward ones" (as Emilio Azcarraga, one of the richest men in the world, and the Czar of Mexican television, likes to call the poor), there was the uprising of the Chiapanecos Indians, who chose this date to show that tradition has not been destroyed by the modernity which has been imposed from above. Suddenly, five-hundred years of oppression and domination have fallen. Neither the left nor the democratic sectors nor the government nor the parties of the right had the least idea that such a thing was going to happen. Of course we knew of the resentment which was gathering under the sur-

face, but did not think it would express itself in this way.

Immediately, and without the government being able to do anything about it, the uprising stirred general support. Almost unanimously, Mexican intellectuals (who have a great deal of weight nationally) openly showed their support for the movement. Although many of them have supported the government in the past, they have demonstrated for an end to the bombardments and proposed a political solution which excludes violence and instead deals with Mexican social problems.

Much of this position results from the historic debt owed to the Indians who survive in Mexico. In Chiapas, as in the states of Guerrero, Oaxaca, Tlaxoala, Tabasco, Hidalgo and Michoacán, where live the majority of the 13 million indigenous Mexicans (the largest number of Indians in Latin America), the living conditions are appalling. This indigenous uprising has put us face to face with harsh reality. Tradition took vengeance against a modernity which is exclusive, marginalising, racist, classist and anti-democratic. Suddenly the rebellions of Yanga in Veracruz, of Jacinto Canek in Yucatán, of Cajeme (José María Leyva) in Sonora, and of course Emilio Zapata in the whole south, took life and spread across all Mexico, as if they were the Angel of History, seeking, as Walter Benjamin said, "to wake the dead and put together the pieces."

There has been much speculation in Mexico on the origin of the EZLN. In the final analysis the writer José Emilio Pacheco is right when he says "It was known at least since May that something terrible was going to happen but nobody expected a tragedy of these dimensions. In Chiapas all the parties failed in not finding non-violent means of struggle for social justice. Demands were answered by repression and the imprisonment of monolingual indigenous people who could not defend themselves."

1. Next August there will be Presidential and parliamentary elections in Mexico. Last December the PRI (the party in power for more than seventy years) nominated Luis Colosio Murrieta as its Presidential candidate after the ceremony known as "the process" in which the current President decides who will be the next PRI candidate for the Presidency.

In fact, the forces of the left have been absorbed by both visions of electoral political change and the awesome power for corruption of the Mexican regime.

In the first case, they correctly analysed the weakness of the political expression of the different social sectors, concluding that they should take advantage of the actual electoral situation. This would enable social sectors to express themselves and the PRI would be censured through the ballot box for the deterioration in living conditions. The analysis was not wholly incorrect; the problem was that tasks and activity were too restricted to electoral aspects.

In the second case the problem was more serious. The deep treachery shown by the main peasants' leaders in supporting the Salinista reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican constitution, with the result that their land was put on the market, not their produce,² meant that there was no huge response from the peasantry. Today, in Chiapas, the EZLN has retaken up the struggle against the modifications to the Article: in the first issue of its newspaper *The Mexican Awakener*,³ the EZLN says of its plan for a Revolutionary Land Law: "The struggle of the poor peasants in Mexico continues to reclaim the earth for those who work it. Following Emiliano Zapata, and against the reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, the EZLN has retaken up the just struggle of the Mexican peasants for land and liberty." The peasants' organisations in the Permanent Land Council (CAP), which from the start of the land counter-reforms have been the principal support of Salinista policy, have condemned the EZLN and declared their support for the State.⁴

Only two sides

In their composition, their actions, and their plans, the EZLN has shown that there are only two sides; those who support the oligarchy which today governs Mexico and those who are on the side of the indigenous Chiapaneco people.

In its practice, the EZLN has begun its public actions where others have finished. The rebellion began with the taking of four major towns in the region of Altos de Chiapas: the tourist San Cristóbal de las Casas, Ocosingo, Las Margaritas and Altamirano. The taking of towns with hundreds of people would normally follow on from previous experiences and public actions. So in this

sense at least it is not a classic guerilla force.

In the beginning the Mexican government tried to play down the significance of the taking of the towns, stating that there was calm in the other one-hundred and twelve which make up the state of Chiapas. However, a large part of the population is concentrated (or was, until the exodus provoked by the bombardments) in three of the towns occupied by the EZLN. San Cristóbal, Ocosingo and Las Margaritas are towns with more than 100 thousand inhabitants, which means that they have a significant police presence — not to mention the military presence in Las Margaritas, which borders Guatemala.

"On 1 January 1994 we woke to the other Mexico. On the day when we were going to celebrate our entry into the first world, we went back a century to find ourselves again in a rebellion like that led by Tomochic. We wanted to be North Americans and instead were confronted with our Central American destiny. The blood spilled calls for us to put an end to the killing. There can be no end to the violence of the rebels without an end to that of the oppressors."

José Emilio Pacheco, La Jornada, 5 January 1994.

To understand the character of the EZLN actions we should simply think of the efficiency required to transport tens of persons from one town to another. It is said that around eight-hundred guerillas took part in the taking of San Cristóbal, and that the majority were not from that town. This means that we are facing a revolutionary organisation which has already organised thousands of indigenous peasants into a revolutionary army. This also explains how nearly every day from the beginning of the conflict the Zapatistas have been able to launch attacks against the military headquarters of Rancho Nuevo, twelve kilometres from San Cristóbal.⁵ The motive is simple: the EZLN knows that the only way of striking at the morale of the army is to be in direct combat, so that the soldiers realise they could die. They also wish the areas of confrontation to be as remote as possible from populated areas and, of course, achieve maximum publicity. In the fourth attack they left the military headquarters without electricity.

From the beginning the EZLN formulated a strategic plan, requiring the Mexican government to recognise it as a military force⁶ and clearly defining its objectives. The Zapatista commander Marcos (the only visible spokesperson

of the EZLN at this stage, and, who, in his own words, led the taking of San Cristóbal) told the press: "The reforms and counter-reforms which the PRI have carried out in complicity with the National Action Party (PAN)⁷ have disregarded the opposition political parties and even more so other civic movements. There is no freedom and no democracy. We are not seeking to become the government, but for there to be a transitional government which is more balanced politically and which carries out clean elections."

Another aspect which has attracted attention has been the flexibility which the force has shown in its approach to the struggle. On the ideological plane

2. See the author's article, 'The Salinista land counter-reform', in our sister journal, *Inprecor Para América Latina*, no. 19, February 1992.

3. A name surely inspired by *The American Awakener*, the first rebel newspaper in the War of Independence, founded in the city of Guadalajara, which published seven issues between 20 December 1810 and 17 January 1811. The first issue of *The Mexican Awakener* has circulated mostly in the state of Chiapas, and besides the 'Declaration of the Selva Lacandona' (which declared war on the Mexican government) also contained a series of laws which will govern the territories liberated by the EZLN, including on Urban Reform, Labour, Land, Industry and Commerce, Justice, Rights and Obligations of Peoples in Struggle, War Tax, Women, and the Rights and Obligations of the Armed Revolutionary Forces.

4. CAP is comprised of twelve peasant organisations, ranging from the National Peasants' Organisation (CNC), linked to the PRI, to others which originated from work among the peasants by the left, such as the General Popular Peasant Workers' Union (UGOCP). In contrast to the CAP, the organisations which have not pledged themselves to the Salinista land counter-reforms and which are in the Council of Land Organisations (COA) have demanded the recognition of the EZLN for the establishment of a dialogue to resolve the conflict and respond to the demands of peasants and indigenous peoples in the region.

5. Some newspapers stated that it had been confirmed that in the first hours of the conflict EZLN troops entered the Rancho Nuevo headquarters and carried off hundreds of arms.

6. It should not be forgotten that at the beginning of the 1980s the Mexican and French governments recognised the just reasons for the rebellion of the Salvadorean FMLN and treated it as a military force.

7. The rightwing National Action Party (PAN) is traditionally situated in opposition to the PRI, although throughout the six year Presidential term of Salinas de Gortari they have at various times supported the advance of Salinista policy. Their agreements with the government have given the PAN electoral triumphs in different states and PANista members govern the states of Chihuahua and Guanajuato.

they of course define themselves as struggling for socialism, but at the same time state: "The EZLN does not have a tightly defined ideology in the Communist or Marxist-Leninist sense. Rather, there is common agreement on the great national problems, which always centre on the lack of freedom and democracy."⁸ In the editorial of the first issue of its newspaper the EZLN states: "Mexicans, workers, peasants, students, honest professional people, Mexican-Americans, progressives from other countries, we have begun the struggle necessary to achieve the demands which have not been satisfied by the Mexican State: work, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, democracy, freedom, justice and peace."

"Enough!"

The flexibility of the EZLN also shows in its reclaiming of the tradition of national popular revolt: "We say: Enough! We are the heirs to the true makers of our nation. We the dispossessed are millions in number. We call on all our brothers and sisters to respond to our call as the one way not to die of hunger before the insatiable ambition of a dictatorship more than seventy years old, led by a coterie of villains representing the most conservative and traitorous groups. They are the same people who opposed Hidalgo and Morelos, betrayed Vicente Guerrero, who sold half our land to foreign invaders, brought a European prince to govern us, formed the Porfirista dictatorship, opposed the sharing of oil wealth, massacred the railway workers in 1958 and the students in 1968, and who today leave us nothing, absolutely nothing. As our last hope we return to Article 39 of our Constitution which states exactly that: 'National sovereignty lies essentially and originally with the people. All public power emanates from the people and exists for their benefit. The people have, at all times, the inalienable right to alter or modify the form of their government.'⁹

The EZLN differs from other armed movements, in particular the Peruvian, in the relationship it proposes between the popular movement and other political organisations: "The legal struggle is too limited and so there must be other forms of struggle. The revolution is not limited to armed struggle; there are groups, organisations, and independent parties. The war is a political problem and an extreme method. We propose a broad policy of alliances."¹⁰ In another

declaration it stated: "With a base in this (a transitional government which guarantees free elections with equality between the different parties) other demands can be negotiated: bread, housing, health, education, land, justice — many problems which are most serious amongst the indigenous peoples. But above the

demands of freedom and democracy we are calling to all social sectors of the Mexican Republic to take part, not necessarily with arms but with the means each has at its disposal."¹¹

In short, the EZLN has launched a challenge to the Mexican State which has stirred up great popular support throughout the country. The reason for this is clear. For a large part of the population the EZLN is not a guerilla organisation but rather a demonstration of dignity against a section of the ruling class which has sold the national wealth.

For this reason, and especially amongst the young, there is clear sympathy for the EZLN, signs of this appearing immediately in the large cities. The rallies against the bombardments and for a unilateral truce on the part of the Mexican army have turned into real acts of support for the EZLN. We are seeing one of the worst crises in the PRI system of domination.

The way in which Salinas de Gortari was able to overcome the 1988 crisis and present himself as a great transformer made an impression on both Mexicans and foreigners. He not only solved (although but momentarily) the most difficult aspects of the economic crisis but also carried out a series of modifications to the relationship between the State and the people, bourgeoisie and economy. In a few areas, the so-called "reform of the State" seemed to be successful. In particular an alliance was established with the PAN with the aim of achieving a consensus in parliament of eighty percent in favour of the economic and social policy he was promoting. The achievement of NAFTA at the end of 1993 appeared to confirm his success and many Mexicans prepared themselves for entry into the first world. All

that was missing, said the most critical Salinistas, was a little more democracy.¹²

Then the Chiapeneco uprising occurred and threw a large part of the project into crisis. The first great Cabinet crisis occurred with the "resignation" of the Minister of the Interior, Patrocinio González Garrido, by coincidence governor of Chiapas state.¹³

This provoked the worst fall in the stock market in the last four years, but also a crisis of the Salinista project, due to the popular support for the Zapatistas.

From the outset the government tried to crush the movement by strictly military means, with the result that the most negative aspects of the national repressive forces came into view. The bombardments of the Lacandona Selva and the Altos de Chiapas have only caused opposition. Once the federal army stated that it would take at least six months to normalise the situation in the region, the Presidential strategists began to realise that, for the first time since the 1910-17 Mexican revolution, the 1994 elections would take place in the middle of a war.

In this sense, in 1994 the government will confront too many connected problems:

a) The awakening of a large part of the world to the real situation in Mexico and, with the creation of a climate of instability, no injection of the foreign capital which it was hoping to attract following NAFTA;

b) As a result of the recession in 1993 and the crisis in investment of fresh capital, the difficulty of carrying out social policies which win popular sympathy without putting at risk a large part of its project;

8. Declarations by Commandant Marcos, reproduced by the journal *Proceso*, no. 897, 10 January 1994.

9. "Declaration of Selva Lacandona".

10. Declaration by Commandant Marcos, *Proceso*.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Octavio Paz, of the group around the magazine *Vuelta*, and Héctor Aguilar Camín, of the group around the magazine *Nexos*, which both categorise "stale Marxists", "shipwreck survivors" and "clapped-out liberation theologians" as manipulators of indigenous peoples.

13. On "resigning" González Garrido broke the unwritten rules of those who leave the Cabinet when he said "In the morning the President agreed (author's emphasis) my resignation", indicating that his resignation was not voluntary.

c) The lack of charisma of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the Presidential candidate selected by Salinas after NAFTA was approved, and a possible worsening of the internal differences in the PRI now that Manuel Camacho Solís has become Commissioner for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas. Although unsuccessful, the return of Camacho Solís to the political scene, with a task of this relevance and with the sympathy of certain sectors, will mean a heavy burden for Colosio throughout the electoral campaign;

d) The uselessness of the PAN as a support for the government faced with events of this kind. For example their Presidential candidate, Diego Fernández de Caballos, has declared that the army should suffocate the movement "as rapidly as possible";

e) The possibility that the other important Presidential candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas,¹⁴ will identify himself with the popular struggle. After a rather equivocal first declaration,¹⁵ he has taken up a correct position which has won him much support, proposing a unilateral truce on the part of the army, treating the EZLN as a respectable political force, recognising the indigenous character of the rebellion and refusing to sign a supposedly neutral declaration proposed by the PRI Presidential candidate, in contrast to his parliamentary fraction, which again has shown itself more a part of the State apparatus than a representative of the popular classes;

f) The possibility of the development of a great social movement which will stretch beyond Chiapas. The EZLN have achieved something fundamental: they have opened up a breach in which diverse but allied social movements can express themselves. The limit on annual wage rises of five percent, the violated trade union rights, the problem of guaranteed prices in the country or unsold produce or the right to land could re-emerge as major issues as the movement generates sympathy in the unions, tenant farmer organisations, and youth, not to mention the peasants.

What has happened in Chiapas will determine what will happen in the next few months throughout the country, and in particular it will determine the electoral process. The events in Chiapas cannot be subordinated to the electoral process. On the contrary, they will determine the electoral campaigns. If there is no mobilisation, through fear of being linked to the rebellion or armed struggle, if we accept the blackmail of the State when it proposes supposedly neutral

negotiated settlements (as if neutrality was possible in a conflict between oppressors and oppressed), then not only will the Chiapas movement be easily beaten but the whole popular democratic movement will have lost a golden opportunity.

The best image of what is happening in the country was given by those indigenous Chiapanecos who, in spite of having dynamite, decided to destroy the town halls with spades and pickaxes, symbolising how the poor think of the State, its institutions and its authorities. It represents one of the finest proletarian acts in our history, only comparable with that of the Zapatistas at the beginning of the century when they arrived at Mexico City and breakfasted at the "Sanborns de los Azulejos" Restaurant,¹⁶ the centre of the Porfirist aristocracy. Both actions reflect the almost anarchist character of many of the actions of the Mexican people. The democratic and left forces must decide

whether they place themselves on the side of this radical spirit, which reflects our best traditions, or on the side of the failing institutions of a dictatorship in search of modernisation. ★

14. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, robbed of his electoral triumph in 1988 by the government's most scandalous electoral fraud in this country's modern political life. He is now supported in his Presidential candidacy by a pluralist alliance of principally left and centrist organisations which are participating in the elections through an electoral register sponsored by the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD).

15. On the first day of the conflict Cárdenas declared: "Violence from wherever it comes only leads to the spilling of blood, destruction and major social setbacks" adding "However imperfect and discredited the Mexican electoral process, only through civil action and active participation in the elections will the energy and courage of this society lead to the establishment of a democratic regime with full civil rights."

16. On 6 December 1914 the troops of the Northern Division, led by Francisco Villa, and those of the Southern Army, led by Emiliano Zapata, arrived in Mexico City. After ranging the streets of the City, the two rebel armies concluded their military parade in the square opposite the National Palace. On this date the photographer Casasola took for history the images of the indigenous Zapatistas, who with their coarse sandals and large sombreros ate in the luxurious Los Azulejos Restaurant, having displaced from their seats the rich young aristocrats in bowler hats and fine clothes.

Revolutionary Law on Women

IN its struggle for the liberation of our people, the EZLN will include women in the revolutionary struggle without discrimination as to race, belief, colour or political affiliation, so long as they take up the demands of the exploited and promise to abide by the laws and regulations of the revolution. Further, taking account of the situation of working women in Mexico, their just demands for equality and justice have been incorporated in the following Revolutionary Law for Women.

1. All women, of whatever race, belief, colour or political affiliation have the right to participate in the revolutionary struggle according to their willingness and capability.
2. Women have the right to work and receive an honest wage.
3. Women have the right to decide the number of children they will have and care for.
4. Women have the right to participate in community affairs and hold positions if elected freely and democratically.
5. Women and children have the right to first priority in health care and access to food.
6. Women have the right to education.
7. Women have the right to choose their partner and not be forced into marriage.
8. No woman should be hit or maltreated physically, whether by family members or strangers. Attempted rape or rape will be severely punished.
9. Women can occupy leadership positions in the organisation and hold military grades in the revolutionary armed forces.
10. Women will have all the rights and obligations conferred by the revolutionary laws and regulations.

★



A break with Salinista aggression

THE situation which began in Mexico on 1 January changes day by day. On 12 January a huge march for peace, of more than 100 thousand people, gathered in the main square of Mexico City, in protest at the massacre which had unfolded in Chiapas, against the indigenous civil population as well as the EZLN combatants. Several hours before on that same day Carlos Salinas de Gortari had announced a cease-fire. For him things had changed radically within a few days.

With all the arrogance which characterises it, on 5 January the federal government had set out its conditions for a dialogue with the rebels: cessation of hostilities, surrender of arms, release of hostages and those kidnapped, and identification of the spokespeople and leaders of the EZLN. In other words, and as all understood, the government was seeking the unconditional surrender of the rebels before it would negotiate. But what reason would there then be to negotiate?

At the same time bombardments were beginning over a number of indigenous regions of Altos de Chiapas. A day later, when speaking to the nation, Salinas described the Zapatistas as "professionals of violence" who "can continue to carry out isolated acts of violence but will fail."

Some days later this confidence came to an end. Different sectors of Mexican society and international public opinion bitterly questioned the government's military approach and demanded an end to the bombardments and an attempt at serious dialogue. Then, on 10 January, the Presidential Cabinet fell into crisis and it was the military approach taken by the government which began to fail. Salinas dismissed his Minister of the Interior, Patrocinio González Garrido — coincidentally, Governor of the state of Chiapas — and named in his place the ex-university Rector and ex-President of the National Commission on Human Rights, Jorge Carpizo. But more relevant was his nomination that day of Manuel Camacho Solís (scarcely a few weeks previously loser of the PRI Presidential candidacy to Colosio Murrieta) as Commissioner for Peace and Reconciliation in Chiapas. The nomination has objectively weakened the PRI electoral campaign and many believe that Colosio may be removed by the official party, in the face of the political weight which Camacho Solís is taking on.

Also on 10 January, the EZLN gave its own conditions for a dialogue: recognition of the organisation as a military force, bilateral cease-fire, retreat of the federal troops to their headquarters, a cessation to their bombardments and formation of a national commission of mediation.

On 12 January the government began to carry out part of these conditions. Although there was not a total cease-fire on the part of the federal army, the bombardments stopped and there was a partial withdrawal of soldiers. However, there is no guarantee that the Mexican government will not, after all, pursue to the end a military offensive in the region. On the other hand, from calling the EZLN "transgressors" and "aggressors" the government has tacitly recognised it as a force with which it must open a dialogue if there is to be peace. This recognition, if not by the President nor the Minister of the Interior, has been more than emphatic on the part of the governmental Commission for Peace in Chiapas.

For the present, civil society and the armed indigenous people have halted the dominance and aggression of the government and forced it to recognise that behind the decision of the EZLN to take up arms there are no "professionals of violence" or "transgressors of the law", only the impoverished and forgotten of Mexico.

But we cannot lower our guard — what the Zapatistas are demanding, and with them millions of Mexicans — is not only a seat at the negotiating table. Work, housing, land, food, health, education, independence, liberty, democracy, justice and peace for all Mexicans demand that we must all be Indians and Zapatistas now. ★

Salinista celebrations dashed

WITH the ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement in December of last year, the Salinista government was preparing to celebrate its entry to the "First World". The new Zapatistas have smashed the illusion.

ALFONSO MORO — 11 January 1994

THE agreement was only ratified after the Mexican government made a number of last minute concessions and after the Clinton government clumsily bought votes of support from a number of American elected representatives.

Leaving aside references to the date chosen for the insurrection — for example, on 1 January 1959, the rebel army led by Fidel Castro entered the city of Havana, Cuba — the armed uprising showed the whole world the impoverishment to which millions of Mexicans have been subjected for years. A political and social expression of growing discontent, the indigenous revolt has put the Mexican regime up against the wall. The semi-dictatorial regime has always been characterised by the scanty attention it has paid to the democratic demands of the population; and over the last ten years it has chosen to take the economy down the path of the most extreme forms of neo-liberalism.

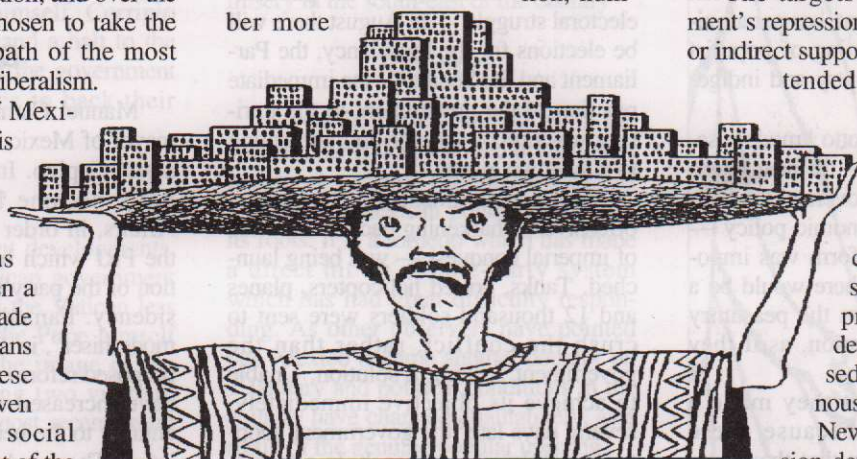
Chiapas is one of Mexico's poorest states. It is twice the size of Belgium, and is populated by a large proportion of indigenous peoples who have seen a number of promises made but not kept by politicians of all ideologies. These promises have now given way to plunder and social exploitation akin to that of the eighteenth century.

It is a region where petty tyrants and large landowners — both Mexican and foreign — conspire with local and federal authorities from the governing PRI party to impose their "law". This is the "law" of the plunder of land, the murder of peasants, electoral fraud, and the use of natural resources from which the indigenous peoples have never benefited.

Chiapas has one-hundred and eleven municipalities, ninety-four of which were defined as having a "high" or "very high" level of poverty, in a 1990 study by the National Population Council (CONAPO). Illiteracy affects 30% of the population aged over fifteen, more than triple the national average. In the municipalities of Altamirano, Ocosingo and Margaritas — where there were major confrontations between the army and the EZLN — 80% of families earn less than \$US25 per month. In spite of the fact that the state contains 30% of the country's fresh water supplies, only 57% of inhabitants have running water, and the majority of these are centred in the tourist zones or cities.

Forgotten

The indigenous peoples, at 12 million, number more



than 15% of the population and they constitute a significant sector of those forgotten in the Mexican political system. They have said "Enough is enough!" in a radical way, advancing a number of demands which strike at the heart of the political structure which has been in place since 1929 — the year in which the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) predecessor, the National Revolutionary Party, was founded.

"Work, land, housing, food, health care, independence, democracy, justice and peace" are demands with which the majority of the Mexican population can easily identify, even if they have not chosen the path of the EZLN.

The social conflicts in Chiapas are not new. Among the earliest uprisings of indigenous people can be cited the events of 1712-13, when 32 communities of the Tzotziles rebelled against colonial domination. Later, in 1869-70, the Chamulas Indians led another uprising in defence of their lands and communities.

In the "modern era", we need go back only so far as the beginning of the 1980s, when social pressures on land ownership increased, after thousands of Guatemalan refugees crossed the border fleeing repression and Guatemalan government-instigated murder. In 1982, General Absalon Castellanos, a sinister personality and at the time of writing an EZLN hostage, became the state Governor. In 1988, he was replaced by Patrocinio González Garrido — until then the Minister of the Interior — who followed in his footsteps and used repression in reply to the demands of the population.

The targets of the local government's repression, usually with the open or indirect support of federal authorities, tended to be the indigenous peoples, peasants, exiled Central American teachers, opposition political parties, and the Church itself — which for several years has held a progressive position in defence of the dispossessed, in particular indigenous peoples.

New sources of social tension developed in early 1993.

In May a number of indigenous people fell victim to persecution, detention and torture from elements within the Mexican army after being accused of killing two officers. The government resorted once again to the use of force to impose its "solution" to the desperate protests of the indigenous peoples and also of the Bishop of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Samuel Ruiz. Ruiz is hated by the region's wealthy citizenry and political

leaders for his principles and the Pope, John Paul II, himself tried to have him removed through a despicable manoeuvre involving the Minister of the Interior and the Vatican's representative in Mexico.

To this should be added the consequences of the changes made by the Salinista government to Article 27 of the Constitution, which formalised the privatisation of the communal lands known as "ejidos". This has left millions of peasants more vulnerable than ever, as many will be forced to sell their lands.

The above changes have to be taken into account in order to fully understand the events in Chiapas. Historically, Mexican agriculture has been divided in to two clearly distinct types. Firstly, there are the large properties owned by the "latifundistas" (large estate owners). These receive full financial backing from the government, are worked with modern technology, and their produce is largely destined for foreign markets. The coffee and banana plantations and the harvesting of precious forest products are all controlled by less than 25 families. At the same time, the indigenous peoples of the Chiapas highlands, along with the majority of the peasantry, are used for cheap labour.

Secondly, there are also thousands of small parcels of land, whose products are consumed by those who work the land and survive on a subsistence diet.

The agrarian counter-reform, undertaken necessarily within the framework of the NAFTA agreement, has paradoxically led to the weakening of populist controls over the peasantry and indigenous population.

With the official motto "modernisation and productivity" — the near-magical words which have governed the Salinista government's economic policy — the agrarian counter-reform was imposed with the idea that there would be a negligible reaction from the peasantry and indigenous population, as if they had no historical memory.

But it is clear that they made a monumental error, because these oppressed groups know that they have very little chance of improving their situation under current economic policies. What is more, they cling to the historic quest of Emiliano Zapata for "Land and liberty" — for which he fought from 1910 until his assassination in 1919.

Millions of Mexicans continue to hope that the century's first social revolution will bring them justice — a justice which drifts further and further away

with every trade agreement which is signed and with every promise made by the government about taking them down the path of the "First World". The Mexican government is now beginning to pay the price for its unrelenting policy of attacks on social gains made during the revolution of 1910-17.

Chiapas is one of the states where electoral fraud, common currency in Mexico, has reached previously unimaginable heights. In 1988 the PRI used the full weight of its political machine to install its candidates — including Salinas de Gortari himself, the President of the Republic. In this state, as in many others, results coming from the most remote (and predominantly indigenous) regions were shown to be entirely favourable to the PRI — even though it was obvious that thousands of people had voted for opposition candidates. This scenario was played out again for the election of federal deputies in 1991.

This being the case, it is not surprising that the Selva Lacandona Declaration, released by the general command of the EZLN on 1 January, states: "In keeping with this Declaration of War we call on the other governmental institutions of the nation (legislative and judicial) to restore the legality and stability of the nation, and oust the dictator", a clear reference to Salinas de Gortari.

Elections

In a year dominated by the political-electoral struggle — in August there will be elections for the Presidency, the Parliament and the Senate — the immediate reaction of the government to the uprising was one of surprise and attempting to play down events.

At the same time, a vicious military offensive — harkening back to the wars of imperial conquest — was being launched. Tanks, armed helicopters, planes and 12 thousand soldiers were sent to crush the conflict, rather than the government seeking a solution. Unable to achieve its objective immediately, several days later the government adopted a well-known approach. In a message broadcast on all radio and television channels on 6 January, Salinas spoke of the "professionals of violence, Mexicans and a foreign group" who were out to "undermine the country's prestige". This is the same type of line taken by the Salvadorean and Guatemalan governments when confronted with similar developments.

It was the conspiracy theory version of history, which sees everything as a

foreign plot. It was also racist, inasmuch as it explicitly denied that indigenous peoples can act as conscious social agents, standing up for themselves against the weight of oppression.

The government is attempting to treat the problem as one which only affects a clearly demarcated region, as if poverty did not affect more than 35 million Mexicans. It insists on centring its efforts on the effects (the indigenous uprising) and not the causes (misery, despotic rule, exploitation), attempting a "solution" by using its traditional methods of repression.

But the air force's indiscriminate bombing and the cold-blooded murder of dozens of indigenous people who were captured alive have awakened a society which is fed up with government impunity and various foreign democratic sectors have rightly held the government responsible for its genocidal policy.

Sensing that he risked being cornered, Salinas decided on 9 January to dismiss the Minister of the Interior, Gonzalez Garrido, replacing him with Jorge Capizo, who had until recently been the President of the Human Rights Commission. Capizo had been unable to resolve the problem of nearly five-hundred political disappearances and in 1987, while Rector of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), his attempt to push through a number of neo-liberal reforms was met with the biggest student demonstrations since 1968.

Defuse

Manuel Camacho Solís, the former mayor of Mexico City, was called on to assist Capizo. In December Camacho Solís became Minister of Foreign Affairs, in order to defuse the crisis in the PRI which broke after the nomination of the party's candidate for the Presidency. Famed as a "negotiator and moderniser", in 1993 he was behind the proposed reform to the law which would have increased tenants' rents and was entirely to the benefit of property speculators. Thousands of people mobilised in Mexico City and the project was withdrawn.

Salinas has thus sacrificed one of his lackeys (Garrido) and made kings out of Capizo and Camacho Solís. The manoeuvre is aimed at reducing pressure from inside and outside the country but could cost him dearly in the coming months.

Of course, it is difficult to equate Capizo or Comacho Solís with Garrido.

But two important factors remain untouched: the army and Salinas himself, both directly responsible for the murders in Chiapas. In any other country where there is real democracy, both would surely have had to face a trial of some sort. For example, one need only recall the corruption scandals which forced both the Brazilian and Venezuelan Presidents to resign last year.

While it now seems that negotiations are under way, this may be just another manoeuvre to gain time. The army has not withdrawn from the occupied municipalities and is now involved in a campaign of selective repression.

The brutal reaction of the Mexican government to the progressive sector of the Church will have its own consequences in the coming months. As already mentioned, for more than one and a half years, with the complicity of the Vatican, the government has tried to get rid of Bishop Samuel Ruiz and other Bishops of the Chiapas diocese, who are all identified with liberation theology. The unconditional support given to them by all democratic sectors in Mexico has obliged both the government and the rightwing Church leadership to retreat.

Judging by official declarations which insidiously seek to blame Bishop Ruiz for the Chiapas uprising, there is no question that the government would like to settle its score with the democratic sector of the Church. But their declarations have been so clumsy, and the repression in Chiapas so brutal, that the Cardinal of Mexico himself, Corripio Ahumada, had to demand a halt to the killing and request that the government furnish some evidence to back their accusations.

Pope

These are important developments, especially as the Mexican government re-established ties with the Vatican less than a year ago, and the Pope himself has helped to boost the image of the government by making two visits in under five years (the most recent being last August).

Thus far, no-one has been able to characterise the leadership of the EZLN in any real sense. Certainly, there does not seem to be any direct link between the various armed actions which have taken place in the country since 1 January, although credit for these actions has been taken by what seem to be remnants of guerrilla organisations from the 1970s — groups which were crushed at the time by State repression in a dirty war

about which little has been said in Mexico, and nothing said abroad.

What is clear is that throughout 1993, there were various reports in the Mexican press concerning the existence of camps in Chiapas which were training armed groups. Near the end of May, the army released its findings in an extensive report, yet the government failed to take action.

Although faced with the evidence, the former Governor of Chiapas and (recently dismissed) Minister of the Interior, Garrido, asserted in August that, "There is no guerrilla force in Chiapas. To accept this false rumour would cause great damage to development in our State, because it would lead to a breakdown in foreign and domestic investment in the agricultural sector." He added, "The government of Mexico denies the possibility that a guerrilla force exists in the southern part of the Mexican Republic, or that there is any other group which claims to be in rebellion against the marginalisation of indigenous peoples and the peasantry."

Those familiar with the Mexican police and army know that when they want they can act with tremendous zeal and efficiency.

The facts demonstrate that, blinded by the unprecedented concentration of powers in the hands of the President, Salinas and his entourage of loyal servants underestimated the popular explosion which was taking shape from the misery in the south-east of the country

Torpedo

Given the current conditions in the country, the EZLN's armed uprising has become a veritable earthquake which is shaking the Mexican political system to its roots. It is a torpedo which has made a direct hit on a State-party system which has had great difficulty responding. As other observers have pointed out, Mexico became another country on 1 January and political conditions in the country have changed qualitatively, as a result of the genuine popular uprising.

So much for the policies invariably applied by Mexico's rulers — and praised abroad by such institutions as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The crude reality of Mexican life has taken centre stage. It is clear that if the just demands of the people — thirsting for democracy and dignity — are not met, they may very well seek to take matters into their own hands, as between 1910-17. ★



**Communiqué from the Underground General Committee of the EZLN
Mexico, 20 January 1994**

"We want the steps of all those who walk truthfully to unite in a single step"

TO the people of Mexico:

To all the democratic, honest and independent people, civil organisations and politicians of Mexico:

To the people and governments of the world:

Brothers and sisters:

The dignified struggle of the EZLN fighters has drawn the sympathy of many different people, organisations and social sectors, both in Mexico and internationally. The honourable and resolute support from these progressive forces has been what has truly opened up the possibility of a just political solution to the conflict which fills our skies.

Neither the political will of the federal executive nor the glorious military actions of our fighters have been as effective as the various public demonstrations, in the streets, the mountain areas and the mass media, of the honest and independent organisations and people which form part of what is called Mexican civil society.

We, the most recent of Mexican citizens and the first of its patriots, have understood from the outset that our problems, and those of the whole country, can only be resolved through a national revolutionary movement based around three principal demands: liberty, democracy and justice.

Our way of struggle is not the only one. Other forms of struggle exist and have great value. Our organisation is not the only one, and perhaps for many this would not be desirable. Other honest, progressive and independent organisations exist and also have great value. The EZLN has never intended that its form of struggle should be the only legitimate one. However, for us it is the only one left. The EZLN salutes the honest and important development of all forms of struggle which take the course which will lead all of us to freedom, democracy and justice. The EZLN has never intended that its organisation should be the only true, honest and revolutionary one in Mexico or Chiapas.

We organise ourselves as we do because it is the only form left to us. The EZLN salutes the honest and important development of all the independent and progressive organisations which struggle for freedom, democracy and justice for the whole nation. There are and will be other revolutionary organisations. There are and will be other popular armies. We do not intend to be the one, only and true historical vanguard. We do not intend to force under our Zapatista banner all honest Mexicans, although we offer it.

There is a larger and more powerful banner under which we all can gather: the banner of a national revolutionary movement where different tendencies, ideas and forms of struggle can be accommodated, but the common desire is for freedom, democracy and justice.

The EZLN calls on all Mexicans to raise this banner, not the banner of the EZLN, nor that of armed struggle, but that of freedom, democracy and justice. Below this great banner will also be unfurled our Zapatista banner, below this great banner will also march our guns.

The struggle for liberty, democracy and justice is not only a task for the EZLN, but for all independent and progressive Mexicans and honest, independent and progressive organisations, with their own form of struggle, organisation and ideas.

The steps of all those who walk truthfully should unite in a single step: that which leads to freedom, democracy and justice.

Our struggle will go beyond the shout of "Enough!" on 1 January 1994. There is a long way to walk, but the different steps are for a united goal: Liberty! Democracy! Justice!

We will continue struggle until we achieve the freedom which is our right, the democracy which is our motivation and the justice which is our life!

★

New phase begins

ON 9 January, in the Katlehong township near Johannesburg, an African National Congress (ANC) delegation, including Joe Slovo and Cyril Ramaphosa¹, was the target of an ambush by residents of a workers' hostel controlled by Chief Buthelezi's Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP).² One journalist was killed and several people were injured; Slovo and Ramaphosa were unhurt. Had one of the two leaders been killed, the whole political situation could well have taken a dramatic turn.

PETER BLUMER — 19 January 1994

WHILE it appears that both the government and the leadership of the ANC are calmly and amicably preparing for the elections on 27 April, South African society itself remains as explosive as ever.³ The long-term effects of apartheid — its violence and prejudice — continue to play an active role. Allies and former allies of the government — sections of the police apparatus, the far right, and reactionary movements such as the IFP — can still disrupt the situation with attacks such as the one in Katlehong.

However, a new phase of political life has begun, after a long period during which the government negotiated while at the same time carrying out various activities aimed at weakening the ANC. In so doing, it hoped to weaken the ANC's activist base and force it to adopt a new political approach. Among the methods employed, was terror from death squads — the famous "third force", which was never threatened or unmasked — and political and terrorist pressure from the IFP and the Nazi far right.

Today, a large part of the desired political compromises have been secured. The ANC and F.W. de Klerk's National Party (NP) are now preparing to co-manage the South African State. The ANC will do so based on its enormous electoral support from the Black masses; the NP will use the positions it already holds in the State apparatus.

According to a recent opinion poll, the ANC will win 67% of votes in the April elections.⁴ The NP will win 17% while 6% will go to the IFP. The Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC) will win no more than 2%, and the right and far right together will score at most 7%.

While serious polls are not commonplace in such a society, there can be no doubt that support for the ANC will continue to grow until the election date. The overwhelming majority of "African" peoples (according to the apartheid classification) will vote for Nelson Mandela's organisation, including in Natal and Kwazulu provinces, where the ANC will win 51% of votes compared to 32% for the IFP.

However, the votes of the "Indian" and "Coloured" communities will be much more divided. A study indicates that 30% of the "Coloured" population in the Cape region will vote for the NP and only 20% for the ANC, which is seen by some as an "African" movement.

The strength of the ANC vote will determine a number of things. Even though it has already been established that over the next five years the government will be an open coalition of all parties with more than 5% of the vote, the relative representation of each one will be determined by the outcome of the April elections.

The ANC vote will express the social and political expectations of a movement which is not only hegemonic in general, but also among the Black working class. Further expectations will be raised if it obtains more than 66% of the vote, which then would give it some powers in selected legislative spheres.⁵

Furthermore, candidates from the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) will be on the ANC ticket. Even though ANC votes will reflect a number of different social interests and political trajectories, it is clear that most of them will be cast by the majority of the most oppressed

and exploited sectors of South African society.

Two different errors can be made in analysing the current situation in South Africa. The first is to underestimate the scale of the changes which are underway in the country, some of which are structural in nature. The second is to overstate these changes and declare that the country is on the threshold of a glorious era of "economic reconstruction" and national unity.

It is perhaps useful to recall that it took almost a century of total white domination before Blacks obtained the right to vote. On 27 April, the majority of South Africans will be voting for the first time! While we need to understand the contradictory reasons behind the compromises and reforms currently underway, it would be terribly wrong to underestimate the importance and the impact of this new right to vote, and this new acquisition of full citizenship.

In the new political system, all the official rules of racial segregation have disappeared. The Bantustans will no longer exist as separate administrative and "State" units. The army will be open to all citizens; sections of the armed wings of the ANC and the PAC are already being prepared for integration into this army.⁶ And while the high command will remain dominated, in numbers and rank, by officers from the old system, this does not change the fact

1. Both are national leaders of the ANC. Slovo is also the main leader of the South African Communist Party.

2. The IFP is the government party in Kwazulu. It is a reactionary party, basing its propaganda on manipulation of the Zulu ethnic identity.

3. The Transitional Executive Council (TEC) was set up as a kind of temporary government to run the country until the elections. All the traditional political forces are represented, from the ANC and the National Party to the Bantustan government parties. The fascist far right and the IFP rejected the results of the negotiations and do not participate in the TEC.

4. *Business Day* Johannesburg, 11 January 1994.

5. See Mark Harper's article 'Backlash against compromise', *International Viewpoint*, no. 250, November 1993. In any case, even if they win more than 66% of the vote they will still not be able to legislate on most of the areas agreed by the high commands. This is a tremendous obstacle to the "Constituent" nature of the future "Constituent Assembly". Further, on 19 January Nelson Mandela declared that, in spite of the probable victory of the ANC, the future President may not be an ANC member.

6. A Joint Military Command Council was set up with cadres from the army, the ANC's armed wing, and forces from the Venda, Transkei and, soon, Ciskei Bantustans. For the time being, Kwazulu and Bophuthatswana have refused to join, opting instead for an alliance with the far right.

that in general the army will be neither racially homogeneous nor committed to the defence of apartheid, as previously.

A peacekeeping force (the nearly ten thousand-strong National Peacekeeping Force) has been set up for the elections, and may well become a new police force.



All this — once again, whatever the political reasons may be — constitute structural reforms of a character sufficiently thoroughgoing to change the Black masses' perception of the State apparatus.



It is not only the Black middle class who will change their perception of the State and its institutions, but also a significant sector of the Black working class. This evolution will be all the more pronounced if, as is likely to happen on 27 April, the votes of the Black masses produce a government in which the ANC and the Communist Party are in the majority.

This political shock will not, however, free South African society from its racist heritage. The poverty of the poorest layers has actually deepened over the last three years. The considerable changes in the political and institutional spheres have not led to a situation in which basic social relations are no longer intimately related to those of a "racial" nature.

An editorial commentary in the 28 May 1993 issue of Johannesburg's *Business Day* newspaper explains, "If de Klerk has his way, South Africa will remain the last country in Africa with

entrenched white power. Whites will not rule, but they will effectively share power in a Cabinet where major decisions require consensus, giving whites an effective veto. And this is not just for five years, but for as long as the situation lasts before the constitution is changed."

In the face of such a challenge, the political line of the ANC has been essentially to advocate a neo-Keynesian approach of economic revival and the reduction of inequalities through State intervention within the framework of a market economy. This is, to say the least, a little short of what is really required by South African society!

We are already seeing how the coalition government with the NP is being put forward as an obstacle to any kind of radical socio-economic reforms, and there are other blind spots in the ANC's project.

Land

One such blind spot is in the area of land reform. The proposed reform requires Blacks to bring their land claims to a court of law. Can the land question really be solved in this way? And above all, how is the dismantling of the Bantustans to proceed? There is already tremendous pressure for "illegal" occupations, including the appearance of rural women's committees.

The strangest — and most naive — ANC and COSATU positions are those which foresee economic "reconstruction" through a combination of improvements in South African competitiveness on the world market and State intervention to increase the size of the domestic market.

Even the term "reconstruction" is itself questionable. It implies that the current political phase is a kind of period of revolutionary transition, as if there were a "reconstruction" of a country in some way destroyed by apartheid.

But this is certainly not the case; one need only examine the economic func-

tioning of the country and the crushing weight of the huge financial conglomerates. South African capitalism is in the process of reforming the State and the way production is organised in the country. Apartheid may have run its course as a specific form of regulation, but the South African economy is certainly in no need of "reconstruction".

The plan to reach a "national" consensus around competitiveness and the redistribution of wealth can only work if employers' profits rise at least as quickly as salaries. In other words, if the objective of the ANC and COSATU position is to achieve a broad social contract with the employers, the ruling class will have to be convinced that such a course will not cut into their rate of profit.

This is why we are now seeing — at the same time as the setting-up of the National Economic Forum (NEF), which brings together the employers, the trade unions and the government — a series of major employer offensives which aim at compensating for salary increases through job cuts and other cost-cutting measures.

To be sure, there will be new gains for working people. But the end of sanctions and the opening of the country to new external constraints will cause problems which the current ANC line has not taken into consideration.

Just two years ago, the very idea of a broad coalition government would not have been raised by anyone in the ANC leadership. When the negotiations began, the ANC explained that they were merely to determine the conditions for the transfer of power on the basis of the "victories of the liberation movement". COSATU itself followed suit in discussions it had around its future relationship to an ANC government.

But the relationship of forces produced a different outcome. The constituent assembly which emerges from the 27 April elections will in many ways be

Assets

On 7 January a study by the Johannesburg *Financial Mail* gave a list of South Africa's wealthiest families. In first place is the Oppenheimer family, the main stockholder in the Anglo-American mega-firm (which holds about 55% of capital held as stock on the Johannesburg stock market). Oppenheimer assets are estimated at 4 billion Rand (about US\$1.25 billion). In second place is the Ruper-Hertzog family, with assets of more than 3 billion Rand. ★

The latest updates...

in a Constitution which the "Constituent Assembly" will be unable to alter...

- The NP backed down on its insistence that Cabinet decisions be taken on the basis of loaded majorities. But rather than spell out the enormity of the NP concessions, the parties used a vaguely worded statement which stated that a future Cabinet should function "in a manner which gives consideration to the consensus-seeking spirit underlying the concept of a government of national unity as well as the need for effective government". One for the ANC.
- The ANC dropped its insistence that democratic elections should be held when the new constitution is in place, agreeing that national elections should not be held until 1999, unless the Cabinet loses the confidence of Parliament. One for the NP, although not too much lost by the ANC.
- Regional boundaries, powers and functions were entrenched, requiring a two-thirds majority in the Senate before they can be changed. If the deadlock-breaking mechanism comes into operation, a 60 percent majority in the Senate is required. One for the NP, which insisted on federalism.
- Provincial Legislatures will have the right to adopt their own constitutions, as long as they are consistent with the constitutional principles and the national Constitution. One for the NP.
- Deadlock-breaking procedures for the adoption of the new Constitution are dependent on a sixty percent majority. Another one for the NP.
- Then came the NP's major concession to the ANC: a single ballot paper for the election of national and provincial legislatures. ★

source: *Weekly Mail*, 19 November 1993

powerless, since 27 areas for decision-making (including most of the Constitution) have already been set aside during the course of the negotiations as legislative "no go areas" for the elected government.

Whole segments of the old structures are simply going to be co-opted into the new State apparatus. For example, the armed forces of Ciskei, Transkei and other Bantustans will be integrated into the new united army.

Components

We have seen a clear evolution in the political explanations furnished by the three components of the Alliance — the ANC, the SACP and the COSATU. The idea of "co-management" between employers and trade unions which surfaced in a few documents at the end of the 1980s has today become dominant.

In its New Year's message, the COSATU leadership called on employers to take workplace democratisation seriously, saying, "productivity improvements would only follow meaningful participation of workers."

In fact, the ideological and political evolution of the Alliance leadership has proceeded at a quicker pace than the deterioration of the existing relationship of social forces in South African society. In order to understand this desynchronisation, one must keep in mind the rapid

bureaucratisation which has taken place in their apparatuses, as well as the tendency towards debates of a technocratic nature.

Dozens of forums have been set up where all the different social, political and ethnic layers debate and negotiate over various aspects of the reforms. Hundreds of movement cadres and thousands of activists have been seized by this kind of activity, in which the "reconstruction" theme has been determinant. A large number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) which played an active role in supporting the social movements have also been seduced by the forums.

"Mandela generation"

The business of co-option has just begun. But already there is no single large enterprise which does not seek to integrate ANC cadres into their management. The "Mandela generation" is being absorbed into public and private structures, and quickly abandoning all loyalty to their former beliefs.

The needs of "civil society" have been incessantly evoked to justify this linking of the still vibrant social movements with top-level negotiations. But for those who still remember the political themes of the 1980s, there can be no doubt that this terminological backpeddling is not just a question of semantics,

but reflects a desire to break with an analysis based on social classes.⁷

There was tremendous confusion last November when the trade union base objected strongly to the employers' right to lockout, which was part of the agreement of the National Manpower Commission, and accepted by the COSATU leadership.

The COSATU leadership was forced to organise a big demonstration, "(but the) employers refused to budge, and the ANC was clearly embarrassed and impatient with COSATU. Some phrases were rearranged, but essentially the employers' ability to lockout and the workers' right to strike are both included in the interim Bill of Rights."⁸ The same thing happened around the question of the reorganisation of the public administration.

The ANC did not hold back on compromises when it came to drawing up its slate of candidates for the elections — even though nothing has indicated that this was necessary to secure the votes of the Black masses. Thus they accepted the right to belong to both the ANC and another movement. This was not done for the benefit of the SACP, whose leaders are also ANC leaders, but for political movements from the apartheid era, such as Allan Hendrickse's Labour Party (LP).

The Labour Party is a "Coloured" organisation which, in the 1980s, ran in elections for the famous "Coloured" House. Hendrickse, who currently represents the LP on the Transitional Executive Council, was offered ANC membership so that he could be on their electoral slate. The same thing applies to General Holomisa — "Head of State" in Transkei — and several others.

The goal of the ANC is not merely to win votes. For example, a recent poll in the Cape region showed that were the LP to run alone it would only gain 3% of coloured votes. The ANC is attempting to broaden the social and political composition of its apparatus once it takes office.

In response to independent socialist currents which argued for combining democratic struggles and a break from capitalism in one historic movement, the SACP counterposed the notion of a "first stage" of national and democratic revolution.

7. Evoking the need to involve "civil society", the ANC has tried to persuade people totally unconnected with politics on to their electoral slate. These have included sports figures and Miss South Africa 1993!

8. Karl von Hold, *South African Labour Bulletin*, November-December 1993, Johannesburg.

Whilst never specifying the social nature of the new "national-democratic" institutions which it proposed, the SACP was able to present them, in the South African context, as a major socio-political shake-up. Its interpretation of the ANC's Freedom Charter went in this direction: nationalisation of monopolies, redistribution of wealth and the social hegemony of the working class. Between 1985 and 1990 these were the main themes of its work among trade unionists and youth. And in 1986-1987 it wrongly characterised the situation as one of dual power between the popular insurrection on the one hand and the government on the other.

Confusion

But were the SACP now to compare its former creed to the reality of their compromises today, it would conclude that things are still very far from the first stage of the democratic revolution. This is why there is now tremendous internal confusion and why a variety of theoretical interpretations have emerged.

Some see there as being an additional stage before the democratic and national stage, while others declare that this is the normal path taken in the long march to socialism. Indeed, the very existence of the SACP as such is now in doubt. In theory, it can choose one of the following courses: either to disappear by becoming definitively absorbed into the ANC; or to carve out some autonomy for itself as an independent political force, which could be radical reformist in nature.

In reality, however, we may see something altogether different. There is a strong possibility that the apparatuses of the ANC, the SACP and COSATU will progressively fall apart as their social and bureaucratic interests diverge between managing the State and running a trade union.

Already many in COSATU are worried about the kind of trade union control there will be over the ANC slate. In mid-November, the ANC prevented COSATU from mounting a poster campaign bearing the faces of twenty candidates which it had chosen to stand for Parliament. The ANC did not want the trade union movement to decide too quickly, and on its own terms, the number and names of its representatives.

Other conflicts have arisen in relation to the "reconstruction" strategy. "The big three (NUM, NUMSA, SACTWU) tend to see industrial strategy, industry-wide retrenchment and retrain-

ing funds, and increasing industrial competitiveness, as the solutions to job losses... This is at least in part because they have greater policy-making capacity, and can exert industry-wide influence through centralised bargaining forums. The smaller affiliates, without these resources, and bogged down in endless retrenchment negotiations, tend to counter with fighting talk about struggling for a moratorium on retrenchments."⁹

Opposing views are also developing in the South African National Civic Organisation (SANCO). In SANCO there are, on the one hand, plans for radical campaigns (particularly around housing and land), while on the other, for the worst sort of top-heavy managerial compromises. There is therefore a strong possibility that these conflicts will grow in depth and number until the new social and political interests are clearly defined.

Due to the numerous national and



international causes behind this evolution of the situation, it is unlikely that independent and alternative political and trade union leaderships will quickly emerge.

However, over the last few months there has been talk once again of the need for a mass workers' party. This is a recurring theme in a country where two conceptions of the liberation struggle have always been at loggerheads: one which emphasises the "national" and socially diverse character of the political project; the other insisting on the need for specifically socialist and working class input.

In the current situation, it is quite normal that the question of the working class movement and its organisational independence should return to the fore. The idea that in a social formation like South Africa, there can be a single, united and disciplined liberation movement — representing a new nation in formation — is sectarian and wrong. It would lead to division rather than unity in daily struggles. Although the trade union left

fought this approach in the 1980s, it took it up in 1986-87.

This debate will not take shape again until a number of conditions are met. Whether in the political or trade union field, these include a thoroughgoing recomposition through struggle and through new leadership.

A mass party which expresses the vast array of working class and popular demands — in part as a function of its pluralist character — cannot be built on any type of substitutionist approach.

As a result, for the moment the main tasks are centred around the coming elections. What is said and done over the next three months will have tremendous importance for the post-election period. Neither the PAC nor the Azanian People's Congress (AZAPO) represent a credible alternative for those millions of Blacks who will express for the first time through the ballot box their aspirations for change and full citizenship.

The PAC, after long hesitation, has rallied to the electoral process, despite having no alternative approach for improving the terms of negotiation between the ANC and the NP. As for AZAPO, it is planning a "boycott", and falling into a desperate paralysis.

For the revolutionary left, there is obviously an increasing gap between what it would have liked and what it will be able to do. For a full understanding of its current difficulty in offering anything more than a symbolic alternative, we would need to look at the last ten years.¹⁰

In order to be heard, the revolutionary left must avoid isolating itself from the thousands of cadres, activists, women and youth who — while having no direction from and being critical of the ANC — have every intention of voting for it and against all other parties in the coming elections. ★

9. *Ibid.*

10. In a future article we will come back to the question of voting options for forces critical of the ANC.

Solidarity between peoples

Introduction

THIRD World debt no longer makes the news. The banks of the imperialist countries have considerably reduced the size of the debts owed to them by the South and are out of danger (see Susan George's contribution). The diktats of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and so on with regard to the indebted countries have also assured them of regular payments to service the debts. This is one more mechanism for transferring wealth from the people of the South to the ruling classes of the imperialist countries. At the same time Third World debt (and also debt in Eastern Europe) continues to increase, from 1, 350 billion American dollars in 1991 to 1, 600 billion in 1993.

What are the effects of the structural adjustment plans? Who makes decisions in addition to the IMF and the World Bank? What changes should there be in the relationship between the North and the South? These were some of the questions put to the speakers in a forum which took place in Brussels on 4 December 1993 at a meeting organised by the Belgian Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt (CADTM).

The movement for the cancellation of Third World debt has declined as much in the South as in the North. However, servicing the debt is still an intolerable burden for the people of the Third World. Moreover, any left-wing government in the South which aims at satisfying the needs of the masses will have to deal with the problem. For example, can one imagine a Workers' Party government in Brazil, resulting from a Lula victory at the end of 1994, being able to avoid this obstacle in carrying out its programme for social change? The Global Forum in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992, organised by non-governmental organisations throughout the world, prioritised the cancellation of the debt. The meeting in Brussels showed that there can be new initiatives. **Eric Toussaint** ★

WE acknowledge the permission of the Belgian Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt in allowing us to print contributions from one of the major forums at their meeting in Brussels on 4 December.

International Viewpoint is responsible for editing the contributions for reasons of style. Also speaking at this forum were Carol Thompson, an research worker based in Zimbabwe, and "Vasu", a central leader of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International) and a member of the Sri Lankan Parliament. We regret that, for technical reasons, we are unable to print their contributions.

SUSAN GEORGE

is co-director of the Transnational Institute and co-author of the book, *The Boomerang Effect*. She is a member of the International Administrative Council of Greenpeace.

IF one were to ask where the debt crisis stands today, some would ask, "What crisis?" The reason for this is that the banks have emerged unscathed from the affair. They had ten years in which to diversify their portfolios into other profitable operations and now have no more than three percent in so-called "Third World" countries.

Nor is there a crisis for the elites of the Third World. Austerity measures do not affect them. Nor are they hit by cuts in public services because they have access to private services — private clinics, transport, schools and so forth. And they are not the ones who lose jobs.

When their currency is devalued, these elites often become more wealthy in their own countries because most of their money is outside of the country in hard currencies.



So there is no crisis for the banks and no crisis for the Third World elites; this is why we hear so little about the Third World debt. I can only congratulate the Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt (CADTM), because they have made a real activist effort to keep the problem of the debt out in the open and in the public eye.

It has been more than a decade since the breaking of the debt crisis, and since that time banks have withdrawn from the scene. In spite of the "structural adjustment plans" put in place by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund in more than eighty countries (including in the republics of the former USSR), nowhere have we seen the promised growth and reduction of debt.

In spite of ten years of austerity, the debt itself has grown by two thirds in the

countries of the Third World. For the poorest of these it has grown by more than one-hundred and twenty percent, and in sub-Saharan Africa it has more than doubled over the same period.

These countries have been paying 250 thousand American dollars every minute to service the debt. Imagine yourself in a bathtub without a plug. Everything which comes into the country in the form of "aid", investment, and payments for exports escapes down the drain in the form of debt servicing. There is no possibility of accumulating capital for productive investment.

According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 30 thousand health professionals have left Africa over the last ten years. They cannot find decent working conditions or salaries, so they head elsewhere in search of greener pastures. Most African countries now pay more to service their debt than they invest in health and education.

Dysfunctional

This means an excessive burden for women. They have to fill in for a dysfunctional health care system; they have to take care of the children; and they have to work both inside and outside the home. And, often, they must turn to prostitution to make ends meet.

In Africa I was told that now that education costs money, girls of 14 years older who want to go to school are forced to have sexual relations in exchange for enrollment. This is where the debt and attendant austerity lead.

The effects of the debt are not only felt in the "South". In our book, *The Boomerang Effect*, published last year, we researchers from the Transnational Institute showed that the crisis is not a distant problem, which should only interest us for reasons of compassion or solidarity.

It is totally false to say that the debt crisis bears no material relationship to us. The impact on the environment of export-oriented policies is catastrophic, more and more countries are dependent on the drug trade, and everyone knows of the ravages of this trade in the United States of America, where serious drug-related crimes have been rising at an annual rate of 10% for the last few years and have hit minority communities particularly hard.

Approaching the drug problem from a military angle solves nothing. If drugs are the only product on which farmers will not lose money — if coffee and cot-

ton are worthless and the prices of other products are plummeting — then that is what they will produce. And they are right to do so, for they have no other choice.

Then there is the problem of job losses. Since 1991 jobs lost due to Third World debt can be

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estimated even conservatively at 2 million in the United States and 750 thousand in Europe. Countries which are servicing the debt can hardly be expected to buy products manufactured outside. The loss all round is enormous, given that these countries need the advanced technology which they are unable to produce themselves.

Catastrophe

There is also the fact that immigration will continue so long as people cannot make a decent life for themselves in their own country. It is a catastrophe for these countries when, to give my previous example, 30 thousand African health professionals have left their countries. These are people who have studied, who are young and courageous.

Today, in the Senegal Valley, there are entire villages where only old people and children remain. This is not how a country's agriculture will develop, although it is true that remittances from immigrant workers have been very useful in servicing the debt in their countries.

So for both the South and the North the debt is a catastrophe for the vast majority of the population. Since we have a common interest around

this problem, the solution lies in building coalitions between non-governmental organisations and



the peoples of North and South. ★

"This leads to two-tiered and South

MICHEL CHOSSUDOVSKY

is an economics professor at the University of Brussels and a regular contributor to the French journal, *Le Monde*.

We are seeing a globalisation of misery which is a direct product of the macro-economic policies implemented under the auspices of the Bretton Woods institutions. The result has been a shrinking of internal purchasing power, a reduction in labour costs, and a re-orientation of national economies towards exports. National economies are being pillaged by industries producing for the world market, and the Western agricultural surplus dumped upon them.

In the process, internal market activi-

ty is neglected and economies are re-oriented towards the world market. Since the end of the 1980s, the "structural adjustment" plans have taken a new turn, insofar as the process of economic collapse has surpassed all projections, especially with respect to the countries of the former Communist Bloc.

Devaluation

In respect of Russia, the IMF has recommended that social security, which was pegged at \$US6 per month before devaluation, be reduced to \$US3 — this despite the minimum wage being \$US6.50 per month. Price indexes have been manipulated; on the one hand, there has been a dollarisation of most prices — which are now approaching those of the world market — while on the other, the average monthly wage for large sections of the population is between \$US10 and \$US40 per month. School books are being sold to merchants, and then to the West, where they are used for making recycled paper. This is the future of the education system in the whole ex-USSR.

In Kenya, the World Bank has just signed an agreement on readjustment in the education sector. As in most sub-

landless workers or small peasants, there was an increase in famine in the months following the application of the policy.

In Vietnam, the government has begun to implement neo-liberal economic policy voluntarily, in line with IMF-type programmes. While even a teacher with a university diploma earns only \$US15.75 per month, the logic of the measures adopted by the government — with the support of international institutions — will increase the price of rice (the country's main export) to the world level.

There is an economic genocide going on, working through the price-revenue mechanism, which simultaneously affects thousands of millions of people in more than eighty countries around the world.

Global

Clearly this generalised impoverishment has repercussions for economic relations. When purchasing power is systematically reduced on a global level, there can be no growth in internal or global markets. The misery management of the South stimulates the relocation of enterprises to these countries and the closing of factories and "restructuring" in Western Europe and North America. Jobs are transferred to poorer countries, which are forced to produce for the world market — leading in turn to a saturation of world markets, a drop in prices and consequently their revenue.

There is less and less of a relationship between the price of merchandise and the actual costs of production, whether produced in our countries or in the poor countries. As a result, enormous profits are made from low-wage economies which now exist on a global level.

All this leads to two-tiered consumption and two-tiered living standards in the countries of both South and North. Further, in the South, creditors exercise political control through the international institutions, with economic reforms having to conform to the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank.

However, it is important to note that neither the IMF nor the World Bank are political powers in and of themselves, but part of a global bureaucracy. It would be interesting to uncover how this international bureaucracy of functionaries, economists and technocrats serve the interests of certain private financial institutions. Certainly a whole range of financial inter-

ests surround and give directives to the IMF, for example the London and Paris financial institutions, the political players from the G7 countries, the USA Treasury, and so on.

There has also been another important phenomenon over the last decade. More and more financial institutions, in the Third World as much as in the developed countries, are being integrated into a system of money laundering, illegal drug trafficking and organised crime. This is not the dominant feature of international finance, but nor is it a negligible element.

This can be seen, for example, in Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR. Dirty money — drug money — is deposited in Swiss banks, recycled into these countries and used for the privatisation of State enterprises. While this recycling of dirty money strengthens creditors, it also establishes a framework for regular money laundering and illegal trafficking. This is a significant development, and we should watch it carefully. ★

consumption and living standards in both the South and the North"

University of Ottawa and a regular *Le Monde Diplomatique*.

Saharan African countries, the country is forbidden from increasing the number of students entering teacher-training college. The agreement also stipulates that the student-teacher ratio should increase from 35:1 to 42:1 in the coming years. In other words, the loan agreement is programming the destruction of the education system.

In 1991, the Indian government implemented an economic policy under the auspices of the IMF, since when there has been a considerable increase in food prices. This has meant that several hundreds of millions of people have been thrust into the worst forms of misery. In rural areas, where so many are

Devaluation of the CFA franc

THE fifty percent devaluation of the CFA franc* — which had been looming for several months — is one of the latest misadventures in the crisis of French domination in Black Africa. The peoples of the region will pay a heavy price, inasmuch as the foreign trade of the fourteen countries of the "franc zone" is heavily tied to France.

They will now have to fill — but how? — the gap created by the drop in the value of their exports, and pay for the increased cost of imports. This is added to other factors which are turning entire sections of the population into paupers, and offer no solution whatever to the structural crises of these economies.

The proponents of devaluation were many in number. First and foremost were the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, who demanded "real prices" in order to get on with the implementation of "structural adjustment plans". In their view, an "abnormally" overvalued currency was an obstacle to exports.

But this argument forgot that the crisis of African economies taken as a whole — including, and this is significant, non-CFA franc countries — has much more to do with the global re-organisation of the division of labour and demand than with a simple problem of export prices.

The French government was the next force behind the devaluation. For several months it had been declaring that it could no longer go on losing money through the financing of these economies and these governments. There was certainly hesitation in Paris, since the interests of French firms operating in these countries had to be taken into consideration. In the end, however, devaluation won the day.

The franc zone was a rather unusual institution for a supposedly "post-colonial" era. The rate of the CFA franc remained unchanged from 1958 onwards, at fifty CFA francs to the French franc. And the relationship between the two currencies actually dates back to 1948.

The franc zone allowed for unlimited transfer and convertibility between the two currencies. In other words, whatever they looked like, the bills circulating in Gabon, Mali or in any of the other twelve countries were French francs. The goal of the franc zone was to create a wide-open market for French firms and merchandise.

This zone led to the commercial dependence of these countries on France. At a time of free-floating currencies in Europe, one would have had to be a fool to take the risk of buying a machine-tool in Germany, for example, when there was a guaranteed stable price for imports from France.

The stabilisation of the European monetary system lessened the significance of this factor. These African economies were opened to other European suppliers and, in the Maastricht euphoria, there was even talk of a Euro-African ECU zone. But this did not take into account the outbreak of crisis both in Europe and Africa.

In exchange for a stifling dependence, the franc zone at least served as a monetary regulator; and the concerned African countries usually held their debts with the Bank of France. It also allowed for all manner of trafficking and flight of capital for France's dear friends in the region — dictators and "entrepreneurs" alike.

The system worked for a long time, but no longer. What may have appeared as a lesser evil has become a nightmare. For, aside from the various monetary mechanisms and their paternalist trappings, there is the sad reality of domination. Decisions are taken outside Africa and with extreme brutality.

We should not believe that Paris will freeze the holdings syphoned into French banks by those who run — or ran — these African countries. Indeed, it is the peoples of these countries who will pay for this latest in a long series of entries in the colonial ledger. —

Claude Gabriel ★

* The CFA franc is used by those African countries tied to the French franc. Originally "CFA" stood for "French African Colonies", a description which, to a large extent, is still accurate.

MICHEL HUSSON

is a researcher at the the Institute for Economic Research, Paris.

There are several striking features of the model imposed by the various international financial institutions in the name of "structural adjustment". First and foremost, the same recipe is proposed for all countries, without taking into account specific social and economic realities, thus exposing a superficial approach to different social formations.

There are some countries in the Third World which have seen fairly high rates of growth over the last two or three years. These are always held up as models of economic development. But it should be borne in mind that in these countries there is an enormous gap between the rate of growth and the reality of development on the ground, and the fruits of growth are in fact denied to the overwhelming majority of the population

Prosperity

Even the World Bank recognises this fact. In a recent report, on the decade of debt in Latin America, it concluded that perhaps the way in which the fruits of growth are shared out is more important than growth itself.

What are the stumbling blocks to prosperity for the great majority of Third World countries?

The first is very simple. Almost all these countries centre their economic orientation on prioritising potential exports — that is, purchases by the rich countries. However these are actually slowing down at the present time and the purchasing power of the rich countries would have to grow at an unfathomable rate, for it to act as a motor force for the development of all Third World countries.

In a way, we are seeing exactly the same phenomenon in the rich countries, in that the neo-liberal adjustment policies are smashing internal demand in the hope of selling to others. One need not be an economic expert to understand that in the end everyone loses, both in North and South.

The second stumbling block is related in that the model thrusts Third World

"Third World countries need to define a reasoned policy of 'self-centring'. This would not mean autarchy, but an approach which takes the reality of the world economy into consideration."

countries into competition with one another. One striking example, recently examined in a French magazine, is that of Nike. This company, which contracts out, packed up its operations in Malaysia and the Philippines because salaries had risen too high. It then moved to China.

Capital has become highly mobile, which exerts a constant downward pressure on wages, rather than favouring a situation in which development, investment and growth lead to an increase in salaries and growth of the internal market. This vicious circle drives countries to keep wages low.

Thirdly, the model is characterised by a significant growth in social inequality. The World Bank report on Latin America provides very clear figures in this regard.

Alternative

There are a number of programmatic considerations in respect of the development of an alternative to these problems.

Firstly, there is the debt itself, which has an obvious and significant impact.

Secondly, there is a fundamental point to be made, particularly in relation to Africa, which is not sufficiently discussed. This is the problem of the plunging prices of primary goods, which have dragged with them a number of countries which have centred their economic policies on the export of such products.

Thirdly, this export model, where priority is given to export-orientated agricultural business, is linked to the destruction of traditional agricultural and peasant economies, leading to loss of self-reliance in a number of countries. A key element of any alternative programme must be to stabilise and provide the means for the existence of a peasant economy. This would also be likely to slow down the demographic explosion.

Fourthly, the division of income must be radically altered in such a way as to re-activate the internal market. This involves tackling head-on the fact that the rich, by European standards, pay very little tax. There is an absolute necessity to secure wealth and redistri-

bute it, through salary increases and in restoring the social expenditure which has been slashed by structural adjustment policies.

Finally, a characteristic feature of today's world economy is the notion of development in and of itself, which is combined and uneven, does not involve all countries, and is between economies with very different levels of productivity and development.

The countries of the Third World enter into the world economy in a way which is impossible to sustain in the face of economic and technological norms defined by the industrialised countries.

Third World countries need to define a reasoned policy of "self-centring". This would not mean autarchy, but an approach which takes the reality of the world economy into consideration. To forget this reality — to forget differences in the levels of productivity — can only lead to disaster. These points must be taken up in both the South and the North. ★



"There are 20 million people who work in conditions of forced labour in Pakistan, and more and more children work in export industries from the age of seven or eight"

CHARLES ANDRE UDRY is a supporter of the Fourth International and editor of the Swiss journal, *La Brèche*.

THE World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have a father beyond all suspicion — the G3 countries (the European Union, USA and Japan). And the G7 is a mother from a good family.

It is important to say this, because it is the ruling classes in the G3 and G7 countries — and the economic logic of the systems which they control — which determine IMF and World Bank policies.

It is possible to be for the cancellation of the debt and to discuss World Bank documents or the IMF's recent calculations on purchasing power in the Third World without

for all that understanding the social interests and economic mechanisms which lie behind it.

We have to be clear about what "structural adjustment" actually

means. It means adjusting the weakest countries — however different they may be from one another — according to the demands of the centre.

Polarised

Or rather, of the various centres, because the world economy is now becoming more and more polarised. On the one hand there are the developed countries — especially Japan, the USA and Germany — which are fighting among themselves to divide up a select group of countries from the periphery. On the other hand, there is a Third World which, although highly differentiated, has been subjected collectively to a series of catastrophes

Even in the semi-industrialised countries, there is a mass of unemployed, the result of an agrarian crisis which has no outlet (such as

there has never before been so much forced labour in the world. What is interesting, when, for example, we study India and Pakistan, is that this forced labour is increasingly to be found in the export sector.

The cover photo of a recent issue of the German magazine *Der Spiegel* shows a Pakistani child with a brick in his hand, part of the 2 million families which, according to the ILO, work as slave brickmakers in Pakistan. There are 20 million people who work in conditions of forced labour in Pakistan, and more and more children work in export industries from the age of seven or eight — making carpets, textiles, wooden items, small toys and so forth. The same occurs in India, with women being replaced by children in the same way as they replaced men.

Structural adjustment plans are a response to the demands of the centre. From Taiwan to India capital has entirely unprecedented access to a global workforce. Capital and goods can circulate on a world scale — but not labour, which is integrated into the world economy under this particular form of exploitation.

Bankers

Two further points on structural adjustment:

Firstly: Susan George said that the debt no longer exists for bankers. Although bankers do not state this explicitly they do not care if the original loans are not paid, for they can write them off and so lower the level of declared net profits. In turn they pay less tax. Their real concern is the interest on these loans, which they set aside as a financial cushion. Further, while paying less tax, they can declare that there is a budgetary crisis and that social gains have to be attacked.

In other words, the debt crisis allows banks to lower taxable profits, cushion themselves, and transfer the whole burden on to working people in their own countries.

Secondly: the Summer 1993 issue of the New York-based Federal Reserve Bank Bulletin devoted a long article to "emerging markets" — the stockmarkets

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samedi 4 décembre 1993 de 13h00 à minuit à la V.U.B. (Vrije Universiteit van Brussel)

Europe had in 19th Century immigration to the USA). In today's economy, capital and goods can freely circulate, but not working people. The mass of unemployed is so great that the workforce can be subjected to tremendous exploitation in all sectors.

It is no accident that, as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) indicated in its last report,

of Malaysia, the Philippines, South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Mexico and so on — in short, where it is felt money can be made. The September issue of *The Banker*, the monthly magazine of the Financial Times, was entirely devoted to the same subject.

In Europe, social security systems founded on distribution of wealth are being destroyed, as we move increasingly towards private pension funds, which have for a long time been in existence in Canada and the USA.

Such funds are being planned for France, Switzerland, Italy and Germany, with Switzerland the most "advanced" in this area. By 1995, there will be \$US487 billion in pension funds which will have to be invested in some way. So the destruction of social security has created problems of pension fund management.

Reasoning

This is where the Third World comes in. The reasoning is that if the structural adjustment plans are applied, these pension funds can be placed there — for example, in the privatisation process. *The Banker* magazine gives the example of Argentina, where the oil industry and the electric grid are up for grabs.

A Swiss company is in charge of the privatisation of the Argentinian electricity company; all those who do not (or cannot) pay their electricity bills are being cut off.

And while usually a country is obliged to maintain a stable rate of exchange for its currency, Argentina was obliged to overvalue its currency in relation to the American dollar. In this way, money could be placed on the Argentinian stockmarket and large profits made.

In Brazil the IMF imposed a high interest rate on Brazil. So, through a short-term stockmarket operation, local savings can be obtained and profits repatriated.

Chile is said to be playing unfairly, because it does not allow profits to be repatriated before at least one year has elapsed. The banks want to be able to repatriate profits after three months!

On one side, the social security systems are being destroyed. On the other, we see how structural adjustment is used to underpin operations on stockmarkets and with a subsequent repatriation of profits.

In this way the debt plays a part in the gigantic transfer of wealth from South to North, and from East to North.

It is a half-truth to say that the Third World doesn't really count because trade is essentially between developed countries, because structural adjustment plans play a role in this transfer.

Of course, we have to respond to all this. Michel Husson has provided a few ideas, and there is one we should take up most vigorously: the notion of a limited "self-centring". In a world which is increasingly polarised — in which there are processes of regional internationalisation, regional agreements, pluricentric internationalisation, and so on — it is absolutely essential to discuss other possible systems of trade. Cancellation of the debt alone is not sufficient. ★

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Setback for unionists

THE re-election by acclamation of Ismail Sahbani as the leader of the General Union of Tunisian Workers (UGTT) during the opening session of its 18th Congress further weakens the strength of Tunisian workers.

ALI BEN NADRA * — Tunis, 28 December 1994

THE "Achourist" tendency led by Ali Romdhane claims loyalty to the tradition of militant UGTT trade unionism, and to its tradition of autonomy with respect to the government — as defended by Habib Achour at certain periods, notably the end of the 1970s.

The other current, organised around Ismail Sahbani, clings to the worst opportunist and bureaucratic traditions of Tunisian trade unionism, in which the plans of elected leaders coincide with their career plans and where they are the government's representative in labour circles. This current has certainly benefited from the support of the government, but a large part of its success has been due to the structural weakening of the working class which has accompanied the application of the Structural Adjustment Plan. This has meant unemployment, job insecurity and the growth of the informal sector; and has gone hand in hand with a reduction in purchasing power and a deterioration in living conditions. No wonder that working people's ability to struggle has been hampered.

Repression, the opportunist policies of trade union leaders and the effects of the regional and international situation have all contributed to the disarray and demoralisation of the trade union vanguard which emerged from the heart of the struggles at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s.

The Achourist tendency — which itself has given priority to manoeuvres in the UGTT apparatus and taken a concessionary approach to government offensives — has been unable to reverse this process. Following the Sousse Congress in 1989, where the relatively balanced relationship of forces within the UGTT allowed it a place in its leadership, the current was quickly marginalised within the executive bureau, with one of its members being excluded. Yet at the same time it refused to clearly

pose itself as an alternative to the dominant current, as one based on the demands of working people.

The 18th Congress has once again confirmed the failure of this approach. The Achourists, while giving their speeches a more militant tone, took a defensive position in the hope of reaching some kind of agreement with the upper echelons of the bureaucracy.

Accordingly, they did not oppose the designation of the Secretary General directly by the Congress. Further, while Ismail Sahbani refused to include any significant number of them in the list of candidates for the Executive Committee, they themselves presented a slate with only seven of the required twelve names.

Ejection

The attempt to compromise and win the votes of those in favour of reconciliation between the two trade union leaders was all in vain. The Achourists were ejected from the leadership by a majority of Congress delegates.

Although the left was out in force and very active at the 1989 Congress, it could only claim a few dozen of the more than five-hundred Congress delegates, who had been elected for the most part in accordance with the recommendations of the bureaucracy.

This time around, the left took no initiatives whatsoever. The only organised current, made up of sympathisers of the Communist Workers' Party (POCT),¹ set itself the objective of electing the General Secretary of the Post and Telecommunication Workers' Union (PTT) to the Executive Committee. He won with ease, as did the General Secretary of the Secondary School Teachers' Union, who is linked to a small Maoist group.

The result of this congress has been dispiriting. The new leadership is determined to support the government, for example Ben Ali's² candidacy in the

Presidential elections, scheduled to be held in March.

Does this Congress signal the unstoppable decline of the UGTT? While it is too early to answer this question, it is clear that Tunisian trade unionism has reached a decisive turning point.

This trade unionism found strength in the growing quantitative and qualitative weight of the working class, in the central role of the UGTT in the national liberation struggle and in the setting-up of the post-colonial State. The UGTT was a central component of the Bourguibiste³ regime, and largely provided its personnel, ideology, and, above all, mass base (which extended well beyond the working class).

And it can be said without exaggeration that the social and political changes which were provoked by the crisis of the Bourguibiste regime are the cause of the crisis of the UGTT itself. To be sure, the most striking demonstration of the crisis of the Destour⁴ regime between 1977 and 1985 was the attempt by the Achourist bureaucracy — shaken by working class mobilisations — to disassociate itself from Destour. But too many links tied the UGTT to the government, Achourism and Bourguibism; the fall of one could only bring about the fall of the others.⁵

This is the origin of the impasse in which the new version of Achourism, in the person of Ali Romdhane, finds itself. Romdhane is unable to break from Achour-type trade unionism, and more generally from the ideology of populist nationalism — mixed in with corporatism and social democratic ideas — which has historically characterised the UGTT and the Destour party.

* The author is a member of the Revolutionary Communist Organisation (OCR, Tunisian section of the Fourth International).

1. The POCT is an unreconstructed Stalinist party, specifically pro-Albanian.

2. Ben Ali is the current President who came to power through a coup on 7 November 1987. The then current President, Bourguiba, who had been in power since 1956, was sent into exile.

3. See note above.

4. The Destour party has been the sole government party since 1956.

5. It is difficult to say whether Bourguiba's 1985 expulsion of Achour was the cause of Bourguiba's fall or if, on the contrary, it was Bourguiba's ousting in 1987 (when declared to be "mentally and physically unfit to rule") which forced the trade union leader to retire.

The 18th congress also signals the premature demise of a generation of the working-class vanguard. Skilled workers, who gave the UGTT a militant character from the mid-1970s onwards, have quickly lined up behind the leadership. Absorbed into an apparatus which they did not control, selected by Habib⁶ according to clientelist and regionalist criteria, they were hit hard by the retreat from struggle and the crisis of the trade union federation. The sincere among them were ejected; the others were effectively absorbed into the bureaucracy. The degeneration of this vanguard was too fast and overall conditions too unfavourable for a new combative generation to emerge and take their place.

This phenomenon also struck the democratic opposition and the left. We are now witnessing the withering away of the opposition which developed in the 1960s and 1970s-era struggles against the Bourguiba dictatorship but was unable to build a base among newly radicalising generations.

Indeed, there is practically no organised democratic opposition. For example, the Movement of Democratic Socialists (MDS) excluded from its ranks a number of leaders who refused to support government policy unconditionally, and in the forthcoming elections it has decided to present Ben Ali as its candidate.

The former Tunisian Communist Party (PCT), which has perhaps a few dozen active members, has become a kind of movement for renewal, which has won it a few progressive intellectuals and some remaining far left elements. It also supports the Ben Ali candidacy, but stresses that he should be a candidate of national unity and not of any party. This is what the ex-Communists call being the opposition! Nor do the other legal parties have anything better to offer.

However, the Tunisian League for Human Rights offers a framework which, despite its limitations, has mobilised thousands of activists in defence of democratic freedoms. This is why the government is determined to get it under control, dissolving it in 1992 after it refused to submit to a new law on associations where the obvious goal was to annex it to the State).

Conditionally legalised in the spring of 1993, the League is now the scene of a fierce struggle between supporters of self-autonomy and a wave of manoeuvring careerists allied to the government. The date of its next congress was set for the first week of February following a

compromise which limited the number of people from Destour's ranks who can join the organisation.

Last year several attempts were made to revive the democratic movement. A Committee for the Defence of Political Prisoners was set up. It gathered two-hundred signatures from well-known activists and figures in the country for a declaration which made severe criticisms of government policy following the November 1987 coup. However, it was immediately shut down and there was no organised protest.

Today there seems to be no hope of organising a significant alternative for the coming Presidential and Legislative elections. The government hopes to polish its rather tarnished democratic image by allowing a couple of dozen non-Destourist deputies into the National Assembly. This is the goal of this week's reform of the Electoral Code, which will introduce very limited proportional representation in certain constituencies.

Lethargy

The student movement, which for decades was in the vanguard of the democratic struggle, is now mired in a thorough-going lethargy. Most activists have been won to Islamic fundamentalist positions, and the overwhelming majority of students are indifferent, even hostile, to activism and politics.

After the Gulf War, the student movement suffered repression even worse than under Bourguiba. The fundamentalist student union, the Tunisian General Union of Students (UGTE), was dissolved and its activists were arrested, tortured and imprisoned. Students were killed right in the middle of university campuses. In the name of the struggle against fundamentalism, the government banned all political activity, muzzled all unions and increased its police presence in university buildings.

While repression is a major reason for the ongoing crisis in the student movement, it is not the only one. The role of the major tendencies of the student left — Maoist and pro-Albanian — must be singled out for criticism. They took over the UGET,⁷ and emptied it of its militant content in order to make it a mechanism for self-enrichment and a dubious bargaining chip in its negotiations with the government.

The UGET congress, held several weeks ago, was one more step in the rapid degeneration of student union organisation. Student demands were

only addressed in a formal manner. POCT sympathisers, who control the apparatus, expelled the last remnants of the Maoist groups from the leadership, and now the Maoists are threatening to split the union. Both factions accuse one another of collaborating with the government; and in this case, both are right.

Maoism has practically disappeared in the country, after having stagnated in the small groups where it had influence among educated youth and teachers. It could not survive the demobilisation of the student movement and the victory of the anti-Iraq coalition.

The POCT also suffered under the weight of these developments, as well as from the fall of the Albanian dictatorship. These events aggravated an internal crisis provoked above all by the party's ambiguous positions in relation to the government and the opportunist practices of the leadership. The POCT was also hit by repression; several dozen of its activists are in prison or facing trial and its principal leaders have had to flee. It still exists, nevertheless, in its trade union strongholds and the UGET.

As with the UGTT, should the crisis of the democratic opposition and left movements not be linked to the overall crisis of the system which produced them?

It is easy to agree with respect to the different forms of the bourgeois opposition. Originating in the Destour party itself, these currents wanted only to reform the Bourguibist system from within. For some, the idea was to democratise Bourguibism a little and liberalise it a lot; for others, it was to revive its populist inspiration. These currents developed only at the margins of the Destour bureaucracy, taking advantage of certain clientelist and regionalist networks.

To varying degrees, the left clearly demarcated itself from Bourguiba, but it also defended a statist, technocratic, modernist and populist model rather than a genuinely anti-capitalist alternative. Their model was that of the petty-bourgeois (the urban population, intellectuals, students), layers whose social mobility, although achieved thanks to the Destour regime, was now threatened by it.

This generation of activists also lived through the rise of struggles in the

6. Habib Achour was the first General Secretary of the UGTT and has lent his name to the federation's "Achourist" tendency.

7. The UGET, in contrast to the pro-Islamic UGTE, is traditionally the leftist student union.

1960s and 1970s on both the Arab and international level. As it matured it was characterised by optimism in the self-liberating potential of humankind and the emancipatory character of technology, and by ideas of progress and rationalism — all heavily influenced by the Stalinist model.

It is not possible to link this generation and the youth of the 1980s and 1990s. There are considerable differences in terms of political culture, their models and values. The 1960s and 1970s generation was that of a society which was rebuilding and restructuring itself after years of colonialism — not a left of a society decomposing under the effects of economic liberalism. It was the generation of May '68, Vietnam, and the Palestinian resistance — not that of Yeltsin, the Gulf War and the Gaza-Jericho Peace Accord.

The education system is an example. The slogans "democratise, modernise" were the pride and joy of the Bourguiba regime. It was a central institution for national mobilisation and unification — to spread ideological influence, for the mobility of the middle classes, to reproduce the Destour bureaucracy, and so forth. It was also where the left and, more generally, the opposition, emerged. But today it is going through a crisis from which it will not recover. The system is rotten, and is no longer a vehicle for any kind of project for society. It creates only semi-literates and graduates with no future.

In such conditions, the traditional left is outdated; its schemas are obsolete. The necessary thorough-going reform of concepts and methods did not take place, or did so only partially and in the wrong direction. The new left which emerged in the 1980s was the result of the decomposition of both the education system and the political climate generally. It had no ideals, was cynical, clientelistic and sometimes corrupt.

The new left has developed within the fabric of a system which — in spite of its failures, incongruities and crises — was generally able to consolidate

itself. It emerged as a symptom of the system's failures and as an omen of its decline. Fundamentalism is above all the product of the crisis of the regime, its periods of growth corresponding to the breakdown of the major components of the regime's stability.

On the one hand there was the retreat of the trade union movement and, on the other, the loss of the government's legitimacy in the eyes of its main constituency, the middle classes.

Fundamentalism resembles fascism, but it is not fascism. True, there is a popular base — petty-bourgeois, but leading the poorest, most desperate youth.



It has a reactionary ideology, which is anti-worker, anti-democratic, and has a pronounced tendency towards violent methods and the cult of the personality. We can also add the relationships between fundamentalist currents and the most reactionary regimes in the region, and with imperialism (above all American).

But there is a major difference to fascism. One cannot compare the historic role of the petty-bourgeoisie in imperialist States in crisis with petty-bourgeois and popular layers in capitalist countries dominated by imperialism.

In the context of the retreat of the world socialist revolution, the failure of

Arab nationalism and the defeats of the working-class movement, the fundamentalist movement has emerged as an expression of revolt by the middle classes and informal sectors⁸ which are growing on the capitalist periphery (with a spill-over effect on the working class). It is a revolt against the dependent bourgeois regimes whose plans have led to a tragic impasse. The return to Islam and anti-Western feeling are but a desperate rejection of imperialist oppression.

The nature of the social forces which make up the base of the fundamentalist movement and its ideology tends, however, to affect popular mobilisation in such a way that the bourgeoisie can turn it to its own ends. For certain currents, there is a tendency towards seeking alliances with imperialist States. And the establishment of a government under fundamentalist hegemony could only lead to the smashing of the mass movement.⁹

Tunisia provides an example of the shifting and contradictory reality of the fundamentalist current. Its social roots are much more shallow than in Algeria; its ability to mobilise people is far less; it has a stronger presence among educated youth, mid-level administrative employees and the "informal" petty-bourgeoisie, and not among the unemployed and marginalised sectors. This is perhaps why it is more politically uniform than elsewhere, and also relatively moderate.

8. The expression "informal sectors" does not only describe those who work in and/or profit from the black market but also all those who are forced to work without any form of social protection.

9. One cannot help but agree with the exiled Moroccan revolutionary Abraham Serfaty when he writes, "There will be no revolution in the Arab world without some sort of convergence between a progressive Muslim current and a secular current." He calls for the emergence within Islam of an equivalent to the "liberation theology" current in Catholicism. In Tunisia, the situation seems to be more favourable for such a development in that the Islamic movement "is more open-minded, accepts debate and reflects upon questions of democracy." (*The North, the South*, in *Politis La Revue*, Summer 1993). The problem remains that in Tunisia, and probably elsewhere, the Islamic tendencies which are the most open-minded around questions of democracy, rationalism and so forth also have the most accommodating attitude in relation to imperialism, and are the most conciliatory towards the government.

Since it emerged as a political force, the Tunisian fundamentalist current has suffered repression three times: in 1981, in 1987 and from 1990 until now. Following the fall of Bourguiba, the new government pursued a policy of flattering the fundamentalists, asserting through different symbolic measures Tunisia's Arab and Islamic character.

After the legislative elections of April 1989, when the results reflected the fundamentalists' growing support, the government took a two-track approach. On the one hand, they evoked the threat of fundamentalism to rally a section of the middle classes and the democratic movement to their side. On the other, they began repression.

This repression was largely small-scale until 2 August 1990 (the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait), after which time it was hugely increased. The Gulf crisis led to significant conflicts within Nahda.¹⁰ The divisions and paralysis of the leadership and the fact that it did not mobilise against the imperialist aggression led to a loss of credibility.

Distance

The pro-Iraq positions formulated late in the game by the majority current around Rached Ghanouchi did not make them the leadership of the mass mobilisation, unlike the Algerian Islamic Salvation Front (FIS). The government was able to formally distance itself from the United States of America (USA)-led coalition (although it applied the embargo) and come to a consensus with the opposition based around Ben Ali.

This significant gain gave the government a free hand for its police attacks on Nahda. There have been tens of thousands of arrests — with many still languishing in gaol; the systematic use of torture; an as yet unknown number of deaths; army occupation of certain neighbourhoods, and so forth.

Nahda has no public profile save through the activities of exiled leaders, allies of the 1980s-era Prime Minister, Mohamed Mzali. While virulently denouncing the government, Ghanouchi (who remains the main leader) tries to secure the favours of France and the USA, by asserting his stance in favour of economic liberalism and political democracy.

In his last communiqué, which appeared on 29 November 1993, Ghanouchi called for a boycott of the forthcoming elections and compares the situation in Tunisia with that in Bosnia. But the central purpose of the communi-

qué — released just after the arrests and raids carried out against Islamic milieux by the French government — can be found in the long paragraph reminding all Islamic exiles of their absolute duty to respect the laws of their host country.

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of the fundamentalists on the population or the results of their attempts at clandestine re-organisation. Nor is it possible to know the real content of their internal debates and conflicts. Opinions pronounced abroad by their leaders do not necessarily reflect the positions of currents in the country.

That said, the dominant approach seems to be that of counting on the progressive deterioration of the situation, to wait and see what the repercussions of the Algerian crisis will be in Tunisia and to convince the imperialist world that stability in the region depends on the integration of fundamentalists into official political life.

Whatever the case may be, in a crisis situation Nahda remains the only political force which can intervene on the ground and enjoy popular support. And the possibility of such a crisis is not just some remote fundamentalist pipedream.

In spite of the current order, the absence of struggles, the calm reassurance of successive governments, good growth rates and the satisfaction of the International Monetary Fund, the government is more vulnerable than it has been for thirty years.

Indeed, the sole objective of the authors of the November 1987 coup was to rescue the government, which had fallen prey to the dangerous whims and fancies of a "supreme fighter". Imperialism, particularly American imperialism, probably saw the coup as a way of avoiding the implosion of a disintegrating regime which had no direction.

Ben Ali had neither the ambition nor the means to effect a thoroughgoing transformation of the system, nor to inject a new dynamism which could have restored some of its lost popular credibility. Winning time to consolidate his hold over the State apparatus, guaranteeing international support, reassuring propertied elements worried by the mad schemes of Bourguiba — these were his first and only goals. In relation to the people, he knows only one approach: cheat, buy, repress. And from this we have the series of minimal concessions, manoeuvres, manipulation, demagoguery and corruption which have characterised his rule. For recalcitrant sectors, the approach is very simple: repression.

Unlike the Bourguiba regime, which had historic legitimacy, the post-coup government has no roots in the masses. Nobody is a "Ben-Alist", as one may have been "Bourguibist". Ben-Alism is an empty shell, despite attempts by the official propaganda agency to fashion a philosophy around human rights and democracy rooted in the Arab and Muslim heritage. This is an ideological cover for bureaucratic and bourgeois interests — particularly the consumerism of some privileged layers of the middle classes.

A series of favourable circumstances have, however, allowed the government to take the initiative. For example, successful harvests have cushioned the effects of economic liberalisation, the Gulf War and the putsch in Algeria.

"Taking the initiative" can only mean one thing for such a government: unleashing the floodgates of police repression, to repress not only the fundamentalists but all forms of opposition and all divergent opinions. The defence of civil society against the obscurantist threat has become the major theme of government propaganda — while at the same time, the police goons of the Ministry of the Interior have busied themselves with the smashing up of all the networks and structures of civil society which have retained some degree of autonomy. There is no relationship between the government and the people, save when the policeman's truncheon strikes.

The Bourguiba regime completed the colonialists' work of destroying traditional forms of community in the country. But it largely replaced them with other forms of solidarity, other allegiances, from which it was able to draw support, so long as it sustained a certain equilibrium.

The post-1987 coup government is based on the shifting sands of a society which economic liberalisation is decomposing, destructuring and desocialising.

This process of liberalisation is an obstacle to the re-organisation of the working class and democratic movement along traditional lines, while favouring clientelist arrangements and the search for individual solutions. It also generates attitudes and a potential for violence which could lead to social explosions — or serve as a basis for the implementation of solutions even more authoritarian than experienced up to this point. ★

10. Nahda, or "Renaissance movement", is the principal fundamentalist organisation in Tunisia.

Pointing to the potential

LAST autumn, Belgium was shaken by a powerful wave of struggle against the austerity programme of the Jean-Luc Dehaene government, a coalition between christian democratic and social democratic parties* from the north and south of the country. The movement did not succeed in defeating government plans; parliament gave the green light to "the global project for employment, competitiveness and social security". But what happened points to the potential explosiveness of the social situation in a number of countries.

ALAIN TONDEUR** — Brussels, 17 January 1994

THE social movement began on 29 October with a national demonstration by the Socialist trade union FGTB, for which more than 60 thousand people mobilised over two days. This unexpected success produced a wave of hope and stimulated the combativeness of the whole working class.

Following this, there was tremendous pressure in favour of united action and the Christian trade union CSC was forced to take to the streets. On 15 November, the "Common Trade Union Front" called for a selective national strike; the railways and other services were spared, but industry was paralysed.

There were sectoral strikes on 22 November and 24 November in three and six provinces respectively. The week of 22 to 26 November saw the struggle reach its peak, with a general strike paralysing the country on 26 November. Due to a lack of perspective, the movement then ran out of steam, ending on 10 December with a final demonstration organised by the FGTB. This final demonstration was smaller than that on 29 October, and the bitterness of activists was obvious.

The movement highlighted significant changes in working class opinion, the consciousness of trade union activists, and the activity of different sections of the working class — in terms of the forms of struggle and in relations with the trade union apparatuses. Deep anger over never-ending sacrifices had finally burst forth.

Belgium is actually in a rather unusual situation in the European context, having a public debt of 7,000 billion Belgian francs (\$US195 billion) or one-hundred and twenty percent of gross

national product (GNP). Since the end of the 1970s, governments have imposed a series of austerity programmes. The annual State deficit has been brought closer to the European average (nearly six percent of GNP today as opposed to more than eleven percent of GNP at the beginning of the 1980s) but the country is still far from meeting Maastricht criteria. However, the ruling class is fully in favour of respecting its demands, not only to save its policy of a strong franc linked to the German mark, but also from its fear of institutional instability, given the State's composition of two separate linguistic blocs.

The road remaining to be travelled will be even more difficult, inasmuch as the social damage has already been severe: 500 thousand unemployed; 1.1 million victims of unemployment; and twenty-one percent of households living in a state of material insecurity.

Broad layers of the population now know that sacrifices serve only to "make the rich richer and the poor poorer." It is well known that the State budget would be in order were the State not obliged to pay out 730 billion Belgian francs yearly to service a debt which is ninety percent internal.

"Take the money"

Over the years the slogan "Take the money where there's money to spare!" has been widely taken up and translated into precise demands: for taxes on large fortunes; an increase in corporate taxes (more than a half of firms pay no tax); the elimination of fiscal privileges for multinationals and power companies; taxes on stockmarket profits; and also the outright cancellation of the debt.

For trade union activists this combines with a growing awareness that social needs must be satisfied if society is not to splinter, with an attendant growth of the far right. The question of unemployment occupies a central place in this awareness.

Many trade unionists understand that austerity, and the race for competitiveness, flexibility and increased productivity (areas in which Belgium is in first place in Europe, and perhaps in the world) does not create jobs but in fact eliminates them.

Demands for a radical reduction in the working week (to thirty-five or thirty-two hours) are increasingly counterposed to the employers' strategy of increasing part-time work. Proposals for a public programme of job creation to meet social needs are met with considerable interest.

As such, this latest social movement has had an anti-capitalist thrust — unfocused, but clearer than in the struggles of the 1977-86 period. Several factors point to rising discontent with the very logic of the system — with a war of competition between working people in different countries and between those active in and excluded from the labour market.

These sentiments have not cancelled out the rising tendencies towards xenophobia, but last autumn shows that the social frustrations behind them can lead to tremendous social struggles which massively strengthen solidarity in word and in deed.

The strike on 26 November clearly reflected the current state of mass feeling in the country and was without precedent even in Belgium's rather stormy social history. It was something more than a simple national work stoppage — a sign that the working class is still capable of throwing its weight behind a general strike.

The autonomous activity of working people was impressive. As the big enterprises were in general already paralysed,

* The coalition includes the Christian People's Party (CVP) from Flanders; the Christian Social Party (PSC) from Wallonia; the Flemish Socialist Party; and the Walloon Socialist Party.

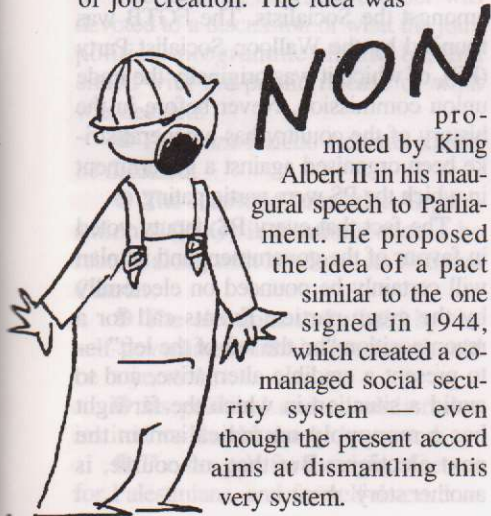
** The author is a member of the Socialist Workers' Party (POS/SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International) and editor of the organisation's journal, *La Gauche*.

massive pickets were concentrated on small and medium enterprises which lack union representation. Industrial parks were cut off with road blocks. In many cities, the trade unions were able both to paralyse industry and organise big demonstrations: 15 thousand in Antwerp on 22 November; 4 thousand in Liège and 4 thousand in Louvière on 24 November; 5 thousand in Charleroi and 3 thousand in Leuven on 26 November. These figures also show that Walloon (the French-speaking region) is no longer the driving social force in the country.

A number of factories joined together the two days of strike action, 24 and 26 November, by combining national and their own specific demands. The following features should also be noted: the central role of industrial workers; the dynamism of a new generation of young workers; and the beginnings of an alliance between the working class and the youth movements — on 24 November, 20 thousand youth (largely Flemish) demonstrated against racism to mark the second anniversary of the electoral breakthrough of the far right Vlaams Blok party.

This social mobilisation can be cited as an example of the potential which exists for sudden social turns. Last summer, after the death of King Baudouin, Belgium was submerged in very powerful emotions. The exaltation of the moral values of the deceased monarch, his faith, his commitment to the plight of "the most disadvantaged", his contempt for the mediocrity of the political class — all this created a stifling climate of populist national unity.

The media chose to blow up the whole affair and the upper reaches of the State thought the moment right to conclude a "Social Pact" linking the trade unions to austerity, under the cover of job creation. The idea was



In the midst of all this Prime Minister Dehaene obtained a solemn declaration from his social partners to the effect that they would conclude a pact "as desired by the King", and from the end of August until 20 October, secret negotiations were conducted at the highest level.

A group of experts presided over by the Governor of the National Bank — in violation of the Maastricht Treaty, which calls for the central banks to be independent — submitted a thick report which the Prime Minister immediately made the basis for the pact. During these weeks, social passivity was pronounced, despite worrying reports of the attack which was being prepared.

Split

The movement was born not as a result of direct pressure from the rank and file, but rather due to a split in the upper ranks of the apparatus of the FGTB. The main industrial trade union groupings agreed to reduce wage costs through the lowering of employers' contributions to social security. They were even ready to renegotiate collective agreements concluded for 1994 (which included an average wage increase of 1.5% and the automatic indexation of salaries).

However they could not agree on the question of government control of the agreements, which they felt might lead to the marginalisation of the trade unions in the factories — where social negotiation, a pillar of the Belgian system, has already deteriorated under the effects of "participative management".

With massive unemployment, contracting out, and growing recourse to the courts by employers to safeguard the "right to work", the national inter-professional apparatus of the trade union could no longer continue the negotiations, and they were broken off after the first sitting on 21 November. The smokescreen of unanimity which had hidden class contradictions thus evaporated in one fell swoop.

The President of the FGTB, François Janssens, tried to stop things at that point, but in vain. The pressure to act was too strong.

The success of the FGTB demonstration on 29 October also forced the CSC to take action. Its apparatus did not appreciate having its hand forced in this way. It was not against action, but not in such circumstances, and certainly not around the themes concentrated upon by the FGTB demonstration.

In fact, since the beginning of 1993, the CSC leadership had been preparing its members to accept a new austerity offensive and had talked about the idea of a social pact before anyone else.

The CSC leadership wanted to see a massive reduction in salaries and costs, in exchange for job creation and "equally shared" sacrifices. An internal poll asked members to choose between different formulas of "work sharing", with the understanding that factory competitiveness would not suffer as a result. Losses in wages were presented as a demonstration of solidarity among working people. Finally, an acceleration in the privatisation of public enterprises was seen as a source of finance which could be devoted to employment.

The CSC leadership counted on its support in the Flemish Christian People's Party (CVP) (one of the main bourgeois parties) to obtain employer commitment to their proposals. But the FGTB mobilisation spoiled their game, and re-oriented the concerns of the population.

However, even though the two trade union confederations established an action plan together, and adopted five common demands, the priorities of their apparatuses were different.

They did have two common concerns. One was not to bring down the coalition government. Accordingly, the second was not to pursue the memorandum on "Take the money where there's money to spare" and "Provide employment for all" which they delivered to the government in 1992.

But for the rest, the priority of the CSC apparatus was to co-manage a kind of employment policy, while that of the FGTB was to defend collective agreements. This difference is related to the specific differences in the ways christian-democratic and social-democratic reformism exercise hegemony and go into crisis.

The two trade unions do not share the same national and social centres of gravity. The CSC holds the majority in Flemish-speaking Flanders while the FGTB holds the majority in French-speaking Walloon and they belong to competing networks of political clientelism. There is not enough space to go into this matter here, but the policy of division carried out by the trade union leaderships is a result of these factors — as certain activists have thought, a conspiracy.

In the heat of the mobilisation, these divisive policies were exposed as never before. After the strike on 15 November,

employers advised the government to abandon its freezing of collective agreements for 1994, in order to avoid sparking class war in their factories.

In exchange, in the name of balance, Dehaene manipulated indexation. Under the pretext of protecting the environment and discouraging the consumption of tobacco and alcohol, salary increases to keep up with the rise in living costs were postponed for eight months. The Prime Minister also took minimal measures against the "rich" — which were essentially measures against popular savings.

The leadership of the FGTB considered this to be "positive" action and announced an end to its actions. At the same time, the CSC said the plan was unacceptable and enlarged the mobilisation. Fifteen days later, the tables were turned; the CSC suspended its activities (while judging government proposals to be unsatisfactory), while the FGTB prepared for the final battle of 10 December.

Tens of thousands of trade unionists mobilised against the divisive policies of the apparatuses. The fact that the raising of the stakes at the top did not draw a favourable response from the rank and file is a new development.

Confrontation

The first struggle was waged to force the CSC to quit pact negotiations, but the most spectacular confrontation took place inside the FGTB. When its leadership's position became known, there was a veritable revolt in the trade union. In Antwerp, the local apparatus immediately gave in to strike threats from the chemical sector. In Liège, where the local leadership tried to keep a lid on things, strikes broke out in steel and metal works. The national office was forced to beat a hasty retreat before its congress, which — a happy coincidence — had been scheduled for two days after its decision to suspend activities and two days before the cancelled industrial action, on 18 November.

At this congress, Janssens tried a new manoeuvre by calling for a strike on 26 November — a "Red Friday" for the FGTB alone. But the CSC supported the proposal, leading to the success of the 26 November action.

But those who wanted to go further down the road of trade union unity did not get very far. This was primarily to do with the very apolitical nature of the trade union left, which radicalises in action, but is not very strong around

questions of strategy and programme. To overcome division, there should have been a call for the full withdrawal of the plan, and a repetition of the demands put forward in the 1992 memorandum.

With such a perspective, the fall of the government would have been inevitable. So a political alternative was needed to offer a third way, which neither supported the coalition government nor paved the way for the return of the Thacherite Verhofstadt of the Flemish Liberal party, the VLD.

The Socialist Workers' Party (POS/SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International) put forward the idea that a social movement could, through struggle, break the political apparatuses and force a major political recomposition to the left, within the perspective of forming a "social government". The proposal was met with some interest, but despite the political awakening of the trade union left it was still inadequate to defend it and tackle the apparatuses.

The line of the trade union leadership made it possible for the government to push through almost the whole of its programme. This is a significant victory for the employers; they have obtained the maximum possible given the current relationship of forces.

Salaries have been frozen until 1996. The indexation of salaries and social payments has been manipulated. Employers can hire young workers at 90% of the full salary, even if this means paying less than below the minimum wage, and do not have to make employer payments to social security for a full year.

For every "new job", employers receive a credit of 100 thousand Belgian Francs per year deductible from their contributions to social security. "New employment" is defined as any job equivalent to at least fifty percent of a full-time job. So enterprises have an ideal legal framework in which to generalise flexibility and further increase the amount of part-time work.

Any reduction in the working week with no reduction in wages has been excluded. Moreover, the government has implemented a scandalous measure to force certain categories of the unemployed to accept "small jobs" offered by individuals through local agencies.

The plan has also led to a structural destabilisation of social security, through a decrease in revenues. Since these shortfalls will be compensated primarily through an increase in indirect taxation, working people will suffer. As for employers, they will profit three

times over: once through the lowering of costs, then through the development of private pensions and health insurance, and finally through the privatisations — facilitated by the growth of private insurance, which will release additional capital.

Aside from maintaining wage agreements for 1994, the government did not make a single real concession. The trade union movement will be able to confirm how the employers use the fruits of its modification in the area of wages. The stated goal is to negotiate "enterprise plans for the sharing of employment". But this concession is also a terrible trap, for it will be very difficult for trade union delegations not to be complicit in the capitalist reorganisation of production.

As for the employers, they are satisfied with the whole procedure, which has "depoliticised" the plan, placing social situation down to the level of individual firms — where they are strong — and restoring the social peace which is indispensable to the proper functioning of the "just in time" economy.

The parliamentary vote in favour of the plan is a victory for the CVP and the Christian Social Party (PSC). The CVP has discovered that a robust austerity policy can be implemented with a social democratic coalition partner — against the trade union movement, and with minimal risks of the social explosion which a purely bourgeois government could very well provoke.

Nevertheless, the breadth of the movement has had an impact politically. The government could only push through the plan at the cost of a tremendous amount of tension within its social bases and in the Flemish CSC, there are a growing number of voices calling for a clean break from the CVP.

The trauma is at least as deep amongst the Socialists. The FGTB was founded by the Walloon Socialist Party (PS), of which it was originally the trade union commission. Never before in the history of the country has a general strike been organised against a government in which the PS were participating.

The fact that every PS deputy voted in favour of the government and its plan will certainly be pounced on electorally by the green parties. Events call for a recomposition "on the left of the left" — to present a credible alternative, and to avoid a situation in which the far right has a monopoly on radicalism in the next elections. But that, of course, is another story. ★

Inside the PLO

Introduction

Walid Salem is already known to our readers. In our November 1993 issue we published an interview with this militant Palestinian from the occupied West Bank, imprisoned several times for his involvement in the leadership of the Intifada and accused of belonging to the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Unfortunately the conditions in which the interview was carried out and transcribed resulted in his words being cut short and a little misrepresented. We therefore suggested that he put forward his point of view in a new contribution.

The article which we publish below contains important information on the debates within the opposition to the Washington Accords. It also exposes the views of the left of the PLO, which we have already had occasion to criticise, notably on the subject of the kind of alliance there should be with the Islamic fundamentalists and how the Rabin-Arafat Accords should be approached (see *International Viewpoint*, no. 252, January 1994, p18). **Salah Jaber** ★

WALID SALEM — 24 January 1994

THE course of the discussions between the ten groups which make up the Palestinian opposition* shows that these organisations have not yet been able to organise anything more than simple co-ordination between themselves, despite the efforts of democratic elements.

It is worth examining closely the events of the last three meetings of "the ten" — which can be divided into democratic, nationalist and Islamic tendencies — which took place in December 1993 and January this year. At these meetings the future and tactics of their alliance were central topics.

Discussion

The meeting on 15 December was devoted to a discussion of what the joint political programme should be, and ended with the public release of what was decided:

- The Gaza-Jericho Accords should be defeated;
- The Palestine Liberation Organisation's (PLO) institutions should be rebuilt, along with loyalty to its National Charter;
- The elections to be held by the self-government administration should be boycotted;
- Its political and administrative institutions should also be boycotted;
- The struggle for the right of return for Palestinians, and for self-determina-

tion and full national independence should be re-affirmed.

An "Alliance of Palestinian Forces", comprised of the ten, was declared on the basis of the new programme, which also defined tasks on the pan-Arab and international levels. However, no clear strategy was advanced in respect of building a new leadership of the Intifada (uprising) in the territories occupied since 1967 — a significant drawback to the programme as a whole.

The 30 December meeting was devoted to the question of organisation. In the previous meeting Hamas had proposed a Central Leadership (CL) of forty members, in which forty percent would be Hamas members, forty percent would be from other organisations, and twenty percent would be independents. It had further proposed that there should be an Executive Committee (EC), comprised of a member from each of the ten and five independents chosen by the CL.

Hamas now proposed that half of the CL should be comprised of independents, which it would have the right to choose, while the other half should be comprised of two members from each of the ten. The EC would still be comprised of one member from each of the ten but the five independents would be chosen by consensus of the ten, rather than by the CL.

The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) proposed a CL of twenty members (two from each of the ten) and an Executive of ten members (one from each). It also proposed that a national conference be organised to lay the basis for the reconstitution of PLO

institutions without Arafat, along democratic lines. It was the only organisation to insist on the need for the Intifada to have a national and Islamic leadership.

Saika (a nationalist current) made a third proposal. It called for a CL which would comprise three members from each of the ten, and a number of independents (to be determined collectively) and an EC comprised of equal numbers of representatives from each of the ten and independents.

The Hamas proposals were rejected by the nine other organisations, which requested that they be withdrawn. Hamas then requested a delay of one week, and the meeting was adjourned.

The 5 January meeting was devoted to reaching an agreement with Hamas on organisation. At the beginning, the Islamic movement conditionally accepted the political programme (including that part relating to the PLO Charter) provided that forty percent of places were allotted to Hamas.

Representation

The formula eventually agreed was that of equal representation for all the organisations in the leadership. However, there was no longer agreement on that part of the political programme relating to the rebuilding of the PLO and its National Charter.

After a long discussion, the meeting adopted a resolution to the effect that firstly, the Alliance should be based upon equal representation, with the CL being comprised of two representatives and the EC of one representative from each of the ten, and, secondly, the political programme decided on 15 December should be transformed into a list of "political tasks".

Although the part relating to the rebuilding of the PLO and its Charter was retained, no specific details were agreed concerning the timescale and framework within which the Palestinian leadership should be rebuilt.

The result of the meetings is the logical conclusion of the positions held by and conflict between the three major tendencies which make up the ten.

* See *International Viewpoint*, no. 250, November 1993

What is the current position of the democratic, nationalist and Islamic tendencies?

The **democratic** tendency is essentially made up of the PFLP and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), together with two small organisations: the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) and the Front for Popular Struggle (FPS). Its approach may be summarised thus:

1. The ten must direct themselves towards forming a national Islamic



Front, as a provisional framework in which to rebuild the PLO without Arafat and the supporters of the Gaza-Jericho Accords. A rebuilt PLO would unite the opponents of the Accords, (including Arafat Fatah opponents), and would attempt to draw in independent figures from the Palestinian National Council (PNC), the Central Council and members of the PLO Executive Committee, in particular those who have resigned or been suspended from it.

2. However, care should be taken that the building of a national, democratic and Islamic front does not become a goal in itself. It should only be a transitional front for the rebuilding of the PLO institutions, which should be taken up by all opponents of the Gaza-Jericho Accords, independent of their Marxist, nationalist or Islamic ideological projects. PLO membership at this stage of the national liberation struggle should represent political and practical support for a national, not ideological program-

me. Of course, democratic forces must preserve their specific character, and also carry out the democratic struggle for women's liberation. In this way they will have sufficient weight in the new PLO to prevent domination by Hamas, oppose reactionary features of religious ideology and defend the rights of the working class, which should become the dominant social force in the national struggle.

The idea is certainly not to build an alliance between Marxists and Hamas which will grant hegemony to Hamas

and provide a leftwing cover for its growth, but to rebuild the PLO without Arafat, with all those forces which continue to support the national programme — the democratic, nationalist and Islamic tendencies. The last tendency currently plays an important role in the national struggle and cannot be excluded, unless, as it appears to be considering, it changes its current position and participates in the elections of the self-government administration — which change would constitute a clear break with the aim of rebuilding the PLO.

3. The tendency has proposed democratic mechanisms for the formation of a transitional front and the rebuilding of the PLO. These would involve the masses through popular assemblies which would elect delegates to a broad national conference, which in turn would elect the leadership of the PLO. Hopefully this would prevent leaders of the new structures being chosen only by the top.

4. Finally, the tendency emphasises

that the struggle against the Gaza-Jericho Accords cannot be waged **only** on the basis of strategic slogans. Slogans must be translated into concrete action and a firm political programme which addresses the issues of the right to return, self-determination, and the creation of an independent Palestinian State with international credibility.

For its part, the **nationalist** tendency is represented primarily by Fatah-Intifada (a dissident Fatah group led by Abu Mussa), the Popular Front General Command (PF-GC), Saika, and the Palestinian Revolutionary Communist Party. The first two organisations have taken the following positions;

1. It is unnecessary to form a national, democratic and Islamic front. It would be better to convene immediately a meeting of the PNC, to elect a new leadership of the PLO. According to the democratic tendency, this proposal is premature and makes it impossible to try and convince independents and opponents within Fatah that they should participate in the rebuilding of the PLO.

2. The tendency is rather unsupportive of the idea of involving the masses in the rebuilding of the PLO and in elections of its leadership, preferring that only the ten choose the members of a broad national conference, each organisation sending representatives according to predetermined quotas.

3. The tendency supports the strategic objective of an independent Palestine, but rejects both the idea of seeking international legitimacy and a transitional formula for an independent Palestinian State, wanting the liberation of all Palestine rather than simply an independent state.

The **Islamic** tendency is composed of Hamas and Islamic Jihad and takes the following stance:

1. In the political arena it is similar to the nationalist tendency in that it also rejects a quest for international legitimacy and a transitional formula.

2. From the beginning the tendency has approved the idea of a national Islamic front (as opposed to a national, democratic, Islamic front). It has also supported the idea of forming an Islamic national leadership of the Intifada — no doubt because it believes it has the support of the masses and so can do so alone.

3. Although following the meeting on 15 December the two organisations agreed to work within the PLO and rebuild its institutions, and also agreed to recognise the Charter (on condition that

it be amended to include the project of a future Islamic State in Palestine), this was not through conviction (although they claimed this) but rather due to the fact that the PLO is recognised on a pan-Arab and international level. Further, gaining leadership of the PLO is not their strategic objective. Both organisations have always stated openly that their aim is to build a replacement organisation.

4. The tendency agrees with the idea of broad national conferences and popular assemblies, but only on condition that these are propagandist bodies with no democratic role, that is, without mass participation in the election of the leaderships.

5. A minority current in Hamas is in favour of participating in the self-government administration elections, if they involve election to a legislature. This position shows that they have not understood the liquidationist nature of the Gaza-Jericho Accords in relation to the Palestinian struggle. If this current should strengthen, leading to a shift in the Hamas position, the tendency could end up participating in the liquidation of the struggle.

Alliance

It should be stated that Islamic Jihad does not support the position of Hamas, particularly with regard to organisation of the Alliance, and is also firmly opposed to the self-government administration elections.

The attitude of Hamas towards programme and organisation in the meetings on 15 December and 5 January led to the formation of an alliance rather



than a front (and so a reduced platform) and to adopt "political tasks", not a substantive programme. Nor was a timescale agreed for the rebuilding of the PLO. Arafat thus continues to appear as its legitimate leader.

Moreover, there remains a lack of clarity in respect of establishing a national leadership of the Intifada. If no leadership is set up the activities of the ten in the Occupied Territories will become

dispersed between Hamas, the PFLP and DFLP, with further isolated activity by Islamic Jihad. None of the other groups has any real existence in the Territories.

There is no reason, however, for pessimism.



Firstly, the meetings have reduced a concrete result — an alliance around agreed political tasks — a positive achievement which has already produced results in daily activity.

Secondly, we intend to continue the struggle, in particular for the rebuilding of the PLO's institutions in such a way as to remove Arafat's claim to legitimacy, which he uses to obtain support for the Gaza-Jericho Accords, and also for the setting up of a national Islamic leadership for the Intifada, based on the four organisations with a presence in the Occupied Territories. This clandestine leadership will have a public leadership comprised of democratically elected organisations and individuals, involving

the broadest possible mass participation. The PLO has its basis in the Palestinian National Charter, the national programme (adopted in 1974), the political and moral identity of the Palestinian people, its institutions and the people who work within the framework of these.

By signing the Gaza-Jericho Accords, Arafat abandoned the Charter, the programme and the political and

moral identity of the PLO. Accordingly the PLO presently does not exist in its old form. The different currents must remain loyal to the above and rebuild the PLO's institutions with new people, to remove Arafat's appearance of formal legitimacy.

The democratic tendency sees the PLO as a project for Palestinian liberation which is the property of all the Palestinian people — not just of Arafat. The tendency contributed to the building of the PLO and to it becoming the symbol of the political and moral identity of the Palestinian people. This is why it believes that the PLO must continue — unburdened of all those who, under Arafat's guidance, have abandoned the programme and the Charter.

The nationalist tendency shares this conception of the PLO, although differing on the transitional programme. Accordingly, eight of the ten are in favour of maintaining the PLO and rebuilding its institutions — thereby isolating Hamas and Islamic Jihad and increasing the pressure on them to rally to this position.

It is extremely important that Hamas takes part in the rebuilding of the PLO for two reasons: Firstly, if Hamas remains in the ten this weakens the current within it which wants to participate in the self-government administration elections. Secondly, it will be easier to prevent Hamas from posing as an alternative to the PLO or attempting to eliminate it outright if it is involved in the rebuilding.

The discussion on the tactics of each of the three oppositionist tendencies remains open. However, the important point is that we are working for our revolutionary project. Whatever our successes or errors, we must act decisively and with confidence. ★

Tuzla: "A workers' town"

OUR correspondent, who was a driver with the first International Workers' Aid convoy last year, and plans to return to Bosnia in the near future, has sent us the following report. It was originally submitted to the British political magazine *New Statesman and Society* which declined to publish it. In our March issue a major article from Catherine Sammary will continue our regular coverage and analysis of the war in Bosnia.

MICK WOODS* — London, 14 January 1994

WHEN our convoy of trucks reached Tuzla last November we were one of the first convoys to get through for seven months; since the Croatian Defence Organisation (HVO) had begun their blockade of the route from Split to Central Bosnia in April 1993.

The HVO are only one part of the blockade of Tuzla. The town has been surrounded on three sides by Bosnian Serb forces since May 1992 and is constantly in range of heavy artillery. Together, this mis-alliance is trying to starve the city into submission and, perhaps more importantly, isolate it from the Europe of which it is so much a part.

Ideals

Tuzla is the embodiment of the old multi-ethnic Bosnia and the ideals of the old Titoist Yugoslavia. Here Muslim, Croat and Serb lived and continue to live, work and fight side by side. This area had the highest number of people describing themselves as Yugoslavs; the product of mixed marriages or political conviction. When we visited the 760 megawatt power station TE Tuzla, a Serb worker told us he stayed in Tuzla "because it is a workers' town". The most popular picture in factories, offices and homes remains that of Marshall Tito, architect of federal Yugoslavia.

Tuzla benefited from the years of Titoism and grew five-fold in that period to its present 150 thousand inhabitants. It had one of the highest standards of living in the relatively backward Bosnia-Herzegovina (BH), a life its inhabitants remember fondly. Its main industries were mining; there are five deep and two surface coal mines. These supplied the electricity industry for much of Bosnia and Croatia. There are also salt

mines, a massive chemical complex to the west of the town and assorted light industries.

The war has devastated the prosperity of the town. Pits are barely working due to a lack of fuel and explosives. The power station works at five percent of its capacity. It is not certain whether there will be sufficient fuel for the town's communal heating system this winter. Many workers are in the army and most others are working short-time or not at all. Cash wages have fallen with the BH dinar and are now worth between three and five deutschmarks (DM) a month. The Bosnian dinar is no longer a currency, but is a war bond worth about 80 thousand to the DM and is most often encountered as small change.

In any war or disaster a small section of the population will arise to exploit the misery of their fellow citizens. In Tuzla we were told that maybe five percent are working in or living off the black-market. Opposite the town hall you can buy Serbian cigarettes for 7DM a packet, flour for 10DM a kilo, and coffee for between 70 and 90DM a kilo. Diesel is 25DM a litre. Most people are either spending their savings or slowly starving.

Nouveau riches

On the other hand you can see the well dressed nouveau riches eating in the Tuzla Hotel or one of the few remaining restaurants — places where a meal costs six months' salary.

The challenge of controlling this trade seems to be beyond the civil and military authorities and one is forced to ask questions: Who runs it? Who benefits? And why is there not greater effort to suppress it? It was not easy to get answers to any of these questions.

The local authority control some die-

sel stocks for essential services. Much of the trade reaching Tuzla previously had come from the Serbs via a bunch of renegade HVO who had been chased out by the BH army after the massacre by Croat fanatics of twenty-five Muslim civilians at Stupni Do. It is inconceivable that the 70 thousand refugees in the town do not sell some of the items from their food parcels. We were told even more bizarre tales of the BH army buying ammunition from the Serbs only to shoot it back at them. The black-market is at present the most visible sign of market forces at work.

The army has grown since May 1992 when the Tuzla militia and police drove the Yugoslavian National Army (JNA) out of the town with heavy losses. The effect of the United Nations arms embargo has crippled the BH army against their better armed enemies. Soldiers have to walk perhaps twenty-five kilometres to the front where they are issued with six bullets for normal purposes. They are not allowed to fire unless sure of their target or their own lives are in danger. They stay at the front for six days without adequate food and then they walk back.

The Bosnian Serb Army (BSA) they face has tanks, artillery, machine guns, mortars and plenty of ammunition. However, the morale of the BH army is magnificent. On the day before we planned to leave Tuzla we were invited to dinner by the miners' union. While we were eating there was chanting and singing outside in the hotel entrance. We went out and saw maybe two-hundred fully armed soldiers celebrating. When we asked what they were celebrating we were told it was their being sent to the front!

Whoever you talk to in the town, from the Mayor to miners and soldiers, expresses a desire for peace but also a determination to fight to maintain their multi-ethnic Bosnian identity. At the last election in Tuzla the anti-nationalist parties won overwhelmingly. The same cannot be said of the area surrounding it,

* Mick Woods is a supporter of the British Fourth Internationalist paper, *Socialist Outlook*. Jenny Mees, a member of the Belgian section of the Fourth International, the Socialist Workers' Party (POS/SAP), was also on the convoy which reached Tuzla.

which is dominated by Itzebegovich's Muslim Democratic Party.

There is a tension within Bosnia-Herzegovina between the two poles of multi-ethnicity and Muslim nationalism. The Presidency seems to move between the two but can be seen, at this time, to be moving towards the latter and away from the Sarajevo declaration.¹ This reflects many factors: the isolation of BH by both its enemies and the international community; the efforts of the UN to broker a carve-up of BH on ethnic lines; and the real effects of ethnic cleansing on the national psyche (the base of the nationalists in Tuzla is amongst refugees). The arms which have arrived have been from the Muslim world and this has strengthened the hand of the nationalists.

Tuzla is the other pole. The town's Mayor, Selim Beslegic, is the best known spokesperson for the old BH. The 2nd Corps of the BH army, based in Tuzla, has mixed units; for example, the 3rd Mechanised Brigade, made up of Muslims, Croats and Serbs. No ethnic cleansing has taken place of Serbs in this area, although many have moved voluntarily to places like Bijeljina. The only other comparable area is Sarajevo but the effects of the Presidency's shifting position seems to be undermining this.

Tuzla now stands like an island in a sea of nationalist madness, its population slowly starving and freezing in the Bosnian winter. To get a convoy to Tuzla you have to drive over four-hundred kilometres of some of the worst roads and tracks in Europe, and through three battle lines. Tuzla's refugees receive only forty-eight percent of the food needed to keep them alive. Why is this happening?

Airport

Tuzla is an industrialised city with an airport and is two hours drive from Croatia on a perfectly good road. Why does the UN not open the airport and the northern route through Orasje, or the route through Banja Luka and Doboj and carry out its mandate to take humanitarian aid to the people of Central Bosnia?

The simplest answer is that the UN are prepared to use aid and starvation as an instrument with which to force the Bosnian people to accept the Vance/Owen or Owen/Stoltenberg plans, or whatever is being cooked-up in Geneva at the time. This may sound cynical. It is not nearly so cynical as the games which are being played with the

lives of my friends in Tuzla; or the threats of David Owen to suspend aid if Bosnia does not accept his solution to the war. The West may not be pro-Serbian or pro-Croat, but they are certainly pro-order, and the "strong" regimes being built by Milosevic and Tudjman are seen as safer for stability than the beleaguered Bosnians.

Shoe-string

At another level the UN is one of the most flatulent, useless bureaucracies in the world. They hate anyone who comes in on a shoe-string and shows up their inadequacy and inactivity. Thousands of these people are sitting in offices in Zagreb, and Split drawing £30 thousand-plus salaries telling people they are powerless to help and trying to control the whole shooting match. If you doubt this read the outburst of the UNHCR chief in Mostar against Sally Becker for having the cheek to come on to their patch and evacuate injured people.² On the day before we reached Tuzla we were told categorically that it was impossible to proceed further and the only thing to do was to unload in to the local UNHCR warehouse at Zenica.

This is not to deride the genuine efforts of many of the UN staff and soldiers who helped us and showed great friendliness and hospitality on the road but to describe the rotten edifice of the UN operation in Bosnia.

The International Workers' Aid convoy in which I drove had support from trade unionists, socialists, Muslims and many other people in our home countries. We came from England, Ireland, Australia, Belgium and Sweden. We gave our aid to the trade unions, the very same unions which have assisted others in struggle, for example, during the British miners' strike of 1984/85. The people of Tuzla were delighted to see such international support and treated us accordingly. They begged us to tell the world about their situation and specifically to tell our trade union movements. They rely on our solidarity to fight the blockade they face so that their small nation may live in peace and dignity.

There is much we can do: we can start campaigning for the opening of Tuzla airport; we can start asking why the northern route cannot be opened for aid; we can demand our governments drop their hypocritical arms embargo and allow the Bosnian people to defend themselves against aggression; and we can go back there with more aid.

At the end of last year, at a meeting in Copenhagen, International Workers' Aid decided to raise 60 thousand deutschmarks to buy three four-wheel-drive trucks to develop its operation. I can't wait to get back. ★

1. The Sarajevo declaration was published in 1992 by the Bosnia-Herzegovina Presidency, emphasising the multi-ethnic nature of the society they wished to defend.

2. Sally Becker, a Briton, while working independently from any of the various medical agencies, has managed to evacuate wounded on more than one occasion.

Student appeal from Tuzla

"Greetings,

We address you from Tuzla, the centre of north-eastern Bosnia, and the most important mining area of our country.

Soon, two whole years will have passed since the war began in this area. The war has affected all of us but our faculty, Mining & Geology, still functions. Professors and students still work hard and learn so that in the future their acquired knowledge will aid the industrial development of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Our town and country is under a blockade from all sides, so we are in no position to make contact with the outside world.

For these reasons we are appealing for your co-operation.

We have no new books and little access to the necessary literature and journals. Our financial situation is so bad we need whatever help you can give.

Thank you."

Our address is:

**Students' Association
Mining-Geological Faculty/Tuzla
University
Bratstva i jedinstva
75 000 Tuzla**

phone: (075) 238 552 or 239 492

Video out soon!

A video made by members of the International Workers' Aid convoy, and edited by British film-maker Anne Marie Sweeney, is soon to be released.

This will be a resource no solidarity campaign can be without.

Watch this space.

FRANCE

ON Sunday 16 January there was held in Paris the largest mass demonstration since 1968. Around 700 thousand people came from all over France in response to the call of more than eighty organisations. The demonstration marched through the city from mid-day to 9pm, the final part (made up of protesters from the Paris area) not even being able to march through lack of room and time.

The trigger for this exceptional demonstration was a hurried vote in the Senate approving revision of the "Fallou Law". This was to permit massive funding of the infrastructure of private schools by local councils, in other words, with public money.

In demanding the withdrawal of the revision, the demonstration was showing its support for state (secular) education and, in a more general way, for the public services which are being more and more threatened by privatisation. Certainly the secular tradition is very strong in France, being connected with concepts of equality and justice. But there is no doubt that the unexpected success of 16 January was linked to the mounting social mobilisation which has emerged independently of the massive Air France strike or the student struggles.

Backdown

The government has had to back down at each confrontation and did so this time. The very evening before the demonstration, even while the Constitutional Council was annulling the principal articles of the Fallou Law, the Balladur government let it be known that it was abandoning its project.

This new retreat before a mass mobilisation will not fail to have repercussions for the forthcoming struggles. The new social radicalisation also thwarted the Socialist Party's attempt to take credit for the demonstration.

The co-organisers of the demonstration, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR, French section of the Fourth International) and Revolutionary Communist Youth (JCR) organised dynamic and colourful contingents despite rainy weather. **Alain Krivine** ★



a second in Geneva in September 1992 which saw significantly broader participation. The aim of the Paris conference is to stimulate the building of a Europe-wide women's movement ready to act in solidarity for the right to choose.

The Conference will be held in Paris on 25-26-27th March 1994. It will examine the current situation of the right to choose, from Norway to Portugal, from Ireland to Germany and Sarajevo, paying particular attention to the different ways in which women's choice is opposed or limited. These range from pressure from religious institutions and anti-choice "commandos" to government health, family and demographic policies, and the weight of

East-West, North-South, women's right to choose everywhere!

ABORTION

Free access to abortion and contraception was one of the central demands of the women's movement in Western Europe in its earliest and perhaps most militant days. So forcefully did it put its message across, and so much did it win on this terrain, that many people today assume that the question is closed and the situation in general satisfactory.

However, not only is the existing situation far from satisfactory when we examine it more closely — limitations run from strict conditions for and time limits on abortion, to denial of young women's right to contraception and abortion without parental permission, to refusal to reimburse the latest contraceptive pills by social security systems — but the current social, political and economic crisis can only lead to further attacks.

At the same time, the continuing changes in Eastern Europe, where abortion — more than contraception — was often relatively freely available by decision of the bureaucratic governments, have led to a situation where this limited right is also being rolled back, as for example we have seen in Poland.

Faced with this situation, the French National Co-ordinating Committee of Associations for the Right to Abortion and Contraception has taken the initiative to hold a European conference, in co-organisation with the European Network for Women's Right to Abortion and Contraception (ENWRAC). This third European conference follows one held in Norway in 1990, when ENWRAC was founded, and

medical authority and new bio-ethical legislation. It will also advance proposals on practical solidarity and what strategies women in Europe should take, starting from a vision of abortion rights as an indicator of women's place in society. ★

For more details or registration for the conference please contact:

Co-ordination Nationale des Associations pour le Droit à l'Avortement et à la Contraception,

c/o MFPP

4 square Saint-Irénée

75011 Paris, France

Tel: 33-1 48 07 29 10

Fax: 33-1 47 00 79 77

