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Bosnia :

The West's desperate logic

Palestine :

Hebron reveals bitter truth

Dossier :

Women, work and family



CONTENTS

3 BOSNIA

The West's desperate logic

— Catherine Samary

7 PALESTINE

Hebron reveals bitter truth

— Michel Warschawsky

8 PHILIPPINES

New chapter in CPP crisis

— Paul Petitjean

12 SPAIN

Polarisation intensifies

— Joaquin Nieto

DOSSIER: Women

13 Women, work and family

Penny Duggan

14 GERMANY: Women say no!

Brigitte Kiechle

16 BRITAIN: Back to Basic hypocrisy

Gill Lee

19 SZEDEN: Betrayed and enraged

Eva Nikell

22 BELGIUM: À la carte careers

Ida Dequeecker

25 FRANCE: "Baby crash" shock

Isabelle Forest

27 FRANCE

Against misery and exclusion

— Christophe Mathieu

30 ITALY

"Tangentopoli" toppling

— Franco Turigliatto

34 SRI LANKA

Government skulduggery

— Interview with NSSP leader

36 AROUND THE WORLD

● Senegal ● Choi Il-Bung ● IMR

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The West's desperate logic

WERE we really — and are we still — on the verge of a NATO military intervention in Bosnia? The logic of ultimatums pointed in this direction, and may soon force those making them to follow their words with action. But the political goal of all the countries involved was and remains clear: get the Serbo-Croat plan (taken up by Owen-Stoltenberg) signed, thus entrenching the division of Bosnia into three States.

CATHERINE SAMARY
22 February 1994

Introduction

THE Western "powers" are increasingly trapped by the contradictions of their policy in the Bosnian conflict. They hope to prevent by "ultimatum" what they themselves entrenched in their "peace plans" — the building of States through the "ethnic cleansing" of mixed territories. And they have been forced to carry out threats of air strikes, without actually wanting to get caught up in the logic of war.

As we go to press, four Serbian planes have been shot down in circumstances which remain unclear. There can be no prediction about what military response will follow, which the various high commands may very well be in no position to control. It is the very logic of the peace plans that entrench the policies of a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia that is now at an impasse. This logic will continue to come up against the determined resistance of those who remained threatened by genocide.

No bilateral alliance will save Bosnia-Herzegovina — neither the Serbo-Croatian plan that gives the Muslims unviable enclaves nor the plan for a "Croat-Muslim community" which the United States has recently "suggested". The US goal is clearly to disassociate itself somewhat from European plans that it has criticised all along, without, of course, changing their approach in any noticeable way. It may also provide a counterweight to the Russo-Serb rapprochement, which has been too triumphant not to be perceived as dangerous — especially when we can't be sure if "the Russians" are "the good guys or the bad guys", to use the language of the American press. We can be sure — and this is confirmed by the comments made by the Bosnian Serb leader, Radovan Karadzic, following the proclamation of the "Croat-Muslim territory" — that such an approach would actually encourage and not hinder the formation of a Greater Serbia.

A Balkan war or a Balkan union? Tensions between Greece and Macedonia, the explosive character of the Albanian question, the return of the Serbo-Croat war — these are all related to the same crisis that is now tearing Bosnia apart. The governments in place are out to secure territory in the name of ethnicity, to make viable States out of the entities that have emerged from the decomposition of ex-Yugoslavia.

As for the populations concerned, there are fears fed by the manipulation of memories of the horrors of the past and by the terrorism of the militia. But above all these fears are linked to the uncertainties of the present, to the absence of a social project guaranteeing socio-economic and national equality, and guaranteeing the right to live together. — Catherine Samary ☉

WHATEVER the past and present public differences between Western governments might be with regards to the crisis in ex-Yugoslavia, there has been a rapprochement, a division of labour and agreement to re-involve Russia in the process as a major player in the diplomatic game.

Before the Gulf War, the media prepared public opinion for a military intervention that had already been given the go ahead in the highest echelons of power. This time however, it is non-interventionist governments that have come under the pressure of the media's images of horror — the broadcast by American cameras of the atrocity at the Sarajevo market shook public opinion,

and over the space of 24 hours shifted it in favour of intervention.

Nevertheless, the bellicose declarations that followed upon these images have not affected the various governments' approaches. As a result, there was intense diplomatic activity to avoid what is explicitly called the "worst case scenario". Even aerial strikes aimed at saving NATO's reputation in the face of overt "bad faith" in the Serbian camp would be accompanied by an active search for a negotiated way out according to the approach of the current "peace plans".

The powerlessness and lack of credibility of Western governments in the settling of this first "post-Communist" conflict are such that it is essential for them to present the results of these recent operations as a "Serbian retreat under the pressure of NATO's unwavering determination". The truth is quite different.

Many had hoped this flexing of muscles would be favourable to the Bosnian cause. Paradoxically, it will actually serve to accelerate the signing of the accord to divide up Bosnia along ethnic lines. From here on, the American role will be to pressure its Muslim "friends"; whereas before the ultimatum the White House was criticising European plans to impose this very accord on the Bosnian Muslims.

For its part, Germany is threatening the Croatian government with reprisals if it continues its armed intervention in Bosnia. The recent sidelining of Mate Boban is undoubtedly a consequence of these pressures, as is opposition within Croatia to President Franco Tudjman's Bosnia policy.¹

It is too early to know if there has been a real change in this area. The recent US proposal to establish a "Croat-Muslim community" was rejected a few weeks ago by Izetbegovic in his meetings with Tudjman. The proposal is in sharp conflict with the ethnic cleansing now underway in Mostar.

The Russians were to exert pressure on their Serbian allies. The Serbs were all the more likely to accept that the plan

1. Leader of the "Croatian Republic of Herzeg-Bosna", and a member of Croatian President Franco Tudjman's party.

to demilitarise Sarajevo places an equal sign between Bosnian arms and their own and would place Sarajevo under UN control, which would include a presence of Russian troops. Would this UN control uproot or entrench the division of Sarajevo and its current state of siege?

In other words, the "Serbs are retreating" because it is only a formal retreat, and the Russian intervention means that they are not caving in to NATO pressure — even though it was NATO itself which requested Moscow's services.

As such, the Kremlin has got what it wanted in the area of its relations with NATO — co-operation with separation,

Flexing muscle will accelerate the division of Bosnia along ethnic lines



which allows Russia to remain (or re-emerge as) an "autonomous" power. This is indispensable for the stability of the Russian government, against its "patriotic" opponents.² In this arrangement, the West can also re-involve Russia in the diplomatic game — especially so in Bosnia where there are no clear stakes involved.

Ex-Yugoslavia lost its strategic importance for the US and European governments with the coming of Gorbachov and the fall of the Berlin Wall. The uncertainties of "post-Communism" have weighed heavily on the nature of the governments in place in the republics of ex-Yugoslavia as in other countries of Eastern Europe.

There are still no clear answers to the questions concerning either future "enemies" or the share of influence in the region. This is also true for Russia; NATO's hesitations in this regard are telling. Do Western governments know for certain on whom to rely to control the new "order" in central and eastern Europe and the Balkans? The question is

all the more vexing in that Maastricht Europe has yet to stabilise, and the tremendous impact of German unification has to be taken into consideration.

There are clearly zones of influence inherited from history and partially differentiated interests can be distinguished from one government to the next. Through its sheer politico-economic weight, Germany has tended to reconquer what it lost during the Second World War. But the German government is not blind to the pseudo-democracy of its Croat ally. It is also worried — as Gensher was previously³ — about involving Russia in the settling of European conflicts.

France and Britain, traditionally closer to Serbia, want to limit German influence, which is now based in Slovenia and Croatia. But they have chosen to support the Serbo-Croatian alliance to temper extremist forces in both camps, running the risk of sacrificing the Bosnian cause.

Alternative

For its part, the United States does not want the European Union to be an alternative political and military force to NATO, and wants to keep the door open to Russia and Turkey. With Turkey in mind, the US is trying to pose as the "good friend" of the Bosnian Muslims (and Albanians) who in turn help it to give NATO a better image in Europe.

But the White House does not want to lose its "boys" for the Bosnian cause. This is why it gave its support — meekly — to the idea of lifting the arms embargo and criticised European peace plans. It only went along with the idea of decreeing ultimatums when it saw that

its NATO partners did not want to intervene, and that such an intervention could in all likelihood be avoided.

The NATO general command does not want to get involved without "clearly defined objectives". And while the military heads of UN troops have expressed the discomfort they feel being in a war situation where they are supposed to be "peacekeeping", many of them have highlighted the uncontrollable logic that air strikes would unleash — unless they were given massive military back up on the ground, in a yet to be determined political direction. The Belgian General, Briquemont, evoked the myth of the "technological, clean war" in the Gulf and said it was "inadequate for the Bosnian conflict".

The thesis of a single (Serbian) "external" aggressor has been undermined by a number of features of the current conflict: Bosnian Serb support in a referendum for a "Serbian republic"; the explicit Milosevic-Tudjman alliance in favour of the plan to divide up Bosnia; the Croat offensive against Muslims and the ethnic "cleansing"

of Mostar, whose fate is worse than Sarajevo's; and finally, the spreading out of the conflict onto new fronts. The cynicism of realpolitik has done the rest.

This is why the ambiguities of the Vance-Owen plan have given way to official acceptance in the Owen-Stoltenberg of the division of Bosnia-Herzegovina in to "three States" along ethnic lines.

From this angle, the "Muslims" or the "Bosnians" are troublesome, and responsible for the continuation of the war. But is this the basis for a peace plan?

This question is of course central for all those opposed to this dirty war. There is widespread feeling that such a plan could be a lesser evil, given the hatred and wounds produced by the war and the need to find a compromise that can at least lead to a cease-fire.

2. These are the forces that criticise the Yeltsin government's subordination to the International Monetary Fund and the dismantling of the USSR.

3. The German minister of foreign affairs that supported a policy oriented towards Gorbachev.

This is a legitimate debate. Let us simply say that it is not up to "us" (the anti-war movement broadly speaking) to decide, while we may have our opinions. To sign the agreement or not, to continue to fight or not — these are decisions that only the communities concerned can make. But we must support the right to self-defence, and the right to refuse to sign under pressure.

There will be no peace without an acceptable solution for the Bosnian people, from all the different communities. From this angle, a negative judgement can be made of two opposing approaches that both lead to an impasse: the ethnic division of this mixed territory; but also the establishment of a "unitary" Bosnian State that does not take into consideration the ethnic-nationalist polarisation within.

Threat

If the "Muslim" State comes into being one day, it will be in the grip of governments that denounce it as "fundamentalist" from the very beginning. It would run the risk of being constantly under threat, and of genuinely becoming fundamentalist. Everyone would continue to try to enlarge their territory in order to protect their ethnic group, defend their borders or merely acquire some "living space".

The "security zones" that the UN Protection Force has promised to defend more forcefully look a lot like "Indian reservations" cut off from the rest of the world. Moreover, the defence of these zones is worse than illusory — given the arms shortage, the encirclement by Serbian and Croatian forces, and the unwillingness of UN countries to provide ground troops. This is the answer to those who base their approach on the creation of "protectorates".

An opponent of the Geneva "peace plan", Tariq Haveric, a leader of the Bosnian Liberal Party, is aware of the grim consequences in store for the so-called "Muslim" State.

In the 20 October 1993 issue of the French daily *Libération*, he said, "It is above all village folk that will return to a devastated Bosnia. [...] But the majority of doctors, engineers, technicians, economists and university professors who have found refuge in Western countries will not decide out of sheer patriotism to return to the economic and political uncertainties of such a rump State. But without them Bosnia will be thrust a hundred years backwards. [...] Many have lost all their loved ones, have been

tortured and humiliated in Serbian and Croatian camps, and now that the international community has betrayed them they will be advocates of extremism. Worse, by signing the plan, Izetbegovic will relieve the instigators of the Muslim genocide of all historical responsibility. They will always be able to say that the international community supported them, that the co-existence of the three peoples in one single State was never possible and that the war was only a way to oblige the Muslims to accept a division which, in the end, everyone agreed was logical."

The practical effect of this "peace plan" is the spreading out of the conflict onto new fronts in Bosnia-Herzegovina, with 2.7 million displaced people and refugees, 3.5 million over the whole of ex-Yugoslavia and 70 thousand refugee applicants outside this territory.⁴

Instability

Contrary to the expectations of the negotiators, the Serbo-Croat plan supported by Owen and Stoltenberg is producing major instability for all the States and communities concerned. On the one hand, the logic of ethnic separation forces the concerned parties into permanent war, to try to make unviable States viable — by establishing "ethnic corridors", getting access to the sea, and increasing their territory in order to host hundreds of refugees in each community.

On the other hand, ethnic cleansing will continue everywhere insofar as it is accepted as the basis for the formation of States. In spite of the massacres and the refugees, not a single region is homogeneous. There will be a generalisation of situations where minorities are oppressed, and a tendency towards the infinite fragmentation of existing States.

But the alternative is not a war for the reconquest of territories to establish a "unitary" State. Tariq Haveric has spoken of a "war of national liberation" against the plans for a Greater Serbia and a Greater Croatia sketched out in Belgrade and Zagreb. But this approach only addresses one of the many issues involved.

Such Serbo-Croat plans — and not inter-ethnic conflicts — are indeed the major cause of the war. But they have won support in Bosnia itself. The Bosnian State cannot survive if it excludes any one of its constituent communities. While the armed forces of Karadzic⁵ and Boban have received substantial support in arms and men, from Belgrade

and Zagreb respectively — and while a joint offensive was being prepared on the eve of the market massacre — the war is not only one of foreign aggression. It is also the consequence of the "ethnic votes" that brought even the nationalist parties to power in Bosnia.

The workers of Tuzla in central Bosnia represent the embryo of resistance to the reactionary policies of ethnic cleansing. However weak their forces might be, we have to support them and help them to chart an alternative course — thus the importance of an international campaign.

It was clearly difficult for the "Citizens Party" — an ex-Communist, liberal reformist party which supports a multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina — to find spokespeople that would defend an alternative orientation. Handicapped by the siege of the cities and the lack of arms — the arms embargo has only hurt the Bosnian forces — these currents were also divided amongst themselves.

Entourage

A section chose to participate in the government, supporting President Alija Izetbegovic. As Bogdan Useljenicki has suggested: "It is in the hope of foreign military intervention that these parties agreed to legitimise Izetbegovic's government and its entourage, and to remain silent concerning its political ambiguities."⁶

To get this support, Izetbegovic spoke in secular terms of a multi-ethnic Bosnia-Herzegovina — but he did not seek to mobilise the communities concerned. One can understand how giving him support appeared to be the only possible option for extremely weak non-nationalist parties. But did this not contribute to the "suffocation of Tuzla", the symbol of an alternative resistance?

In the non-nationalist opposition in Tuzla and Sarajevo, it is said that the "Territorial Defense" of Tuzla, which had held on to its arms, was ready to free Sarajevo from the summer of 1992 onwards. Apparently, Izetbegovic was against such a move.

Conflicts continue within the Bosnian forces. Tariq Haveric has criticised the orientation of the Bosnian army in central Bosnia. "Instead of eliminating the HVO (Croatian militia) as a military force and doing everything to protect the Croatian civilian population, some Bos-

4. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, January 1994.

5. Head of the "Serbian Republic of Bosnia".

6. *Libération*, 8 November 1993.

nian units have themselves engaged in 'cleansing' operations in central Bosnia."⁷

All this reflects the uncertainties within the "Bosnian" camp. Were liberal and "citizen"-based answers sufficient to counteract the divisive logic and fears of the crisis-ridden "small Yugoslavia"?⁸ Or of the big one? These kinds of questions should not cease at a time when, more than ever, multi-ethnic Bosnia is facing the threat of death and deserves to be defended.

The first to be sacrificed are those Bosnians that want to live together, especially Muslims, who have no other State than Bosnia-Herzegovina. One can understand why they would try to enlarge the "Indian reservations" that are generously given to them. But no community has benefited from these policies; there has been a flight abroad of "bad Serbs", "bad Croats", "bad Muslims", an economic catastrophe, a "brain drain" and desertion by youth. The suicides of old people increase every day in Serbia. There have been victims of cold and hunger in all communities this winter.

Each "camp" is politically differentiated. This is perhaps the only hope for pluralism. But without the redefinition of a common project, without the defeat of Greater Serbia and Greater Croatia, nothing will stop the on-going decomposition. Support for those who oppose the current logic, and the defence of their right to expression and independent organisation is the basis for an alternative approach throughout the Balkans. There is no purely "Bosnian" solution to the break-up of Bosnia.

It appears that a plan for a Bosnia, decentralised into cantons, is currently being proposed by the government against the logic of the three republics. This corresponds to the vital need of bringing the State closer to local communities accustomed to living together, in order to rebuild confidence. But is this possible without taking into account the trauma and fear associated with the war?

Without a new union which allows for permeable borders, and for the protection of different ethnic groups in all the States, the logic of dividing up borders will be continued by the war. The rebuilding of socio-economic links based on solidarity — and ensuring the development of all communities — is the only real cement that can guarantee people's right to live together. ★

7. *Libération*, 20 October 1993.

8. This refers to Bosnia-Herzegovina, a multi-ethnic State without a majority nationality.

International Workers' Aid

ON 26 and 27 February the third meeting of International Worker's Aid was held in Amsterdam. This network of solidarity with workers in the Balkans was founded in October 1993. It is present in eight European countries. In Sweden and Denmark, it has received significant support from the trade union movement. Solidarity committees, trade union and student organisations, political parties (such as the German PDS), have given their support to the European solidarity convoy with the industrial and multi-ethnic city of Tuzla.

A rendez-vous has been set for the city of Split in the first week of April. From there, specially purchased trucks will make their way to Tuzla. The objectives of the convoy are to provide humanitarian assistance (oil, flour and sugar which will be distributed by the miners union), and to break the isolation of the working class and social movements of Tuzla.

At the time of the first convoy, in November 1993, contacts were established with the miners and energy workers unions, as well as with the women's union of Tuzla. The first convoy is documented in the film "From Timex to Tuzla", distributed by International Workers Aid. ☉

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Hebron reveals bitter truth

AS we went to press, the death toll of the Hebron massacre was the following: 47 Palestinians killed in the Ibrahim mosque by the settler Baroukh Goldstein — and no doubt by soldiers also — and 19 Palestinians killed by the army during the demonstrations that followed the massacre. To these figures must be added the Palestinian killed by a settler in Bethlehem while a bus was being stoned by young demonstrators. There are not words to describe such a crime, for which the entire Israeli people is in part responsible. To say Goldstein was mentally disturbed is an easy way out, and lets the assassin and all those who allowed the massacre to take place off the hook. We asked our Jerusalem correspondent for his initial reaction.

MICHEL WARSCHAWSKY
Jerusalem, 1 March 1994

// IT was inevitable. Two months ago we had already alerted public opinion and warned the government and the army that if the army did not radically alter its policy and continued to let the settlers do as they pleased, it would end in a bloodbath. [...] As during the massacres at Shabra and Shatila in 1982, the government cannot whitewash what has happened and say that this massacre took them by surprise. The government consciously allowed things to deteriorate. The responsibility for the Hebron is entirely with the Israeli government." This is how the Peace Block and the Committee of Solidarity with Hebron replied, in a joint communiqué, to Yitshak Rabin's declaration that the massacre was "a crazed act perpetrated by a psychopath."

In the end, it has required a bloodbath for a twin truth to capture the attention of a large sector of the Israeli population. Firstly, there is the fact that in

Hebron there are groups of settlers who are prepared to do anything to prevent a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians. Secondly, it is clear that even achieving the measures set by the Oslo Accords requires the rapid dismantling of settlements in the Occupied Territories.

Is Rabin and his team so blind and stupid to not have understood this before? To speak of stupidity is no less simplistic than to speak of madness. Behind Rabin's supposed blindness, there is a strategy that sees settlers as bargaining chips to be negotiated against new compromises from the Palestinians. This is why the Israeli prime minister refuses to pay compensation to settlers ready to leave the colonies — who, according to the latest polls, represent more than 35% of settlers, not including East Jerusalem.

Settler violence

With this in mind, it is not difficult to imagine that the government and the Security Services intentionally let the situation deteriorate — in the hope of using settler violence as a way of pressuring the Palestinians, and also as a pretext to make concessions to them. This is a hypothesis that many Israeli commentators have made since the massacre. These commentators cannot explain how an activist from a far-right organisation closely watched by the Security Services and which has never hidden its criminal intentions could carry out his plan.

The Official Commission of Inquiry set up by the government is going to try to answer this question. The Commission's official mandate is to determine who was responsible, on all levels, for the massacre. "Official" because its *raison d'être* — like that of the commission set up after the massacres at Shabra and Shatila in 1982 — is to put an end to public debate and to prove to international public opinion that there is no reason to accuse the government since it has set up a commission which will establish the facts and determine the guilty parties.

This initiative, put forward once again by the left, is a way to allow the Israeli State to protect itself against criticism from all sides. There are other such devices, for example the unanimous

motion (except for the Communist party and allied deputies) which closed the Knesset debate with a denunciation of the massacre but also a warning against collectively accusing the settlers.

This unanimous vote brought Shulamit Aloni and David Tsuker from Merets together with Rehavam Zeevi, who systematically calls for the death of Palestinians, and Hanan Porat, who on the day of the massacre arrived disguised and drunk at a meeting of the settler leadership saying that Jewish law forbid sadness on that day. The vote serves to separate Israel as a whole from the crime, to marginalise the assassin and thus to absolve the State and its institutions of all responsibility, either direct or indirect.

This is not only indecent, it is outright complicity. But this is how the Israeli Establishment reacts when it is confronted with a major crisis — by closing ranks in relation to the international community and its criticisms.

After having chosen the necessary means for neutralising internal and external criticisms, the task is now that of preventing damage to the negotiations process. Yasser Arafat, publicly accused of betrayal by the enraged Palestinian masses, is going to try to secure new concessions from Israel, in particular in relation to the presence of foreign troops in the Occupied Territories and for the dismantling of some colonies.

Rabin has said that he is not opposed to the presence of foreign observers in the autonomous Palestinian territories, and that he would release a thousand prisoners in the coming days.

The Palestinian response was quick. "Sometimes it is preferable to do nothing than to give meaningless crumbs," declared Faisal Hussein on Israeli radio, providing an accurate reflection of popular feeling throughout the Occupied Territories.

What the Palestinians have a right to demand — and the international community must implement — is real, and not symbolic, international protection throughout the Occupied Territories. They have a right to demand the renegotiation of the Oslo Accords — with the dismantling of Israeli settlements as a precondition to any agreement. ★

New chapter in CPP crisis

THE Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) is in deep crisis. Last year, the party began to fracture. The repercussions from the crisis will be felt by the entire Filipino left. Some of the effects will be positive, insofar as it gives rise to the kind of pluralistic debate that had, until recently, been smothered; but also negative, because it has been accompanied by devastating revelations and an oppressive factional atmosphere which could lead to physical liquidations in the near future.

PAUL PETITJEAN — 17 February 1994

THE fears which surfaced at the end of 1992 have become fact.¹ In the absence of a national congress the crisis of the CPP has deepened, resulting in a new wave of rank and file departures, continuing organisational break-up and a loss of political substance. The CPP of yesterday is in its death throes and the configuration of the entire Filipino left is being dramatically shaken up. The so-called "national democratic" popular organisations and the united coalitions are splitting too.² A new recomposition is emerging, which is bringing together elements of the non-Communist left and the democratic opposition of the CPP.

The origin of the crisis is well known. At the risk of oversimplification, it can be summarised by reference to two decisive dates.

would not organise the debate, and it went no where.

Secondly, 1991-92. A section of the leadership team around Ric Reyes attempted to open a discussion in order to prepare a congress.⁴ However, even if it was already quite late, for the Sison-Tiamzon wing it was still too early and they violently opposed the idea. For them, a congress was out of the question, since it could have legitimised the conceptions of leaders and organisations that had grown too independent of the "founding father".⁵ The Sison-Tiamzon wing, who controlled the executive committee (which at the time only had three members), undertook a "rectification" campaign — a veritable ideological call to order including a purge of recalcitrant elements.

By the end of 1992, the chance of an internal compromise seemed very limited. In July 1992, the Sison wing had convened a plenum of the Central Committee (CC) — the tenth such gathering — to organise their rectification campaign. The opposition refused to accept the legitimacy of this micro-plenum — whose participants had been carefully chosen — on the grounds that it was actually inquorate.

From his Dutch exile, Joma Sison publicly accused his adversaries of being paid government agents. In turn, the opposition denounced the polemical excesses and replied that by refusing to return to the country to address the crisis Sison had lost all authority. By 1993,

several CPP organisations had declared their "autonomy".

It is still too early to sketch an organisational balance sheet of the CPP crisis. The Sison faction probably remains the largest in terms of numbers. According to certain disputed estimates, it controls about 60% of the current forces of the party, while the opposition controls 40%. But the crisis has not yet come to an end, and there will likely be further repercussions.

What we are seeing is a crisis of legitimacy for a party that has lost a lot of the political influence and moral sway it had earned during the struggle against the Marcos dictatorship. This crisis can be seen at all levels.

Firstly, there is an internal crisis of legitimacy. The Party is now paying the price for its bureaucratic centralist functioning. In a way, the only source of internal legitimacy was success itself. Throughout its twenty-five years of history the Party has never held a congress — save for the founding congress in 1968, which only brought together a handful of cadre. Since then, no national leadership bodies have ever been elected, rather they renew themselves from CC plenum to CC plenum.

1. See Paul Petitjean, 'Crisis in Philippine Communist Party', *International Viewpoint*, no. 241, 21 December 1992.

2. The term "national democratic" (Nat Dem or ND) designates the current organised and inspired by the CPP. It brings together clandestine organisations — including the National Democratic Front — and other legal ones.

3. Founded in 1968 with a handful of members, the CPP grew massively, especially between 1975 and 1985. It was the backbone of resistance to the Marcos dictatorship and had a guerrilla force of 25,000 fighters, including 15,000 "regulars". It led a grouping of popular organisations that organised several hundred thousand members. It experimented with different forms of struggle. For a long time it had a great amount of political legitimacy and incontestable moral prestige. At one time it could claim to be the last dynamic politico-military organisation in Southeast Asia. The leadership's errors of judgement, in 1985-86, led to a "hard" boycott of the presidential elections, which isolated it and marginalised it within the huge anti-Marcos mobilisations and in the end left the ground open for Corazon Aquino.

4. On this question, see Paul Petitjean, 'New debates on Philippine left', *International Viewpoint*, no. 211, 22 July 1991.

5. Jose Maria "Joma" Sison was, under the name of Amado Guerrero, the first chair of the CC of the CPP from 1968 until his arrest in 1977. Freed in 1986, in 1987 he found himself exiled in Holland (although without asylum rights), and has been living there ever since. He is once again chair of the CPP, under the name of Armando Liwanag. Benito Tiamzon is the current vice-chair. Sison, Tiamzon and his wife, Wilma Austria, are members of the executive committee.



Conjurture

Firstly, 1985-86. The central leadership of the CPP made a two-fold error, which marginalised the party after a period of remarkable growth.³ It implemented a sectarian line on the question of alliances, and did not understand that the Marcos dictatorship could fall at the time of the presidential elections. The mistake was costly and provoked a debate on its origins. But the leadership

Therefore, in the event of a crisis of orientation, there is no structure, which has legitimacy, for settling differences in the leadership apparatus. The authority of the central leadership core rested upon its ability to perpetuate a consensus between the main regional and sectoral leaderships — an equilibrium, of sorts, between national unity and discipline on the one hand and the de facto autonomy of intermediary and regional organs on the other. When consensus is broken, the remedy of turning to the membership does not exist

Problems

The scope of the political problems the CPP had to confront, from the mid-1980s, as a result of the evolution of the national and international situation, was such that this consensus could no longer be found within the leadership apparatus. The preparation of a congress was the only way to rebuild internal legitimacy — with a democratic debate and the election of delegates. This proposal, while commonplace in many organisations, was altogether revolutionary in the CPP even though the Party statutes anticipate holding congresses.

By refusing to accept the test of a democratic debate and a congress, the Sison-Tiamzon wing destroyed any remaining hope of maintaining the unity of the CPP. Clearly, given the seriousness of differences, a congress may well have been unable to safeguard and rebuild this unity. But it would have at least clarified the options, taken the debate to all the rank and file and given them the right to decide. In the end, a revolutionary organisation is not the sole preserve of the leadership's circles, but belongs to the entirety of the membership. In such an organisation, as in society itself, democracy must be the source of legitimacy.

In the absence of such a congress, it is impossible to know today which current (or bloc of currents) would have represented the majority of the CPP. Vertical control of leadership bodies, alliances between sections of the apparatus; these cannot be a replacement for the judgement of the membership arrived at through an open and free confrontation of analyses and options.

No wing can claim to represent a majority of members. It is probable that more than half of the membership has "voted with their feet" by leaving the party. The absence of debate has played a major role in the flight of the rank and file.

Secondly, there is a crisis of political legitimacy. Crises of internal authority and loss of external influence go together. An entire project — a highly simplified interpretation of the protracted people's war — is losing credibility. Although the social situation in the Philippines (and the international context) has changed significantly, accompanied by a tremendous enrichment in political experience, Sison's strategic and political conceptions have not changed at all.

The current orientation of the Sison-Tiamzon wing is a regression compared to the more dialectical approach the CPP began to develop in the 1980s with regard to the relationship between military and political activity.

Backbone

After having formed the backbone of popular movements over a long period, the validity of the CPP's orientation began to be challenged in 1986. Now, it no longer occupies the central place it once did. The legal organisations of the "national democratic" current have split away — for example, the First of May trade union centre (KMU), the peasant organisation, KMP, and the Bayan coalition.⁶

It is still impossible to evaluate the state of the popular movement on a national scale. It is probable that the relationship of forces between mass organisations varies considerably from one region to the next. But there can be no doubt that a wide-ranging process of realignment and rebuilding is underway. New alliances are being forged between sections of the "anti-Stalinist" opposition within the CPP and the activist left outside the Party.

On the other hand, the Sison-Tiamzon faction seems to be having difficulty rebuilding wide-ranging alliances. The main national federations of the KMU (NFL, NAFLU, UWP) have left, alongside a large part of the Manila-area trade unions. In September 1993, these Manila trade unions established a new federation, the Union of Workers for Change (BMP), with Romy Castillo as the president.

In October, Bayan dissidents formed a new socialist organisation, Makabayan (Movement for the Liberation of the Sons and Daughters of the People). A new coalition appeared — the KAP (Union of Working People) — to organise a rally around social demands on 30 November 1993, bringing together the above-mentioned organisations, moderate trade unions and organisations of

the independent left such as Bisig and Pandayan.

This initiative was a big success in Manila, much more so than the competing KMU rally organised for the same day.⁷

Finally, there is also a crisis of international legitimacy. The CPP's international network was always limited by sectarianism towards the non-Maoist revolutionary left and by its manipulative approach to solidarity work abroad. Nonetheless, because of its activist commitment, its influence in radical Christian milieu, and the weight of the KMU, it had prestige in the anti-imperialist solidarity movement. Today these gains have been very much thrown into doubt.

For example, the majority of solidarity groups in Europe have taken their distance from the Sison-Tiamzon faction. Confronted with the loss of international support, Sison seems to have turned his attention towards the international networks of Maoist organisations — entering into competition with Abimael Guzman of the Peru's Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) for the mantle of "theoretical leader" of international Maoism.⁸

In a declaration, published on 26 December 1993, the Party's Democratic Opposition described their support and forces thus: the Manila-Rizal, Negros and Central Visayas regional committees, the "democratic blocks" in the Panay and Mindanao party organisations, and the Western Europe party committee. As for its central structures, there is the national peasant secretariat, the national united front committee, the Philippines-based international Home Bureau. There are also a significant number of individual members of the CC and various smaller units of the Party.⁹

6. The break-up of organisations like the KMU does not only reflect the internal struggles of the CPP. The functioning of the KMU has itself been criticised as undemocratic, and the positions of the leadership have come in for criticism — its support to the Chinese government, for example, after the Tiananmen repression. There are also cross accusations of corruption.

7. According to Max Lane, correspondent for the Australian paper *Green Left Weekly* (no. 126, 8 December 1993), the KAP brought out 110,000 people to its demonstration while the KMU only attracted between 3,000 and 5,000. The KAP also organised rallies in Cebu, Bacolod, Davao, Cagayan de Oro, Iligan and Zamboanga.

8. One of the main organisations that supports both Shining Path and the Sison-Tiamzon faction at the same time is the Belgian Workers Party (PTB). It recently ran an article that saluted the "rectification movement" within the CPP, called 'Against the renegades, police agents and the Trotskyists, restore the honour of the protected people's war', *Solidaire*, 10 March 1993. Here we have a fine example of the Stalinist tradition of slander and amalgams — in 1993!

9. See 'Out of Crisis, Renewal', *Philippine Left Update*, 1 January 1994.

The Sison-Tiamzon wing has thus held onto its control of the majority of regional committees (the important territorial structures of north and south Luzon and a part of the Visayas and Mindanao committees). But it should be noted that the Manila-Rizal (M-R, the capital region) section is the most powerful, with about 5 thousand members, while the CPP as a whole has around 15 thousand members (although these figures are only estimates).

Beyond squabbles about numbers, what is important is that the CPP is losing in terms of quality.

To be sure, the CPP was molded in a monolithic ideological tradition, a prisoner of a bureaucratic centralist method of functioning and far too respectful of the authority of the "founding father". There is no tradition of free debate, and the party has gone through some terrible chapters — such as the paranoid anti-infiltrator purges that led to the deaths of hundreds of members between 1985 and 1988.¹⁰

But contrary to the media myth perpetuated by Sison himself the CPP was not a *politically* monolithic party. There were always significant internal differences. And the party was largely built independently of Sison, who was imprisoned for ten years and then exiled — and this is true whatever his initial role was and whatever his ideological influence continues to be. The party also brought together original leadership teams from the various regions.

When Sison was released from prison in 1986, he could have played a unifying role since he still had a tremendous amount of prestige. He had not been directly involved in conflicts inside the leadership (which, for example, set Ric Reyes against Rodolfo Salas), and he had formulated a conciliatory critique of the 1986 election boycott. He opposed an ultra-sectarian faction in the violent confrontation which set different CPP networks in Japan against one another.

But to have definitively played such a unifying role, he should have been self-effacing, admitting that he was a national leader like any other — and that the CPP was indebted to initiatives and ideas that were not only his own. It is an option he does not seem to have ever considered.¹¹ Sison's personal sense of history has played an unfortunate part in the current crisis. It could soon lead to further splits, including within his own faction.

Certainly, the Party never developed a serious attitude towards unitary initia-

tives with other currents, and, indeed, never really understood the significance of innovations which developed within its own ranks. But, in spite of appearances, and not without its contradictions, the Party was able to integrate a wide range of experiences, personalities and orientations.

It is this internal wealth that the CPP is now in the process of losing. The Sison-Tiamzon wing is cutting itself off from the living forces of the party, and paving the way for an outright break in the continuity of the party's evolution — thus unleashing a politically regressive process that places a question mark over its future.

"Historic" figures

Through the years, the CPP has alienated itself from many activists in the popular organisations and NGOs. Since 1986 a number of "historic" figures have left the national democratic movement. Radically, in the case of Bernabe Buscayno, also known as commander Dante. Progressively in the case of those who went on to found the "popular democrat" current, such as Isagani "Gani" Serrano (a former member of the Party's Political Bureau), Edicio "Ed" de la Torre (founder of Christians for National Liberation), Horacio "Boy" Morales (the first president of the National Democratic Front).

The departure of these figures is significant. In his own way, Dante incarnated the "pluralist" history of the CPP; proof that even in the initial years the leadership was not reducible to Sison alone. The new Popular Democrats had long fought for the adoption of a unitary line and to give the National Democratic Front its own dynamic, a functional and decision-making autonomy in relation to the CPP. Even if they did not break from the Party; by distancing themselves, they only proved that they had failed.

One sign of the times is that in 1993 this current decided, after a long period of hesitation, to create a formally independent organisation. Its second congress, held on 22 March 1993, decided to transform the organisation into a "social movement distinct from other formations and perspectives", in the words of its president, Boy Morales.¹²

Among the former central leaders of the CPP, clearly some have remained with the Sison-Tiamzon faction — such as Rafael Baylosis, never known for his ideological openmindedness. Others have remained prudently reserved, such as Satur Ocampo, a respected figure

who led the CPP in its negotiations with the Aquino government in 1986-1987. Others, such as Rodolfo Salas, have simply kept their distance from both camps (the Sison-Tiamzon wing and the Democratic Opposition).

But among those that have declared their "autonomy" can be found very strong personalities that embody original experiences. This is the case with Ric Reyes, who embodies the multi-sectoral experience of Mindanao; Romulo Kintanar, also from Mindanao, who brings along his experience as a central guerrilla leader in the 1980s; Felimon Lagman, who has urban experience in Manila-Rizal that dates back to the 1970s; and Victor del Mar, for his experience in Visayas.

Difficulty

In spite of the existence of permanent networks in North America and Western Europe, the CPP has always had tremendous difficulty grasping international realities. These networks, finally, are now addressing the questions all revolutionary organisations have been asking themselves.

But the leadership core existing in Holland (Luis Jalandoni, Antonio Zumel, Coni Ledesma, Jose Maria Sison and Juliet Sison) has cut itself off from this process, leading to increasing isolation. It no longer represents the National Democratic activists living in Europe, unlike other official leaders of the movement that have broken with Sison, such as Byron Bocar (a spokesperson for the NDF) and Sixto Carlos (a "historic" leader who, after his arrival in Europe, was a sectarian's sectarian but now declares himself to be a committed anti-Stalinist).

The debate within the CPP clearly expresses the nature of the currents taking part. The texts put forward by Sison are presented as a return to the

10. On this point see Paul Petitjean, 'Counter-insurgency, terror and democracy', *International Viewpoint*, no. 176, 25 December 1989 and Walden Bello, 'The Philippine Communist Party at the crossroads', *International Viewpoint*, no. 240, 7 December 1992.

11. For a reductionist identification between his own history and that of the CPP, see Jose Maria Sison, 'The Philippine Revolution: The Leader's View', *Crane Russak*, New York, 1989. The CPP was a victim of a pernicious illness, the presidential syndrome. Other revolutionary organisations have neither a chair nor a general secretary, only members of a national leadership whose tasks are shared on a functional basis. And they are much the better for it.

12. 'Movement for Popular Democracy moves forward', *Conjuncture*, February-March 1993. The MDP does not describe itself as a party but has set for itself the task of "strengthening popular organisations and NGOs". At their congress, there were about 250 participants from, among other places, Metro-Manila, north Luzon, Bicol, and central Luzon. A national leadership council of 25 members was elected.

roots, that is to the line that he defended before his arrest in 1977. They denounce subsequent advances as "deviations". They assert a frozen and linear strategic outlook. They see international developments as a confirmation of Maoist Cultural Revolution-era notions. They entrench further still bureaucratic centralism.

The texts of the various opposition forces highlight the advances of the 1980s. They examine a large spectrum of strategic approaches. They discuss the democratisation of the party, popular democracy, the notion of the vanguard and its relationship to the masses. They seek alternatives to the command economy for the transition to socialism. They draw a critical balance sheet of the history of the international working class movement and frontally address the question of Stalinism — characterising the Sison-Tiamzon current as a Stalinist faction.

"Anti-Stalinist"

Today the opposition remains politically heterogeneous, coming from different regions and sectors of work. For sure, they make up a principled "anti-Stalinist" block, and some define themselves as a "Leninist opposition". But they are still far from being united in any significant way.

The definition of a common organisational and political framework and the clarification of complex tactical options will not be easy. The various components of the Democratic Opposition must also convince other currents and activists that they themselves have changed, and that they are capable of making a critical balance sheet of their own history.

This includes the disaster of the anti-infiltrator purges in Mindanao, and the costly error made in Manila in 1987 when the urban units of the party were wrongly "activated", providing a good pretext for the death squads to hit legal activists such as Lean Alejandro, a Bayan leader.

For the moment, the CPP has lost the political initiative to the Ramos regime, in particular in the area of the peace negotiations. But its crisis takes place at the same time as a lively recomposition and realignment of the popular movement. There is still a real potential for social resistance in the Philippines today.

The government knows this, and has, for example, abandoned the proposal to impose a price increase for oil

To avoid the worst

During a press conference held on 14 December 1993 in the south of Luzon island, Gregorio Rosal (alias Ka Roger), an official spokesperson for the CPP (Sison-Tiamzon wing) declared that leaders of the Democratic Opposition were going to be brought before a "people's tribunal" on charges of "gangsterism", "corruption", and "sabotage" of the underground movement. When asked, Rosal refused to exclude the possibility that a death sentence would be passed.

He named four central leaders (three members of the Central Committee and the secretary of the capital region), all faced with the same threat: Romulo Kintanar (former guerrilla leader), Ricardo Reyes (former leader in Mindanao and of the Political Bureau), Felimon Lagman (a leader of the Manila-Rizal region), Arturo Tabara (a leader from Visayas).

This initiative is very serious, and highly irresponsible. It follows a series of declarations by Sison who, without evidence, accused leaders of the opposition of being government-paid agents. It could lead to a destructive dynamic of liquidations and counter-liquidations, and unleash uncontrolled developments. It provides a unique opportunity for the Ramos government and repressive forces to deepen contradictions within the popular movement and increase the number of provocations.

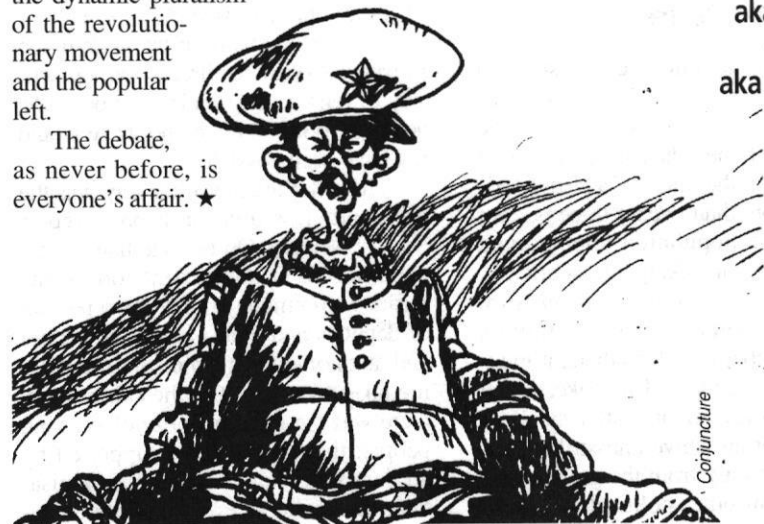
It is essential that debate remain in the political arena and that all the factions involved explicitly reject settling scores by physical means. After the 14 December press conference, it is particularly important that the official spokespeople unambiguously reject the use of "people's tribunals" and death sentences in the current political struggles.

In January, Father Frank Fernandez, general secretary of the National Democratic Front, said that no death sentence would be pronounced upon leaders of the opposition (Bulletin Today, 10 January 1994). A welcome statement, but it does not clear up all worries. It was released in the name of the NDF and not of the Party, like the statement in December. It only excludes the death sentence for circumstantial and not for principled reasons. If the press report is to be believed, Fernandez did not challenge the inflammatory accusations levelled against leaders of the opposition. As such, he continues to criminalise the political debate and differences around questions of orientation. This denies any notion of free choice to the party rank and file. ☛

which would have dramatic consequences on the population's standard of living.

If the different opposition currents avoid fragmentation, and above all if the worst is averted (physical confrontations, see box) the crisis might prove to be beneficial in the long run. The current situation reveals, now more than ever, the dynamic pluralism of the revolutionary movement and the popular left.

The debate, as never before, is everyone's affair. ★



The incredible shrinking Jose Maria "Joma" Sison, aka Armado Guerrero, aka Armando Liwang, aka...

Conjunction

Polarisation intensifies

ON Thursday 27 January, Spanish industry was shut down by a general strike. Almost all of the country's three million industrial workers responded to the trade union call.

JOAQUIN NIETO — Madrid, 3 February 1994

A FEW trains and buses were running in the big cities as a result of the government's decree in favour of minimum service, but passengers were few and far between. Over the morning, the strike spread to other sectors. In general, educational institutions remained empty and press kiosks were closed. There were no newspapers, as the previous evening's strike by workers in the daily press was a clear success. Offices were half-closed, with a few non-striking employees remaining in empty buildings, such as in the big shopping centres.

A significant number of small businesses joined the shut down. In rural areas, farmers worked, but not agricultural labourers who went on strike, as did workers in the schools and municipal services. In the industrial suburbs and those areas most affected by the crisis and by de-industrialisation (such as the northwest), the strike was total. The central core of the big cities took on a festive air, aside from the characteristic tension of such a day of struggle. In the afternoon, one million and a half demonstrators took to the streets in over a hundred cities and towns.

Tense

This was the fourth general strike in less than four years. This strike was without a doubt the most tense and the most difficult one. The call for a general strike came in the midst of a terrible crisis, with more than twenty-three percent of the active population unemployed and forty percent lacking job security.

The effects of this situation were mixed. For some, it was a stimulus towards combativity; for others, it induced fear and paralysis. The strike, which came only a few months after the 1993 election, met an active anti-strike campaign — not only from the government but also from other political forces, in

particular the rightwing People's Party and the rightwing Basque and Catalan nationalists.

The counter-reform of the labour code that led to the strike was approved by ninety-two percent of parliamentary deputies. Only the United Left (IU) supported the general strike. Employers, for their part, who are very attached to this made to measure reform, organised an active campaign against the strike — which included personal threats. Public and private media treated the strike call as something that concerned them directly, and unleashed a campaign to influence public opinion against it, through a barrage of commentaries and pieces in the press.

It is perhaps because there are so many difficulties that this mobilisation was more highly valued than previous ones, and more militant. In the days leading up to the strike, tens of thousands of trade union activists participated in picket lines and in brigades organised to popularise the strike call.

"Normal"

There were hundreds of arrests, tens of injured and one death (a striker run over by a car). This is the balance sheet of a day characterised as "normal" by the press. The vitality of the trade union movement depends directly on the activity of tens of thousands of trade union activists. Without them, the strike would not have been possible.

The other feature of the day was the profound class division it provoked in Spanish society. On the one hand, there were all the establishment forces: the business community, ninety-two percent of deputies and their parties, the central and autonomous governments, the mass media, and so on. On the other hand, there was the great majority of working people, the trade unions, supported by an enormous range of social organisations and collectives — environmental-

lists, students and youth, tenants, consumers associations, anti-poverty collectives, Christian community organisations, the liberal professions, musicians and artists, and so on. These forces produced a huge quantity of manifestos and petitions in support of the strike.

While this is not the first time that such a division has existed, on this occasion the polarisation was probably more intense. What consequences will this have for the future? It is actually quite hard to say. There is still a wide gap between the social and electoral behaviour of the population.

IU was the only parliamentary force that supported the strike. And it did so actively. Will it be able to become the political reference point for all the individuals and organisations that mobilised? Will it succeed in winning over this electorate? A significant decline in PSOE votes and an increase in IU votes in the June elections would be positive indicators.

Failings

Alternatively, either the PSOE will succeed in legitimising its policies once again — as has already happened on several occasions — or only the rightwing will benefit from its failings.

As for immediate perspectives, the general strike revealed two things. Firstly, that there is a rejection of the counter-reform of the labour code, which would open the way to collective redundancies through the elimination of the need for administrative authorisation. The counter-reform also opens the way to apprenticeship contracts that allows employers to hire youth at \$350 per month without access to social security or health care.

Secondly, there is the demand for the government to sit down and negotiate the reform with the trade unions. For the time being, the government is still in post-strike mode and is careful not to admit that it was a success. It is refusing to negotiate, and says that the reform is already under discussion in parliament. It says that secondary reforms (if there are any) can only be made in parliament.

There will surely be some amendments. The only question is how wide-ranging they will be. ★

Women work & family

"ECONOMIC CRISIS" and "crisis of the family". These are two dominant themes in the advanced capitalist countries today. In Western Europe governmental policies are attempting to "solve" both by tying them together, encouraging women to leave work and stay at home with their children, thus reducing unemployment statistics, cutting state spending on childcare and reinforcing the traditional family structure as the best framework for looking after children.

Such policies have to take into account the social changes which have taken place over the last twenty-five years. Despite the economic crisis, all statistics show that women in Western Europe are continuing to enter the labour market by millions. Studies continually refer to their presence as "an irreversible, lasting, widespread reality".¹

However, studies also show that this presence in the labour market takes particular forms. Women are massively present in the service sector, they are the vast majority of part-time workers and those working in other forms of "adjusted" work schedules such as "annual working hours" where work is concentrated at particular times of the year, fixed-term contracts, etc.

For many women, taking such jobs is a result of the pressure they are under as individuals to find a way of combining responsibilities for children with the necessity and wish to go out to work. It is increasingly impossible for families to live on a single income, more and more women are single parents, and the change in social attitudes has also led women to reject the idea that staying at home is a totally fulfilling or natural role, despite the pleasure that they find in caring for their children. The impact of childcare responsibilities on women's working lives is demonstrated by the correlation between women's working patterns and

the provision of publicly-funded childcare.

Another specific factor of women's place in the labour market is also their generally higher rate of unemployment.

It is this combination of factors which makes women a particularly vulnerable target for governmental policies aiming to hide the true extent of unemployment and cut state spending.

The offensive being waged on the "crisis of the family" has both ideological and economic aspects. The crisis of the family — by which is meant the drop in the number of marriages, the rise in the number of divorces and in the number of children born outside marriage — is held responsible for a general decline in "moral values" and particularly the rise of "juvenile delinquency". This is apparently the result of the lack of a "safe, secure, loving environment" and "appropriate role models". Thus governments are looking for policies that will force people into the nuclear family which apparently provides this — despite the reality of child abuse and violence against women within the family. The responsibility of governmental policies, which have led to increasing unemployment, rising poverty, homelessness, lack of good-quality childcare and over-crowded, under-funded schools, is conveniently forgotten.

A strong underlying racism in much of this discourse on the family should be particularly highlighted. One of the most striking examples of this is the recent report on the family in France which openly talks of the "decline of our France" because of the drop in the birth-rate. In fact, if immigrants' children are taken into account, the population is growing by 300,000 per year, the highest rate in Europe!² Nevertheless, the French right is leading the field in proposals of pro-natalist policies, that is policies designed to encourage

(French) women to have more babies.

A particularly vicious attack on women is that being spearheaded by the rightwing of the Conservative Party in Britain which combines attempts to criminalise single mothers by holding them responsible for the "evils of society" and to force them back into a relationship of financial dependence on the fathers of their children.

there are thus ideological attacks on women's right to independence and freedom of choice and an undermining of their material pos-

sibilities through segregation into low paid precarious jobs and cuts in the state provision of services that make it possible to stay in the labour force and assume family responsibilities. In this context we have also seen, and can expect to see a continuation of, attacks on women's right to abortion and contraception.

The response of the women's movement, whose fight during the 1970s and 1980s for women's right to abortion and contraception and to the right to work was fundamental to achieving many of the changes in women's position, has been uneven. Nevertheless, the proposal for a "women's strike" in Germany for International Women's Day (8 March) and the interest in Sweden in the idea of a women's party to defend women's interests, show that women can and will continue to organise and seek ways to resist these attacks. Such national initiatives are crucial in developing awareness of the severity of the attacks we are facing and mobilising women at the grassroots.

At the same time, we also have to develop an international response. It is clear in Western Europe, where governments in those countries that form the European Union and those that are applying to join use the excuse of European "harmonisation" or "interference" in social legislation to justify their policies, that only the development of contacts and solidarity will make it possible to fight such attacks effectively. But the internationalisation of attacks and thus the solidarity required to combat them goes beyond the confines of "Fortress Europe", not only to Eastern Europe but worldwide.

As a step in building an internationalist women's movement at a European level, the 3rd European Conference for the Right to Abortion and Contraception is particularly important.

PENNY DUGGAN ☉

1. *Women in Europe* supplement, no. 36, 1990.
2. Hervé Le Bras, *Cahiers du Féminisme*, no. 67, 1994.

DOSSIER

**3rd European Conference for
the right to abortion
and contraception**
Paris, 25-26-27 March.
**For more details or registration
please contact:**
**Co-ordination Nationale des
Associations pour le Droit à
l'Avortement et à la
Contraception,
c/o MFPF**
**4 square Saint-Irénée
75011 Paris, France**
**☎ 33-1 4807 2910
Fax: 33-1 4700 7977**

Women say no!

THE call for a women's strike in Germany on 8 March has been well received. Strike committees have been formed in many cities. Feminist activists from trade unions, autonomous women's groups, and from political parties have been debating the content and the practicalities of the strike call. Our correspondent reports.

BRIGITTE KIECHLE*
Karlsruhe, 4 February 1994

THE call for a women's strike on International Women's Day corresponds to the present mood: Enough is enough! This is particularly true given the scale of the assault on women's rights and living standards. An important first step has been taken which can propel women back in to the public domain as a serious political force.

The strike call is not fixed on a specific goal or set of demands (see box on page 15). This is certainly a weakness, but it corresponds to the actual state of the women's movement. It is almost invisible and has no functioning structure. The "Call" has won broad support because it has emphasised the worsening reality of women's every-day lives. These political developments must be opposed, as a matter of principle, unless feminist goals are to lose all chance of being realised. The strike call marks a clear dividing line with the right and plainly rejects the notion that merely to be a woman is sufficient ground for common action.

Far-reaching

The strike call sets down political markers which, in relation to its broad social orientation, are more far-reaching than women's political activities in the past.

For this reason the minimum consensus that has been reached is sufficient for the preparation of the strike. If, however, the strike action on 8 March is to resurrect the women's movement in

Germany (which involves bridging the gap between women in the western and eastern parts of the country) a negative definition cannot form a lasting basis for feminist politics. One of the focal points of future work should be a productive political debate on the fundamental questions and goals of a women's movement which does not merely propagate equality under conditions of inequality but aims to emancipate all humanity.

From the beginning the call for the strike was accompanied by a critical debate on the notion of a "strike". The term "women's strike" is not identical with the traditional concept of a strike as a collective form of workers struggle within the framework of collective bargaining. A women's strike means that in all social spheres women refuse to work — in the sphere of production as well as reproduction and the home. This approach makes it possible to overcome the division between "housewives" and unemployed women on the one hand, and employed women on the other. In other words, the common action relates to the specific oppression of women as a whole.

Practical organisation

The women's strike is to be organised on three levels: at the workplace, in the home, and at the shops (in terms of shopping). In all three spheres there will be a multitude of proposals for the practical organisation of the strike. Indisputably it is especially difficult to realise a strike in the sphere of reproduction and to make it known publicly.

A serious objection to the strike call might be that the expectations aroused by the term "strike" cannot be fulfilled. Measured against the goal of the "strike" even a successful day of action would be seen as a failure. This consideration is not unimportant and must be taken into account during the mobilisations.

* The author is a member of the United Socialist Party (VSP) and a supporter of the Fourth International.

To call for a women's strike is a challenge not only to organisations and trade unions but also to women. The trade union leaderships want to limit the strike call to some action in the workplace, and have even referred to the "illegality" of political strikes. However, the DGB (the German trade union federation) has called for political strikes in the past, for example in 1983 ("five minutes for peace"). The problem associated with building a strike is not, in the main, one of legality, but rather a question of the trade union leaderships political determination and the pressure which is brought to bear on it by women rank-and-file activists.

The call for a women's strike is the correct political response to the current shift to the right and the increasing attacks on past gains. We should give up our "feminine" modesty in our methods of struggle as well and at least try to turn the 8 March into a day of women's strike. ★

"An important first step has been taken which can propel women back in to the public domain as a serious political force."

First call for a women's strike in 1994

Women are saying no!

The re-establishment of a greater Germany is occurring at the expense of refugees, the weak, the poor

and at the expense of women.

This is why we call for a

women's strike!

We want to protest against the attacks on our fundamental rights; the reduction in welfare benefits and the increasing poverty of women; attacks on the gains we have made in the past; the destruction of the environment; and against German military intervention.

In 1975 the women of Iceland went on general strike.

In 1991 the Swiss women went on strike.

Now we are going to strike!

This strike will take place in the second week of March, 1994 (with 8 March being International Women's Day). Women will stop their house-work; strike or work to rule at the work place. They will not do the shopping, and nor will they smile courteously or be "nice". They will not make the coffee and they will send their children with their husbands to work. We will demonstrate our common interests and our solidarity in a conspicuous and purposeful way.

We are fed-up with thirty percent less pay than men and will fight against the "old-boy networks" which prevent women from rising into well-paid jobs. The unwritten rule of "men first" has meant that in the five new federal states it is women who, in the main, have been pushed out of their jobs. We fear that it is women who will also pay the price for the EC-Common Market. In Germany hundreds of thousands more women's jobs will be eliminated over the next few years.

Stop right now!

Stop violence and humiliation! Rape is being used as a weapon in war. In Germany rape is still not prohibited in marriage. Women are subjected daily to sexual harassment because men are fighting to preserve their dominant position.

We demand the redistribution of decision-making powers in a way which will correspond to the percentage of women in society. We demand a fair division of paid and unpaid labour between women and men and an independent income for every adult person. We demand equal rights for all forms of living, be it single or in partnership, heterosexual or lesbian. We object to the preferential treatment which is given to heterosexual marriage by the law. Every woman has the right to decide whether or not to continue a pregnancy.

We want equal rights for immigrants, refugees, non-white Germans, Gypsies, and Jews so that they may live here in security and without fear. We reject the German government's plans to send troops to war and will support those men who choose to conscientiously object and desert.

We are giving in our notice to the patriarchal consensus. Our strike is the start. ✪



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Back to basic hypocrisy

SEX, corruption, resignations and suicides — not necessarily in that order — have rocked an increasingly weak government and exposed John Major's "Back to Basics" campaign as a hypocritical sham.

GILL LEE* — London, 7 February 1994

RECENT opinion polls have shown Labour twenty-four points ahead, a lead which, if transferred to a general election, would mean the defeat of the Conservative government and the loss of one-hundred and sixty of their seats. Declining middle class support in the South of England has been accompanied by growing opposition from otherwise rightwing tabloid newspapers like the *Sun* and *Today*. Under the headline "Rotten to the Core" *Today's* editor argued in mid-January that the Conservatives were "Sinking in a sea of scandal". This was in response to news that the Conservative run Westminster Council (in London) had gerrymandered votes by selling off council homes, while thousands remained homeless. *Today* argued that Prime Minister John Major was "dangerously out of touch (as) shown in his wriggling and squirming over Back to Basics... (and) in his cynical launching of a moral crusade which backfired on him."

The financial scandals have since grown. Westminster Council is said to have borrowed its ideas on housing from Conservative flagship Wandsworth Council (London). Individual Conservative MPs, such as Theresa Gorman and Alan Duncan, are said to have personally benefited from the sale of council houses and Duncan has been forced to resign amidst allegations of impropriety. Dr Michael Dutt, implicated in the Westminster "homes-for-votes" scandal has just been found dead with gunshot wounds. Most serious of all, the Public Accounts Committee, Parliament's watch-dog on public expenditure, a majority of whose members are Conservative, has just delivered the most damning report in its one-hundred and forty year history. It sets out a catalogue of mismanagement, incompetence and fraud — twenty-six different scandals involving millions of pounds.

While the financial scandals may prove to be more long lasting in their effect, the government's trauma was initially sparked by a series of allegations about the sexual impropriety of MPs. Tim Yeo, the Environment Minister, was forced by his Constituency party to resign as a minister because he had fathered a child from his adulterous relationship with a Conservative local councillor. The wife of a Conservative Minister, the Earl of Caithness, shot herself after rumours of marital problems. Conservative Transport Minister, Steven Norris, narrowly escaped sacking after revelations about a string of lovers. And in a wonderful piece of quintessentially British farce, Conservative MP David Ashby, denied a homosexual relationship and explained sharing a hotel double bed with a male friend thus: "It was much cheaper... It halved the price", he argued. His wife did not agree and spilt the story to the tabloids who lapped it up.

Human beings

Many voters would normally share the view expressed by Health Minister Virginia Bottomley that "It is well understood that politicians are human beings just like the rest of us". But the fathering of illegitimate children by Conservative MPs became a matter for public scandal and outrage because of the explicitly moral Back to Basics campaign launched by the Conservatives at their annual conference last October, a campaign aimed in particular at single mothers.

Back to Basics began as a clarion call from the right of the Conservative Party. While right wingers like Education Secretary, John Patten, had long been vocal on morality, for example warning against the loss of a belief in sin, defeat over Maastricht prompted the Party's right into an explicit moral cam-

paign. In the run up to the Party Conference in October, ministers such as Treasury Chief Secretary Michael Portillo, Welsh Secretary John Redwood and Social Services Minister Peter Lilley made a series of speeches calling for a mixture of greater self-reliance, less dependency, and more selective welfare benefits. The problems of the British economy were to be dealt with by cutting taxes and slashing the welfare state. Single mothers became a particular target of Conservative abuse, blamed in a series of speeches for an increase in juvenile crime, falling educational standards and living off the welfare state. In July, John Redwood made a much publicised visit to the St Mellon's housing estate in a run down area of Cardiff and expressed his shock at the number of single mothers there who were apparently well contented not to be living with men. "In (St. Mellon's) people had begun to accept that babies just happened and there was no presumption in favour of two adults creating a loving family background for their children. It is that which we have to change", he argued. At Party Conference Michael Portillo joined the rush for the reactionary moral high ground. "It is time to return to plain speaking and traditional values... Personal responsibility has been undermined by a state which does too much." The high point of the right's ideological offensive was a speech to the Conference from Peter Lilley in which he recited a "little list" of fraudsters which included "young women who get pregnant just to jump the housing list".

John Major may have signed his own political death warrant when, rather than distance himself from the rightwing speeches of his ministers, which were clear statements for a moral crusade, he appeared to endorse them: "We stand for self-reliance, decency and respect for order. We must go back to basics and the Conservative Party will lead the country back to those basics right across the board: sound money, free trade, traditional teaching, respect for family and the law", ran his conference speech. Amidst the scandals

* The author is a member of the editorial board of the British Fourth Internationalist paper, *Socialist Outlook*.

which broke in January, Major was to try and argue that Back to Basics had never been about personal morality but "about policy issues of concern to everyone". "None of my ministers have interpreted (Back to Basics) as an attack on single mothers", he argued in defence of MP Tim Yeo, caught making his own personal addition to their numbers.

Major's denials cut little ice, especially since in the same week the Government announced plans to strip single parent families of their priority status on waiting lists for council homes, placing them in hostels instead: "It solves the baby sitting problem", argued Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley.

Back to Basics was not just a farce in which an ideological attack launched on single mothers and absent fathers collapsed in the popular perception that "Ministers appeared to have been fathering more children in secret love nests than the medieval popes", as the *Guardian* put it. Back to Basics was a desperate attempt by a desperate Government to paper over fundamental problems for British capitalism in dealing with its historic decline as an imperialist power, and the very real crisis it has been thrown into by the economic choices of the Conservative Government. It was an attempt to provide ideological support for a whole series of measures aimed at cutting the welfare state and propping up the traditional family.

Back to Basics also represents an attempt by the Conservatives to reconcile the irreconcilable. Long before Major assumed the Conservative party leadership the Conservatives had been groping for a family policy which would match its traditional rhetoric with its increasingly confident free market ideology. As the party of traditional values, the Conservatives have governed over fourteen years of soaring crime, crisis in the economy and the erosion of the traditional family: as a proportion of all families, single parent families nearly doubled between 1976 and 1991, from 10 to 19%. Fewer than one in four British households now conforms to the traditional image of a married couple with children. Back to Basics was an ill-thought-out attempt by the Conservatives to deal with a dilemma of their own making.

The changes wrought on British society by monetarist policies have left the economy "technically bankrupt" according to left Labour MP Ken Livingston, and have produced fundamental shifts in employment patterns which have undermined the traditional

family values the Conservatives claim to support and which many in their constituency base fiercely defend. The expansion of the service sector after the Second World War, with women as a key component of this workforce, and the erosion of Britain's manufacturing base in which most men worked, means that women now make up 49% of the labour force. Since 1970, 90% of all new jobs created in Britain have gone to women. The number of women at work exceeds the number of men in 11 regions of the country. Male unemployment is at 14.1% of the workforce, the highest level since the 1930s. By contrast just 5.6% of the female workforce is unemployed, but half of women workers are in part-time jobs, often very poorly paid.

Traditional

Women's entry into the labour force, and high unemployment among men, undermines the traditional family. Recent television documentaries have shown that many young women in areas of high unemployment, such as the pit valleys in Wales, and the Steel towns in Northern England and the St Mellon's housing estate, see little use in having young men live with them and their children. Single mothers are now a "normal" part of society, representing 20% of all households. The acceptance by more and more people that many single mothers do a good job looking after their children, and that the traditional family cannot simply be glued together again, is illustrated by the response of a police officer in St Mellon's to Redwood's political attack: "We spend half our time sorting out domestic disputes on the estate — removing violent fathers. The thought of forcing absent fathers back is pie in the sky."

But the breakdown of the traditional family under Conservative policies, and in response to women's increased economic independence, has caused anxiety among some of the more progressive representatives of the ruling classes, who are afraid of a breakdown in society, as shown in the increase in crime. Even before the outbreak of Conservative hysteria aimed at single mothers, the liberal *Observer* newspaper had said: "The sad truth (is) that children brought

up by a lone parent are more likely to be poor, do badly at school, have a drug or drink problem and end up in jail." Single parent families are certainly poor. 42% of single mothers have gross weekly incomes of less than £100, compared to 4% of married couples. Lack of nursery provision makes it very hard for single mothers to work.

The seeds sown by Thatcher's "economic miracle" are growing into the weeds of economic decay as it becomes increasingly apparent that the problems of the British economy are long term, structural and to do with the basic choice made in the Thatcher years to make a fast buck rather than invest long term in manufacturing industry. The problems with the economy are closely linked to the crisis of the traditional family. Failure to invest in manufacturing industry, erosion of working conditions, increasing use of women as a cheap and flexible workforce and the attacks unleashed on the public sector and the welfare state have all combined to create a crisis not just in the economy but in society as a whole.

But cutting the welfare state and forcing its caring functions back into the family and onto women is now a financial imperative for the Conservatives. Spending on social security alone currently accounts for 12.3% of Gross Domestic Product and has increased by 700% since 1950. In targeting the public sector as a whole and the welfare state in

As the Guardian put it: "Ministers appeared to have been fathering more children in secret love nests than the medieval popes."

particular, the Conservatives are undertaking a massive attack on the whole working class especially women.

Women make up the majority of the public sector workforce and their jobs and working conditions have been eroded as part of the slashing of public sector spending. Redundancies, privatisations and "marketisation" of services like health and local government have resulted in massive productivity increases for the remaining public sector workforce. Conditions for the workforce and service provision have been directly pitted against each other; for example, maternity pay being cut in order to avoid



redundancies. Women have also been massively affected as the main users of public sector services. In order to realise many of the formal equalities laid down in law, especially that of entering the paid labour force on equal terms with men, women have depended on the state to "socialise" domestic responsibilities; for example, care for the old, the sick and the young. Cuts in health and social services have resulted in a "re-privatisation" of care back into the family. Psychiatric hospitals have been closed and long term hospital care slashed. 6.8 million people in Britain are carers for relatives or friends. 17% of women are carers and the estimated savings to the state of that unpaid caring is £24 billion. Nursery provision in Britain is amongst the worst in Europe, maternity leave is not a universal right, the state pension age has just been equalised by raising women's retirement age to 65 and wages councils which protected the wages of millions of the poorest paid have been abolished.

Back to Basics was to be an ideological justification for further deregulation and cuts in the welfare state, individuals were to take responsibility for themselves. The attacks on single mothers and irresponsible fathers made explicit in Back to Basics were not new and had been most clearly embodied in the Child Support Act (CSA), introduced the previous April.

At the time of its introduction the CSA seemed like an ideal way to link the Conservatives twin aims of cutting social security spending and ideologically reinforcing the traditional family. The CSA requires mothers on Income Support to claim maintenance from absent fathers, regardless of the mother's wishes and the Treasury pockets the money. Mothers who refuse to pass on the name of the father lose 20% of their benefit for the first six months and 10% thereafter. The Child Support Agency set up by the Act only collects money on behalf of women not on benefit if paid to do so.

Feminist campaigners against the Act pointed out the increased risk of violence to women from their ex-partners and argued that the Act posed the risk of renewed custody battles for lesbian mothers. They also argued that the Act was implicitly racist. Half of Black families of Caribbean descent are headed by single mothers. Men of African, Asian and Caribbean descent — who because of racism are more likely to be unemployed, imprisoned or on low wages — would be most vulnerable to

the Child Support Agency; and "failure to maintain" could be used as grounds for deportation.

Since the Act came into operation the main opposition has come from affected men and their second families. This partly represents the weakened state of the women's liberation movement but is also a response to the blaring injustices suffered by men on the receiving end of the Act. The income of many men has been reduced to benefit levels as their wages are taken by the Agency to pay for the maintenance of their children. Previous agreements reached in court are ignored so men who had reached "clean break" agreements with their ex-partners — in which they gave over their share of the house to avoid future maintenance payments — have now lost their homes but are still having to pay amounts reaching £200 per week in maintenance.

Mistakes

A number of suicides have been linked with the Act, two in Sheffield in just one week. In one case, a separated father and his two young children were found dead of carbon monoxide poisoning in their car, while in the other the car had been set alight burning to death the man and children inside. Mistakes by the agency have included a letter demanding money from a ninety-three year-old man for the maintenance of a child fathered by a much younger namesake, and that of a man who was only able to prove the Agency wrong in its pursuit of maintenance from him when his doctor verified that he had been sterilised long before the disputed child was born.

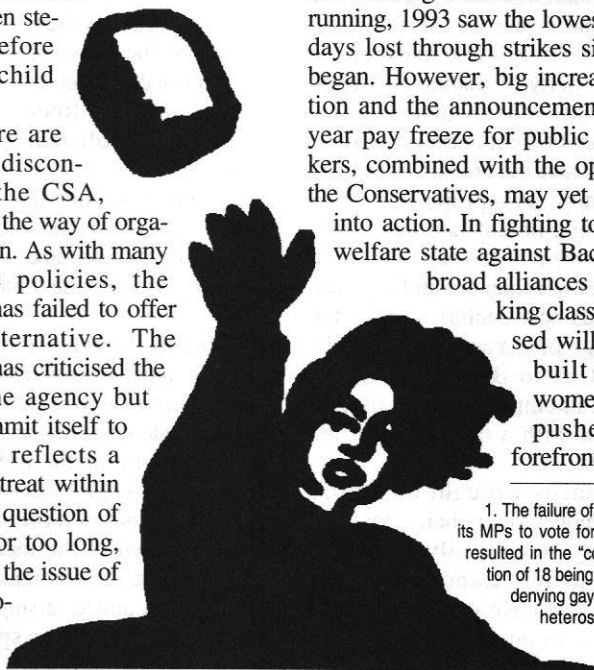
While there are rumblings of discontent around the CSA, there is little in the way of organised opposition. As with many Conservative policies, the Labour Party has failed to offer a coherent alternative. The Labour Party has criticised the working of the agency but refused to commit itself to scrap it. This reflects a much wider retreat within Labour on the question of the family: "For too long, the Left has let the issue of the family become the domain of the Right"

argued Harriet Harman, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury. Her colleague Marjorie Mowlem told Labour's women's conference this year that the party must have policies with a high "family friendliness" appeal. The Labour Party leadership has refused appeals from lesbian and gay activists to instruct MPs to vote for a forthcoming amendment which would lower the age of consent for gay men to sixteen.¹

Failure to oppose on the family reflects Labour's wider inability to oppose on the economy and disagreement within the Labour Party on welfare state policy. There is a growing economic consensus between Conservatives and Labour over the need to limit spending on welfare. Labour leader John Smith and his Shadow Chancellor Gordon Brown refuse to make firm spending commitments on Labour's behalf, arguing that spending should be on the basis of what the country can afford. The Labour left, concerned that the "modernisers" within the Party who want Labour to cut back on the welfare state are gaining ground, have launched a "Campaign to Defend the Welfare State". Ken Livingston argues that a Labour Government would have to engage in a policy of robust spending and heavy taxation of the wealthiest 40% of the population. "Labour will be forced to be much more radical in government than in opposition" he prophesies.

Back to Basics has represented a further stage in the internal implosion facing the Conservatives but has yet to be taken full advantage of by Labour or the working class. For the second year running, 1993 saw the lowest number of days lost through strikes since records began. However, big increases in taxation and the announcement of a three year pay freeze for public sector workers, combined with the open crisis of the Conservatives, may yet push people into action. In fighting to defend the welfare state against Back to Basics broad alliances of the working class and oppressed will have to be built and women's interests pushed to the forefront. ★

1. The failure of Labour to instruct its MPs to vote for this amendment resulted in the "compromise" position of 18 being adopted, thus still denying gay men equality with heterosexuals for whom the age of consent is 16.



Betrayed and enraged

SWEDISH women feel betrayed, enraged and bewildered. Will their response be to build a Women's Party? Our correspondent explains the background to this debate.

EVA NIKELL* — Stockholm, 30 January 1994

RECENT opinion polls have shown that forty percent of those interviewed — both women and men — would consider voting for a Women's Party in the next parliamentary election, to be held in September of this year.

This could, of course, be only a symbolic protest, but it demonstrates that more and more people, of both sexes, are sick and tired of politics which puts concrete before people; politics which prioritises bridges and motorways over health, schooling and the environment.

In January of this year the Social Democratic Labour Party (SAP)¹ "promised" to lower the benefit level of Sweden's famous parental leave system from ninety to eighty percent of salary.

SAP Secretary, Mona Sahlin, said in explanation that: "This move hurts, but we must make it in order to preserve the welfare state." This decision was further accompanied by support being given to the Liberal Party (also known as the People's Party [Fp])² and their compulsory "daddy's month". (If the father does not take at least one month out of the twelve possible during a seven year period, he would lose his entitlement to his full twelve months leave.)

"Family packages" are hot stuff in the build up to September's election.

Small revolution

Long parental leave in Sweden meant a small revolution occurred in ordinary people lives, and in the general attitude towards masculinity and femininity.

The system gives parents, fathers and/or mothers in any combination, the right in law to take leave of absence whilst continuing to draw ninety percent of their salary during a period of twelve months for each child, until their twelfth birthday. (With reduced net tax ninety

percent salary is, for most people, similar to one-hundred percent and it gives parents a real choice.)

Today up to thirty-seven percent of men take at least some parental leave, a figure which has risen in the last four to five years from twenty-five percent. The total of parental leave used by fathers is 9.1 percent. In the main, this leave is taken following the end of breast feeding. Other men work only six hours a day, or stay at home one day a week, when the children are small, in order to reduce the number of hours spent in day care centres.

"For the first time in modern history we have created the "two-parent family" says feminist historian Ann-Sofie Ohlander. She comments further that her eighteen year-old male students — as future fathers — find it totally undemocratic that they did not have this legal provision before.

Now however, all the establishment political parties are giving in to "the crisis".

"There must be a fundamental shift in the system", argue the bourgeois economists and neo-liberal social democrats. "But we must keep our policies about gender equality". As if gender equality could be created without economic and social possibilities!

To give parents only eighty percent of the income in a situation when women's wages are stabilized at a very low level, and when the wage gap between men and women has become much wider in all professions, will create a backlash.

A development such as this will put a halt to the real and positive changes which have taken place in Sweden during the last fifteen years. Women have been drawn out into society and men into the family, regardless of any compulsory "daddy's month".

This "promise" from the SAP to lower parental leave benefits was of course a signal to the SAF, the Swedish

bosses organisation, and to the bourgeois parties that the SAP hopes will become governmental partners after the September election.

Moreover, it was only part of a whole package of "family politics" designed by the Christian Democrats. Family allowances, home worker's pay, reduction of state benefits to day care centres, the introduction of "conscience clause" into the health education system with regard to the 1975 abortion law: all of these subjects and measures have created a whirl of activity between the parliamentary parties.

However, nobody believes that any of these packages will last very long after the election. But for the "Thatcherite" bourgeois government, composed of four different parties,³ family politics is both a melting pot and a dividing line and it is vital for the government that it can keep the peace within its own ranks before the election.

Power

Once again, women's interests are being prostituted to keep the men — and some women — in power.

On top of this development comes the "maid-debate". Woman economist Ann-Marie Pålsson has "discovered" that there is money within the household: "This could create real new markets" she argues, and proposes substantial tax cuts for people with low and high incomes

The aim being that high income households should hire low income people (read girls) as "maids", without any one losing economically on the deal.

Her ideas are to be seriously investigated by the current government.

In the same week the new pension system, which will systematically disfavour women, was presented.

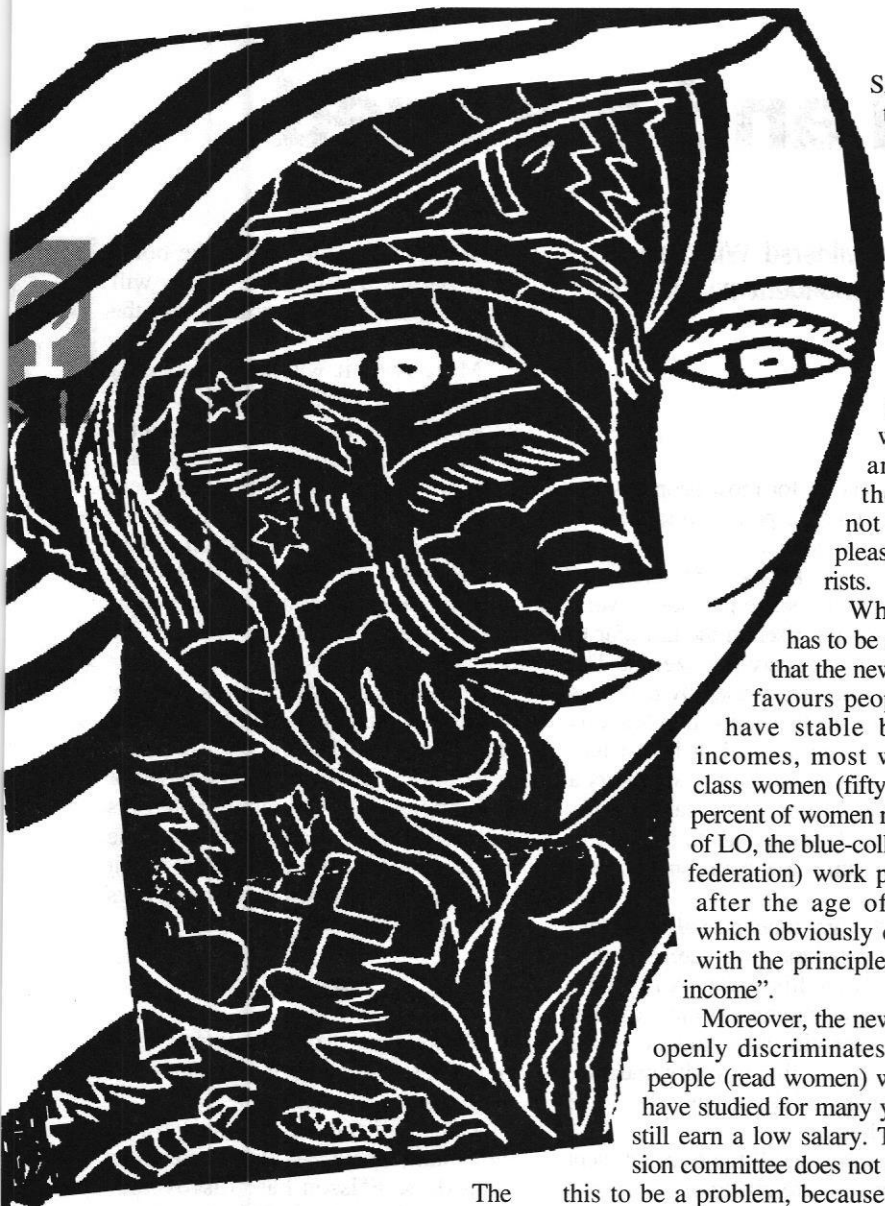
* The author is a leader of the Socialist Party (SP), Swedish section of the Fourth International.

1. The Social Democratic Labour Party (SAP) was in government from 1932-1976 and, following a short break, from 1982-1991 when it lost the last election.

2. The Liberal Party is one of the coalition partners in the current government.

3. The coalition government is comprised of, apart from the aforementioned Liberals, the Moderate Unity Party (the more rightwing component), Centre Party, and the Christian Democratic Community Party (KdS). The coalition is particularly unstable and often depends upon the support of either New Democracy or the SAP.





The existing system, which is the result of one of the main class fights won by the workers movement during the fifties, is based on the best fifteen years out of thirty in wage work.

Low income

This system disfavors women because women have low incomes, or no income at all in our mothers' generation. But, with nearly all women out in the official workforce, women little by little have begun to become pensioners with a decent living.

The new pension system — agreed upon by the government and the SAP — is based on the so called principles of "life income" and "direct input-output".⁴ It expects the norm to be full-time waged work over a period of at least forty years. Agneta Stark, a popular and radical economist has called the agreement "a handshake between working class men and professional men".

The SAP have tried to claim that the new system is good for working class women, and that they do not want to please careerists.

Whilst it has to be admitted that the new system favours people who have stable but low incomes, most working class women (fifty to sixty percent of women members of LO, the blue-collar union federation) work part time after the age of thirty, which obviously conflicts with the principle of "life income".

Moreover, the new system openly discriminates against people (read women) who may have studied for many years but still earn a low salary. The pension committee does not consider this to be a problem, because in their minds, people (read men) who study for a long time usually earn higher salaries.

In the name of gender equality, there is also to be a proposal that husband and wife should split their pension earnings between them. (It should be noted that this proposal is only for married people, in a culture with a thousand year long tradition of legal cohabiting.)

Stunningly, the proposal goes further, saying that as women generally live longer than men, a widow should only get "a fair proportion" of her husband's pension bonus after his death.

Contribution

The whole deal has been carefully constructed so that employers can reduce their contribution to the pension system, while the contribution of working people will have to increase. The gap, it is argued, "should" be evened out by bosses paying better wages. Despite the fact that in the 1950s the struggle around

pensions resulted in years of conflict, a national referendum, the dissolution of parliament and fresh elections, the government intends to push through the "reforms" with no more than eight weeks debate. The proposals are scheduled to be presented to the parliament (Riksdag) in February and, if everything goes according to plan, passed by 25 April. The SAP's desire and need to unite with the bourgeois parties is leading Sweden into a veritable dictatorship.

The SAP's recent "shadow budget" is hell-bent on industrial growth. It is projected that other investment, to develop or enlarge employment in the public sector, would come as "a result of growth in the private sector".

The SAP, Sweden's reformist state party, the architect of the welfare state, has been thoroughly converted to the neo-liberal doctrine.

Their main aim is to get Sweden into the European Union, halt inflation and construct new large scale, non state-financed industrial projects like the Öresund bridge or the new motorway system around Stockholm.

To meet these ends they openly sacrifice the interests of women.

The depth of political discontent amongst women is based on the drastic reduction in the standards of living for women in the 1980s. All talk about "golden days" and "yuppification" excluded women, both in the working class and elsewhere.

In fact, the biggest gap between female and male wages today can be found within the professional trades. Similarly, the wage gap between working class women and professional women has shrunk. And last year the number of women employed in the official labour market dropped for the first time in thirty years.

The cuts in social security, the degradation in the standards of public care, schooling and so forth made the lives of most women much harder, as workers and as mothers.

"We are already in a situation in Stockholm where day care centres built for fifteen children have to take in twenty-four. And next year there will be another fifteen percent cut, which means

4. The principle of pensions being based on "life income", ie at least 40 years, contrasts sharply with the existing system based upon the best 15 out of 30 years of work, since while many women remained in relatively low-paid jobs they did at least have the opportunity to choose the fifteen years which would go towards their pension. Similarly the principle of "direct input-output" attacks the existing pension scheme by reducing the higher level of contributions to the general fund which were required from higher earners.

that two adults will tend to forty children. What happens if there is a fire? To me it's clear that politicians prioritise cars before children", a woman unionist and health care worker said in a typical speech during a protest meeting against the new motorways.

Extreme

During the last twenty years Sweden has become a rather extreme case: The rate of waged work for women is one of the highest in the world. During the most active years, twenty-seven to forty-five, more than ninety percent of all women are active in the labour market. (For men the figure is ninety-five percent.) At the same time the birth rate is the second highest in Europe (the Republic of Ireland being the highest).

"A development such as this will put a halt to the real and positive changes which have taken place in Sweden during the last fifteen years."

This combination — high activity in the labour market alongside a high birth rate — has been possible only through an expansion in female part-time work and a welfare state.

During the 1970s and 1980s women in Sweden became economically independent of men, although this was relative. But we have in turn become very dependent on the state, and upon women-friendly political decisions.

In the last national election, in 1991, the number of women in parliament dropped from thirty-eight to thirty-three percent, and today's political proposals and decisions are crass in their ignorance about women's needs.

Many women are turning away from traditional politics and looking for something new — like a Women's Party. ★

Background...

Two years ago, the Swedish media "exploded" over the proposal that a Women's Party could have a realistic chance of entering parliament. Was there a real movement behind the proposal, or was it only a superficial media debate?

The women's movement in Sweden has not yet taken on a visible, organised form on a national scale. But behind the curtains women are organizing on a major scale in a number of milieus:

- Within the unions there are specific women's networks for both blue collar and white collar workers. Within the LO, the blue collar and biggest union federation, there is a national network called Tjejligan (the "Girls Gang") which has 10 thousand members. The level of activity of this organisation is hard to measure, but its paper, *Clara*, reaches out to 100 thousand women members every two months.

Women activists in the unions put forward many of the classic demands from the feminist movement: women's right to work, equal pay, political representation, and full social security. There have also been protests against the attacks on job security and the specific repercussions of such attacks on women.

The Swedish workers' movement, both women and men, has traditionally seen class as far more important than gender. But attitudes are changing. A recent survey showed that seventy percent of the LO-men thought that equal rights for women was the most important question for the organisation to come to grips with.

- The self-organised shelter movement is another sector of the women's movement which grew substantially in the 1980s.

Linked together through an independent national organisation, ROKS, the movement has 9 thousand active members and 132 local shelters. The organisation has some state and local funding, but most of the work is still self-financed and self-organised.

- In all the university towns there are Women's Forums. Many women researchers work closely with the union movement, or take part in different projects to support women at their workplaces.

Besides these larger groups there is a myriad of local associations, women's study projects, immigrant women's associations, women's cafés and networks for women activists of all ages.

This means that the Swedish women's movement, in its broadest sense, is today at least 50-60 thousand strong.

It was the general political discontent among these thousands of women, and indeed amongst the majority of women in the country, which, in February 1992, set the debate about a Women's Party afloat.

Opinion polls at that time indicated that thirty-three percent of those interviewed would consider voting for such a party.

Today, potential support has risen to forty percent.

The big newspaper-editors get hysterical: "Women do not care about the really important economic issues", their columns angrily argue, day after day.

And yes, it is true, women in Sweden do not care much about big bridges, new motorways, the European Union or how to beat inflation. Instead, they often care more about the education of their children, the health service, public transport, a clean environment — and they demand political representation.

Will there be a Women's Party? We do not know yet. So far a network of longterm feminist activists have registered a "Women's List", but they have not decided if they will stand.

For sure, if they stand, they will get in.

And then we all know the real hazards begin. ☹



À la carte careers

WOMEN were hit hardest by the changes in working patterns during the 1980s. In response, an élitist feminism has begun to develop in support of proposals which could create *à la carte* careers for the well-off — and misery for the poor. Our correspondent reports.

IDA DEQUEECKER* — Antwerp, 14 February 1994

THE first major offensive on work flexibilisation and unequal distribution of work in Belgium in the 1980s was, given the large-scale introduction of part-time work, directed against women. The consequences were lasting and harmful. This policy, which was requested by the bosses and promoted by the coalition Liberal/Christian Democrat governments, had, alongside a general increase in flexibility, a dual effect on women. On the one hand it sharpened their structural inequality in the labour market, on the other there was a worrying ideological drift in the terms of the discussion on the redistribution of work and the problems related to combining a paid job with responsibilities for the home.

“The movement lost its vitality in the wake of the capitulation of the trade-union leaderships to the unprecedented austerity offensive of the Liberal/Christian Democrat government.”

A striking fact is how the Greens (particularly in Flanders) have become the spearhead of a new “left” current which has accepted the bosses’ belief that full-time jobs for all are no longer possible. They are thus in the front line of the polemic with the sections of the women’s movement and the left who persevere with the so-called old-fashioned idea of a radical reduction in working time for all without loss of wages and new jobs created to compensate for lost production. This not only is a response to high unemployment but also a precondition for an equitable sharing of housework and childcare.

In the last ten to fifteen years there has been an amazing shift in the terms

of debate on the redistribution of work. Previously, the collective redistribution of the work available was the central idea, based on the principle of equality and justice. Today, it is the idea of the individual redistribution of work, based on the principle of individual free choice. This shift took place during the 1980s, a period in which the neo-liberal austerity offensive pushed the workers’ movement onto the defensive.

Up to 1975, the length of the working week was reduced by cross-sectoral agreements between the employers’ organisations and the trade unions from 45 hours (1955) to 43 hours (1969) to 40 hours (1975). In 1976, faced with the crisis and a worrying increase in unemployment, the two main union federations (Socialist and Christian Democrat)

put forward the slogan of “36 hours in 1980” with full wage compensation and job creation. The employers rejected the 36 hour demand. On the one hand they proposed “38 hours in 1981” (which has still not been achieved in all sectors, for example small retail businesses) and on the other hand through the FEB (Fédération des Entreprises de Belgique), they put forward, as a counter-proposal, part-time work, that is a bigger reduction of the working week but limited to certain people, and above all, with a corresponding cut in wages.

The women’s movement supported the trade-union demand for a generalised reduction in work hours, even if there was a discussion whether this should be expressed in a reduction of the working day or the working week. In 1980, this movement succeeded in mobilising 15 thousand women in a

demonstration called by the “Women Against the Crisis” coalition, which put forward the demands “for the right to work”, “reduction in work hours for all without loss of pay and with job creation”, “no to part-time work”. This action was repeated every year until 1983. But the movement lost its vitality in the wake of the capitulation of the trade-union leaderships to the unprecedented austerity offensive of the Liberal/Christian Democrat government. This started with the devaluation of the Belgian franc in 1981 and opened a period of generalised wage freeze with a drop in real wages and a collective — but above all individual — redistribution of work with loss of wages.

It was the successive governments in power between 1981 and 1988 which thus imposed the employers’ formulas for a reduction in work hours. This first took the form of imposing part-time work. Thus, from 1981, the legislation governing part-time work has been constantly adapted, in two ways. First of all the social legislation has been modified in order to give greater protection to part-time workers. Second, the door has been opened to flexibility “made to measure” for the enterprise (for example flexible working hours). The most striking measure that the government took during this period was undoubtedly that of subsidies for imposed part-time work.¹ The was that this form of work organisation spread rapidly. Since the beginning of the 1980s, the number of men and above all women in (involuntary) part-time work has increased by almost 200 thousand. Part-time work has become the dominant form (80%) in the increase in the number of women at work in the last few years. In addition, the increase in waged work is in great measure due to the increase in part-time jobs.²

While the illusion was thus being created that new jobs were being created

* The author is a member of the Socialist Workers’ Party (POS/SAP, Belgian section of the Fourth International).

1. An unemployed person working at reduced time “to avoid unemployment” receives benefits as part-time unemployed. This concerns women above all.

2. Between 1984 and 1990 the active waged population increased by 177,686, part-time workers by 138,367. Between June 1983 and June 1987, the total workforce dropped from 2,533,150 to 2,503,807 (*Nieuwsbrief Steunpunt WAW*, April 1993).

— although it was in fact simply the conversion of full-time jobs to part-time jobs — the discussion on the redistribution of work declined. There were exceptions, such as the women's movement which protested against the increase in part-time work. It was only with the recession of the 1990s and the new frightening increase in unemployment³ that the discussion came back onto the agenda in 1993, although in a situation where the relationship of forces was a lot less favourable to the women's and workers' movements than it had been in the 1970s. This time around, the themes of the discussion are those advanced by the bosses: full-time jobs for all are no longer possible and individual redistribution of work is much preferable. These two ideas are particularly damaging for women, who are the principal victims of unemployment (2/3 of the fully unemployed) and the unequal distribution of work.

Work and family

In 1989, the then Flemish minister of labour, Mr Vanden Brande, organised a tripartite conference on "harmonisation of work and the family". Part-time work was highlighted as one of the most popular measures in this framework. The fact that it is mainly women who take part-time jobs did not appear to worry the minister. According to him, women and men are free to choose which one will work part-time in order to be able to combine work and home responsibilities. The government should, he continued, only intervene to create the conditions to make this choice possible.

The ideological character of this discourse is scarcely hidden. First of all, when the government starts to promote part-time work it is nothing to do with its worries about people's family problems. It has, on the other hand, everything to do with creating the conditions to allow the employers to introduce part-time work on their own initiative into certain specific sectors (services, hotel and catering, retail, industrial cleaning) where they need a flexible, unskilled, cheap and part-time work-force. These are sectors where the overwhelming majority of the work-force is women. In short, women have accepted part-time jobs because they have no other choice, and often only after a struggle against them. In addition, this type of job does nothing to help the combination of work and family responsibilities as Mr Vanden Brande claims, given the changing and irregular work-hours (evening shifts, work at peak

hours, standby contracts, etc). Perhaps it seems strange but more married women have irregular working hours than married men.⁴ Most women who work part-time are not in fact women with small children, but older women (35-60 years old).

The ideological discourse is clearly very far removed from concrete reality. But it gives the tone. If part-time work is the result of individual free choice why should it continue to be subsidised? Indeed, in 1992, the system of subsidies for part-time workers was practically eliminated by the government. Only those with dependents were more or less spared, but not many were in this situation, if only because it is not possible to keep a family on a part-time wage.

In 1993, the regional and federal governments organised tripartite conference with the employers and trade unions on the question of employment. The proposals which emerged were along the lines of those made in the 1980s: part-time work (but without the financial compensation which existed at the time); flexibility, deregulation, creation of cheap jobs (for young people and unskilled workers). These same proposals were included in the Socialist/Christian Democrat government's last austerity plan, put forward in the framework of the European economic recovery policy, the so-called "Plan for employment, competitiveness and social security"

Freedom of choice

This plan gives the absolute priority to restoring the competitiveness of the Belgian enterprises. On the one hand it starts from the assumption that it must be accepted that full-time jobs for all are no longer possible. On the other, the so-called employment measures are framed within a modernist discourse which calls on individual freedom of choice. Thus the federal employment minister, Madame Smet, herself a feminist and responsible for the equal opportunities policy for women and men, has put forward the formula of "an à la carte professional career", implying that workers will have a choice between different formulas such as interruption of careers, alternation between full and part-time work, reduced working hours at the beginning and end of careers, and so on. (Attention! They all imply a loss of wages of course.) The same minister states: "As far as the redistribution of work is concerned, I of course prefer voluntary redistribution. Undoubtedly in every enterprise there will be people who wish

to work less: 3/5 time, free Wednesday afternoons, Fridays free... I prefer à la carte careers rather than a reduction in working time for all." And for the harmonisation of work and family responsibilities, it is no longer part-time but career breaks which are the preferred formula: "Harmonisation of work and family responsibilities through career breaks seems to me very important. It is true that career breaks are not only for that. But they are nevertheless important, particularly now that they have become a right in the private sector."⁵

The reality is a lot less idyllic. Many people work part-time because there are not full-time jobs, subsidies to the employers turn one full-time job into two part-time ones, the unemployed cannot refuse part-time jobs on the grounds that they want full-time ones, long-term unemployed are forced to take temporary jobs without their status of unemployed changing, enterprises in difficulty are forced to reduce working hours with corresponding wage reductions, young people are forced to undertake three-year training schemes at reduced wages. All so many limitations on free choice!

However the idea of freedom of choice is attractive. It has seduced certain feminists and women workers, disappointed by the failure to obtain a generalised reduction in work-time. Among certain feminists the idea is spreading that women are victims of their own demand, that in going to work for a wage they force themselves to work a double day (at work and at home). This has been confirmed by a series of surveys.⁶ They see no perspective except at an individual level. This idea has also been bolstered by the results of surveys, even if some questions can be asked about the interpretations and the conclusions of the researchers who themselves are not free from the influence of the dominant ideology.⁷

The question arises of who is able to choose an "à la carte career". A few months ago a number of women in management-level jobs issued a "Charter for a family-friendly enterprise",

3. There are currently more than 0.5 million fully unemployed in receipt of benefits. The real number of people affected unemployment is more than 1.1 million.

4. According to a recent survey by the CBGS (Study Centre on Population and the Family), 1992.

5. Interview in *Nieuwsbrief Steunpunt WAV*, August 1993.

6. According to a recent study a working woman will work 10 years more than her husband during her working life because of the double work day.

7. For example "A reasonable policy of work redistribution should create good conditions for all families and organisations to be able in the most flexible and correct fashion define their division of labour", (see CBGS study).



which is a plea for an optimal combination of the interests of the family and those of the enterprise, through reciprocal flexibility. "Managers would be happy to work a bit less, obviously with a corresponding salary reduction," stated the spokeswoman of this movement.⁸



"The Greens in Flanders are putting themselves forward as the spokespersons for disillusioned feminists."

But this needs a certain income level. According to the surveys, many women and men workers would like to work less, on condition that they did not suffer a loss of wages.⁹ Some university researchers propose a redistribution of work formulated according to income levels. For the higher-income groups they propose the "à la carte careers", for the lower-income groups, the classic generalised weekly reduction, with job creation. Some go even further for the less well-off, with work for the unemployed. A segmented society at different speeds is being proposed, with freedom of choice for the better-off. Against this background an elitist feminism is also developing which is only interested in the emancipation of a better-off layer.

The women's movement, even if it does not have the strength that it had in the early 1980s, resists this discourse and the governmental measures which use it. On 11 November, the annual women's day in Flanders, in which several thousand women participate each year, the women's movement once again stated its position in favour of the collective and radical reduction of the working week without loss of pay and with the creation of new jobs. For this movement, this is the only way to solve the unemployment question in a minimally egalitarian fashion on the one hand, and on the other to start to create the conditions for a fair division of domestic tasks. In a public debate which was reported in the media, the federal and regional employment ministers were challenged on their policies against women, as were the trade-union leaders for their unclear positions on the different formulas for the redistribution of work. Thus the women's movement is nevertheless raising a clear voice for the right to work and a decent wage for all, women and men, as the only guarantee of emancipation for all women.

But it is the Greens in Flanders who are putting themselves forward as the spokespersons for disillusioned feminists. In this role they are not attacking neo-liberal policies as responsible for women's worsening situation, but feminism and the women's movement. "By putting forward paid work as the lever for women's economic independence, women are totally subordinating themselves to the laws of market. In this period of high unemployment and at a time

when full-time employment for all is becoming more and more and out-of-date dream, this is leading more and more women to frustration," diagnoses Mieke Vogels, main spokeswoman of the Flemish Green party in her recent book, which received a lot of media coverage. Then she asks, "What is now the credibility of the slogan 'redistribution of work outside the home and in the home'?" She caricatures the traditional rejection by the women's movement of any form of "wages for housework": "The women's movement has always denigrated housework." She thus proposes a new strategy which takes housework as its starting point, "All women have an interest in giving increased value to the caring tasks traditionally called 'feminine' and which are in reality always taken on by women." How does she propose to do this? Even though the Flemish Green party supports the 32 hour week, it proposes at the same time to break the link between work and income and supports a basic income for all, so that economic independence is guaranteed without being obliged to go out to work for a wage. Small detail, the idea of a basic income concerns above all women. "It [the basic income] gives women the chance to be in the forefront of developing new modern forms of informal services, local solidarity, and social employment, and thus it will become clear that the tasks that are traditionally considered feminine are not superfluous and easy to pass on to others [the state], but on the contrary essential for a society on the road to emancipation."¹⁰

Family policy

Even though there is a discussion among the Greens on the notion of a basic income, as well as whether or not this can become an immediate demand,

the spokespersons, and above all their spokeswoman, make it an immediate demand. In addition, Mieke Vogels makes it quite a violent polemical point against the women's movement, considered as old-fashioned: the basic income and the greater value given to household tasks are in fact put forward as an alternative to the generalised reduction of work time and against the idea of full-time waged work.

It is undoubtedly the case that the elements of criticism of women's difficult situation that exist in the Greens discourse evoke a response among women, and even among feminists, particularly as the party is very popular. But the "basic income" answer is closer to the government's measures than the Greens would like. As an immediate demand, the basic income would result in an institutionalisation of the current situation of under-employment in Belgium which affects more than one million people, a majority of whom are women, who are in fact already partly or totally sent back to the home.

Thus the Greens' positions do more to confirm the government's current employment policy than they do to fight it. This is a policy which is consciously linked to a certain traditional family policy which is at the same time adapted to the new developments of capitalism which needs the female work-force. The norm is no longer the family with the woman at home, it is more and more the two-income family. This is very concrete. The crisis has not had more effect on people because the drop in individual incomes has been compensated above all in two-income families. But these two incomes are not equal. The policy of wide-spread introduction of part-time work for women has gone along with a conscious policy of one-and-a-half incomes per family. The reduced unemployment benefit for "dependents", that is to say people who are dependents in a household has the same function. In this situation of social inequality women remain tied to the home, they remain those mainly responsible for housework and they have a double work day. It seems that the only solution is the demand for a sharing out of paid work. Thus the fact that the women's movement has not dropped this demand, unlike many other currents, is an important factor. ★

8. *De Standaard*, 3 June 1993.

9. Recent survey by the KWB (Catholic Workers League).

10. Mieke Vogels, Jos Geysels, *Politieke Herbebossing*, 1993.

"Baby crash" shock

A NEW report on family policy claims to want to "reconcile" family and professional life. Could any parent be opposed to this abstract idea? However, the real aim of the report is to propose steps which will stem the decline in France's birth-rate — a source of so-called "instability", "atrophy" and "despair".

ISABELLE FOREST* — Paris, 14 February 1994

THIS spring, the French National Assembly is due to discuss a new draft law on the family presented by the government. This draft is currently being discussed between the different ministries concerned (Social Affairs, Finances, etc) and the precise content is not yet known. On the other hand, we do know one of the documents used by the government advisers in preparing this text: the Report on Family Policy by Colette Codaccioni (deputy for the right-wing Rally for the Republic party), prepared on request of the Prime Minister.

This report has a clearly pro-natalist orientation. Its goal is to strengthen the place of the family, considered as the mainspring of society. While some of the measures suggested could be seen as simple "social common sense" and accept the diverse reality of the family today, this is mixed in with a classically reactionary view of the world focused on the strengthening of the family institution. In the present economic context, these measures aim to lower artificially unemployment figures and pretend to offer a solution to the crisis. As large families are, by definition, large consumers this should automatically lead, according to Colette Codaccioni and others, to stimulating economic growth.

The section of the report which notes the current trends in society is centred around the idea of a "baby crash" whose scope is largely exaggerated (see interview with Hervé Le Bras in *Cahiers du Féminisme*, no. 67, 1994). The consequences of this fall in the birth rate are described in an apocalyptic manner, talking of an extremely harsh "demographic winter" which will lead

to the "decline of our France". The main reason for the fall in the birth rate is said to lie in the weakening of the family: fewer marriages, more divorces and births outside marriage. This weakening then produces a "family deficit for the child which will inevitably be reflected in the adult" and which provokes "lasting handicaps". What does this mean? The report does not say, the suggestion is enough. Are not single mothers in the United States seen as responsible for juvenile delinquency or even criminality?

Women going out to work is described as an incontestable and unavoidable fact of society, which a coherent pro-natalist policy must take into account, by making it possible to "reconcile" family and professional life. Which parents could be against the abstract idea of

The consequences of this fall in the birth rate are described in an apocalyptic manner, talking of an extremely harsh "demographic winter" which will lead to the "decline of our France"

"reconciliation"? But people should not try to make us believe that the increase in part-time work or in claims for the APE (Allocation Parentale d'Education, state allowance payable to parents who stay at home with their third or subsequent children) are the result of a free choice. We know very well that it is most often for want of anything better that women are forced into this. The authors of the report cite in passing the number of abortions performed per year which was stabilised at 170-180,000 per year except, it so happens, since 1990-91 where there has been a considerable increase (although the figures are not given). Why propagate this rumour?

The report does not say. But the juxtaposition of an increase in the number of abortion with lamentations about the "decline of our France" is not by chance.

As the decline in the birth rate is considered a source of "instability", "atrophy" and "despair", the proposals aim to "restore the family" and the "secular values of civil marriage". The suggestion is made, in order to carry through this ambition, that there should be a standing committee on family policy and an annual debate in parliament on the question.

The main measure proposed is the creation of an APLC (Allocation Parentale de Libre Choix, parental allowance for free choice). This would be paid for all children, from birth to entry to nursery school, "whatever the parent's activity". In fact, given the current situation, this allowance is only addressed to parents who would stop working, at least partially. It would replace the existing allowances for small children, care of the child in the home, and for payment of a registered childminder. It would be half the legal minimum wage if the parent stopped work completely and pro rata if the parent worked part-time. There would be three supplement-

ary measures along with the creation of the APLC. First, the parent concerned would be credited with social security and pension contributions. Second there would be increased possibilities for organising work-time (annualisation, variable working hours,

part-time) and a "sick children's leave" would be introduced for twelve paid days per year. Thirdly the "service voucher" system of the five-year employment plan would be extended. This is a system of buying the working time of employees (as one buys luncheon vouchers) for "personal workers". This measure, which is apparently supposed to create 40,000 jobs, aims to encourage children being looked after in their homes.

* The author is a member of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), French section of the Fourth International. The article is taken, with permission, from the forthcoming Spring edition of the socialist-feminist journal *Cahiers du Féminisme*.

At the same time, and in a contradictory fashion, the report says that it wants to encourage an improvement, extension and diversification of childcare. Proposals include drop-off centres and nurseries open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and more day-time leisure centres. Once again the goal is the famous "reconciliation" of family and professional life. As we see, Colette Codaccioni, prudently, does not propose a generalised return of women to the home. She cleverly mixes "solutions" of different types that taken together contribute to "restoring" the family, taking into account the real evolution of society, which has integrated women's work.

In addition, there are a certain number of reforms proposed for "ensuring and continuing" family financing. Among other proposals are making family allowances tax-funded and thus state-managed, rather than the current system of employees and employers contributions and management by a so-called independent parity body. The financial effort to be made by the state would thus be a result of demographic changes: it would be correspondingly greater if there was a low birth rate.

Price index

The Codaccioni report also proposes to peg all forms of family allowances to an increased price index (thus above the rate of inflation). These allowances would also be simplified and extended: children could be treated as dependent up to the age of twenty-two, and the special allowances for families of three and more children would be maintained until the youngest child was grown up.

With these last proposals, Madame Codaccioni is only responding to long-standing and legitimate demands. But they would still have to be implemented. Nothing is guaranteed in the current situation.

Finally the Codaccioni report suggests a reform of income tax in order to combat the current "penalisation" of married couples. Single people and unmarried couples would thus pay more taxes. Over and above her pro-natalist and pro-family goal, such measures would undoubtedly worsen current tax injustice.

This report should be rejected, not only because it manipulates the figures on which it claims to be based but also because we reject such pro-natalist policies, that is policies which challenge the free choice of women and men. ★

Against misery and exclusion

THE growth of unemployment has continued in France since 1990, the year which signalled the end of a short three-year period of economic revival which had produced some relief on the employment front. At the end of 1993, official figures show 3.8 million unemployed — or nearly 12% of the active population. This places France in second place behind Spain among OCDE countries.

CHRISTOPHE MATHIEU

— Paris, 24 February 1994

TO these figures should be added all those not accounted for and all those compelled to take "small jobs" created by successive governments. In this way, the total nears the five million mark.

If you then add those workers obliged to accept part-time contracts — women by and large — or contracts of a limited duration (three, six or twelve months only), one third of the working population is unemployed or in a situation of insecure employment.

Fifteen years of massive unemployment have had consequences in all areas of social life. Poverty is affecting wider sections of the population.

In 1993, 670,000 people were on state benefits (RMI) — that is, 20% more people than in the preceding year. The RMI gives its recipients an all-round salary of 2,400 French francs (US\$410) per month. The number of homeless continues to grow; there were 200,000 in 1993. And now the health system is under threat. Austerity measures taken to limit the social security deficit have led to a situation in which wider and wider segments of the population no longer have access to benefits. There have been dramatic consequences — an increase in tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.

The increase in unemployment and misery weighs heavily on the condition of

working people. Salaries have been frozen, and in 1993 total wages paid out by firms decreased. Working conditions continue to deteriorate.

There has been an evolution in public opinion. During the 1980s, a significant section of the population felt that priority had to go to the business sector, and that a period of belt-tightening was necessary to re-establish economic equilibrium. The failure of these policies and various social plans in the area of employment has put these kind of arguments on the defensive.

Increasingly, another idea is gaining wide currency — the idea that another approach is in order, one that prioritises the struggle against unemployment, poverty and exclusion.

Political debates over the last few months have reflected this state of affairs. Ecologists were the first — during the March 1993 parliamentary elections — to popularise on a mass scale the old trade union proposal for a massive reduction of the work week as a way of tackling unemployment. The ecologists' proposals coupled a reduced work week with a reduction of medium and high salaries (starting from 1.8 times the minimum wage).

This proposal for salary decreases provoked some concern among working people who noted that at the same time there was a growing number of contracts being signed that linked the reduction of the working week to a proportional drop in salaries for everyone. On each occasion, the argument used to justify such contracts was the threat of redundancies.

The debate was even felt within the right-wing parties, the big winners in the last elections. A group of deputies proposed a four-day work week — 32 hours — with a partial decrease in salaries. The overwhelming majority of right-wing deputies were more open to traditional arguments, such as the one that says that in times of crisis it is better to work longer hours. Nevertheless, political life was polarised by this debate for a few weeks.

While the debate around the four-day work week was centred in the political sphere, it took place at the same time as a revival in social struggles. There was a militant strike at Air France, which forced the government to withdraw its plan. Employers were also sent back to the dra-

wing board following struggles at France Telecom and at Bull, the big French computer company. There were also some rumblings from the student movement, which forced the government to back track on some planned cuts.

The end of 1993 was characterised by a revival of social struggle, and above all by a series of successes which began to restore the confidence of a working class that had previously been through a series of defeats. The most recent victory was in the area of the educational system; after a demonstration of more than one million people, the government was forced to withdraw proposed legislation designed to benefit the private school system.

But the defeats of the past still weigh heavy. In the area of employment, all struggles have a defensive character — struggles against layoffs, such as at Ciotat and Sud Marine in the Marseilles region, and the struggle against the elimination of positions at the post office. As for the trade union movement, it has not overcome its profound weakness and division. France is probably the worst off in Europe, with a unionisation rate of somewhere between 5% and 10% of the salaried population (see box opposite).

It is in this context that a number of trade unionists, organised within the "Collectif" network, initiated "Act Against Unemployment!" (AC). The creation of AC was based on the observation that the trade union movement has neither the strength nor the credibility to be the sole force behind a campaign against unemployment and for job creation. This is unlike the situation in Germany in the 1980s, when IG Metall was able to organise an exemplary mobilisation around the reduction of the work week.

AC plans to address the problem in the political arena, by taking the campaign to the population as a whole. The idea is to bring together trade unionists, social movement activists — particularly organisations of the unemployed (see box p. 28) — intellectuals and all those in favour of building a long-term mobilisation behind the following idea: "the situation has become intolerable; we have to change priorities and implement radical measures to overturn current tendencies."

From the beginning, AC has assembled a wide range of forces. In addition to the trade unions and organisations of the unemployed, the Human Rights League (LDH), the trade union federation of families (of Christian inspiration) and a number of other community organisations have joined.

The massive reduction of the work week is the first goal of the campaign. The

length of the work week has regularly decreased in France, except from 1982 onwards. All studies have shown that the reduction of the work week is an indispensable condition for job creation. Legislating a 35-hour work week would create 1 to 1.5 million jobs.

To rely solely on a future economic upturn — as does the Force Ouvrière (FO) confederation — is to sow tremendous illusions. For massive job creation, there would have to be a growth rate of between 5% and 10%, something which is out of the question in a country like France today.

Redistribution

The financing of this reduction of the work week would take place through a redistribution of wealth. The initial AC call — signed by more than 100 trade unionists, academics and social movement representatives — points in this direction.

During the first national gathering of AC on 15-16 January, the more than 600 participants adopted a plan to demand a series of emergency measures.

These measures call for a moratorium on all layoffs until the implementation of

legislation for a 35-hour work week. They call on the State to set an example by putting a halt to the eliminations of jobs in administration, public services and nationalised enterprises.

Other measures put forward include an increase in unemployment insurance and the minimum wage (RMI), and defense of the rights of the unemployed to housing, health care and free public transit.

Over the long term, AC's goal is to rebuild solidarity based on the joint mobilisation of working people, the unemployed and those hovering between the two categories.

For this campaign to get anywhere there has to be a certain relationship of forces on the national level. AC is therefore organising a national march across France in April and May. There will probably be five marches that will go through as many of the major population centres as possible, and converge on Paris on 29 May.

This initiative, which should have a tremendous impact across the country, will provide an opportunity to improve the relationship of forces and advance toward the campaign's objectives. ★

A divided movement

THE French trade union movement is made up of three large confederations. The CGT, run primarily by activists from the French Communist Party (PCF), remains the main confederation, in trade union electoral terms, but primarily in activist terms, even though its influence has been declining over the last few decades.

The CFDT comes second to the CGT in trade union electoral terms, and originates in Christian trade unionism. Its "deconfessionalisation" dates from 1964. This confederation took up the themes of May 1968 throughout the 1970s, but made a right turn in the 1980s, making it the conciliatory force of the trade union movement. The evolution of the CFDT generated a crisis which continues to this day, and has seen the post office and health sectors (SUD and CRC) bureaucratically repressed and split off. There is a structured left-wing opposition which represents about one third of the confederation.

The FO is a confederation influenced by social democracy, and was created on the basis of a split from the CGT in 1947. While "reformist", the FO has taken a more militant turn of late. But it remains isolated, as it refuses to work with both the CGT and CFDT leaderships.

In addition to these three confederations, there are two smaller ones: the CFTC, a very inactive Christian confederation, and the CGC, which organises administrative employees.

There are also autonomous and independent trade unions. First, there is the FSU, the strongest in the education sector with more than 40% of unionised workers. This federation originates in the united teachers' federation, the FEN, which is dominated by a social democratic current that expelled the trade unions and tendencies supported by activists close to the PCF and far-left groups. The FSU is now twice the size of the FEN.

There are also more limited forces around the "group of ten", which includes those excluded from the CFDT (SUD, CRC, and so on) and those trade unions, like the FEN, that opposed the 1947 split: SNUI in the department of taxation, SNJ among journalists, and so forth.

There is a network around the magazine "Collectif", which includes activists from the CFDT opposition, the group of ten, the FSU and various CGT oppositionists. ☉

Jobless and organised

AT the onset of the crisis in the 1970s, trade union confederations — particularly the CGT and the CFDT — tried to organise the unemployed into “committees of the unemployed” linked to their confederation. These initiatives, which met with some success, were wound up in the 1980s for two main reasons. First, as a result of the lack of motivation from the confederations, which supported the Socialist Party (PS) government at the time. Second, due to a rise in structural unemployment, which distanced the employed from the unemployed.

Today, more than one million unemployed have been so for more than one year; trade unionism does not have much meaning for them, no more than it does for youth in unstable situations who see trade unionism as something institutionalised and outdated.

Organisations of the unemployed have thus sprung up over the last few years. First, there was the “union of the unemployed”, which gave rise to today’s National Movement of the Unemployed and Unstable Workers (MNCP). The MNCP is part of AC and the “Sharing” movement, organised by the founder of the union of the unemployed, Maurice Pagat.

The “Sharing” movement puts forwards demands for the sharing of work and revenues (including workers’ wages), which makes its relations with the employed rather difficult. There is also the Association for the Employment, Information and Solidarity of the Unemployed and Unstable Workers (APEIS), founded in the Paris region, usually by PCF-run municipal governments. The president of APEIS is a signatory of the AC’s founding appeal.

Finally, outside of Paris, there are a number of local groups which are not part of any national federation.

In general, organisations of the unemployed are weak and isolated. The building of a strong national movement of the unemployed and of unstable workers, alongside the trade unions, is one of the stakes in the development of the AC campaign. When AC committees grow with a massive — even majority — participation from the unemployed, they refuse to play second fiddle to the organised trade union movement. As a result, they need the means to develop an autonomous structure. ★

Action, solidarity and debate

THE following text is the initial draft of the appeal put out by the “Act Against Unemployment” (AC) campaign. It has served as a platform for the founding of a broad movement which aims to strengthen solidarity between working people and the unemployed, to create a space for thoroughgoing debate around the question of work, and to struggle for an immediate reduction in the length of the work week.

DOCUMENT

// SIGNATARIES to this call — the unemployed, working people, trade union and social movement activists, teachers, students, youth, peasants, social workers, academics, retirees — assert their common will to meet, exchange their thoughts and experiences, and take initiatives to give rise to a broad movement which can genuinely tackle the problem of unemployment.

Global competition has had a devastating impact. However, there are firms making profits, often very significant profits. These do not go towards hiring, on the contrary. When they are not placed on the speculative market, they are invested in growing automatised efforts, which have expelled millions of men and women from the workplace and from social life.

Technological progress

Technological progress should benefit all of humankind. Instead, it has led to social regression: anguish for youth; pressure on women to take part-time employment or to return to domestic life, thereby further devaluing their social role; the exclusion of the old and the weak, treated like so many worn out tools; the creations of layers of insecurity, people with no status and no real social rights; the exclusion of immigrants and the rise of xenophobia.

The threat of layoffs hangs more and more ominously, even over the heads of the most highly educated. And “social dumping” is growing on a European and global level.

The current division of working time and revenues creates unemployment and insecurity, and overtime. It leads to exclusion, and threatens social equilibrium and democracy itself. It restricts solidarity to

the employed: those that work contribute to the social budgets meant for those without work, while other social categories are exempted from solidarity efforts. Even today, work remains a very strong social link; and unemployment is the main form of exclusion.

There is a need to continue the struggle against layoffs, and for the definitive hiring of those in an unstable position. Overtime should be restricted. Everyone should be guaranteed an adequate wage — whether employed, unemployed, welfare recipients, youth, refugee applicants, and so on.

But all this is not adequate. We can no longer tolerate the exclusion — often definitive — of working people, youth and entire families. However valuable they may be, the many local experiences that try to address this problem directly can’t beat back this rising tide of unemployment and exclusion.

For a reduction in the length of the work week. For more than a century, the struggle to work less has been one waged by working people to live a better life. Today, confronted with the acceleration of the pace of work — with the fatigue and effects on the nervous system this brings — a new stage is necessary, and can make free time, education, leisure and culture accessible to everyone. It is good sense to divvy up working hours among everyone, thereby massively reducing working hours.

This reduction has to take place in the following manner:

- without worsening the condition of working people. They have been asked to many sacrifices over the years and the living conditions for many of them are already difficult;

- without intensifying the pace of

work. This means enacting the necessary guarantees around hours, breaks, pace, norms, and the amount of work done by each worker;

- by adapting through negotiations from sector to sector, but based on nationwide legislation that sets 35 hours as the maximum legal length of the work week;

- with concomitant hiring, to genuinely address the problem of unemployment.

Among developed countries, France ranks as one in which inequalities in revenue and holdings are among the most pronounced. The wealthiest 10% of households receive 28% of revenues and hold 54% of assets. The poorest 50% of households hold only 6% of assets!

The costs of unemployment

The rise of unemployment has led to a growth in these inequalities. For many years, in fact, it is mainly working people, retirees and job-seekers that have borne the costs of unemployment. Directly so for those who have lost their jobs and their salaries, but also for the employed through taxation and payments subtracted from their pay cheques — whether this money goes towards funding job-creation measures, to make up for exemptions accorded to businesses, or to pay for the deficit in social security.

At the same time, taxes have been progressively reduced on financial speculation, fast profits, profits and capital gains.

It is possible to finance the reduction of the work week and defend working people's purchasing power through:

- the drop in the costs of unemployment following upon the creation of jobs;

- a more just sharing out of the enormous productivity gains that have been made over the years;

- the taxation of revenues from financial speculation and other unproductive activities;

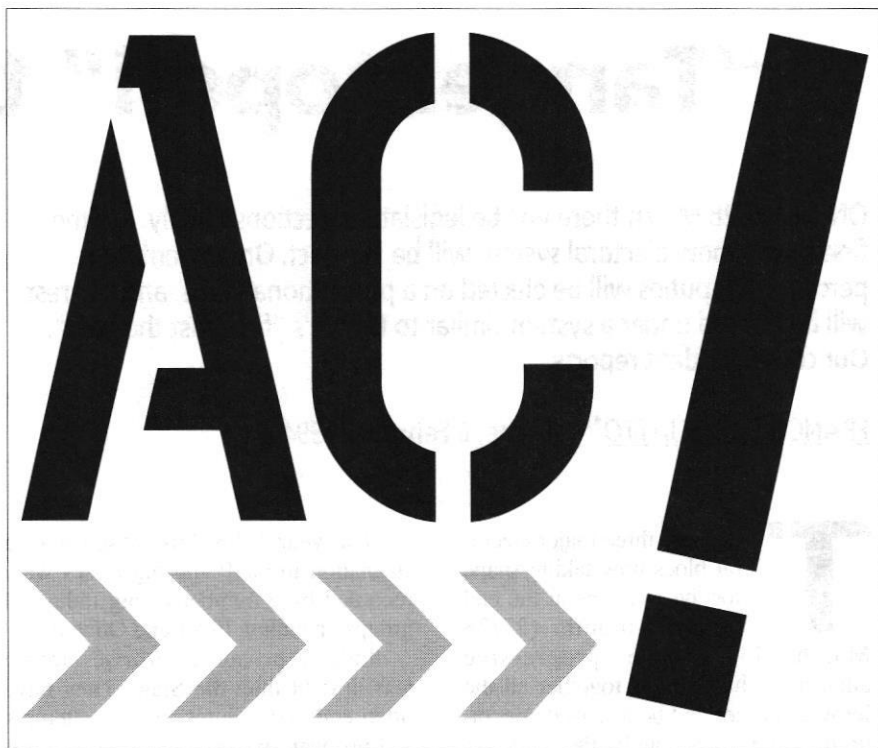
- a more just and effective use of taxes and social security contributions;

- a more just redistribution of wealth produced between labour and capital;

- initiatives for a coordinated reduction of the work week on a pan-European level;

- the establishment of a new relationship between rich and poor countries.

We commit ourselves to organise a broad public debate on all these questions. All proposals have to be heard and be debated — those that propose ways to avoid decreasing purchasing power as well as those that feel it necessary to lower the highest wages, or any other proposal concerning taxation and redistribution.



The mobilisation of working people and the unemployed for the 35-hour work week (on the way to the 30-hour work week) is an essential condition if this debate is to be as broad as possible.

Another mode of production

There is a need to find another mode of production, another organisation of work that is not based on current divisions. The economy has to be revived by prioritising needs that have not yet been met: in health care, education, housing, the environment, community life, public services — all this towards an enduring form of development that respects ecosystems, nature and the rights of future generations in the North and South.

Jobs have to be created, and jobs in sectors undergoing reconversion have to be reconceived without layoffs. There is also a need to make education accessible to everyone — from the initial stages right through specialisation — and to prioritise investment in the educational system. These goals are within reach in a developed country such as our own. They can also give a boost to the idea of a social Europe.

The signatories of this call propose to help in the coordination of initiatives against unemployment, to build a broad movement with three main goals:

1. To strengthen concrete solidarity between working people and the unemployed: by recognising and supporting organisations of the unemployed, by prio-

ritising their representation — and by helping to set up spaces for information, mutual assistance and for common activities around questions of free time and the creation of useful jobs.

2. To debate together: over basic questions raised in the fight against unemployment. How to share and organise work? How to share wealth and revenues in a more equitable fashion, in France, Europe, and the rest of the world? How to make the link between the various anti-unemployment initiatives that have been taken across Europe? How to rethink the educational system to break down segregation and develop forms which provide qualifications for all segments of the society and culture? How to rethink the place of work in society and imagine other venues for social interaction? How to open up free time to forms of solidarity — awareness, creativity, citizenship — that can at last be socially recognised?

3. To organise and act for a reduction of the work week — immediately for a basic law fixing a legal weekly limit of 35 hours, towards the 30-hour work week.

It is collective action that will unleash a new, alternative logic. For this, trade union and social movement efforts have to converge. There has to be a will to develop solidarity, so a broad social movement can bring together working people and job-seekers, women and men, French citizens and immigrants, and all those who believe that the limits of what is tolerable were crossed long ago. ★

"Tangentopoli" toppling

ON 27 and 28 March there will be legislative elections in Italy. For the first time, a new electoral system will be in effect. Only twenty-five percent of deputies will be elected on a proportional basis, and the rest will be elected under a system similar to Britain's "first past the post". Our correspondent reports.

FRANCO TURIGLIATTO* — Rome, 6 February 1994

There are three major electoral blocs now taking shape for the elections at the end of this month (27/28 March). Firstly, the "progressive alliance", which brings together all the leftwing parties and bourgeois democratic formations¹. Secondly, the moderate centre, represented by what remains of the former Christian Democracy (DC) — having transformed itself into the Italian People's Party (PPI) — and by the "Pact for Italy" grouping under the leadership of the former Christian Democrat Mario Segni.

And finally there is a bloc of the three rightwing — even far-rightwing — formations. The fascists of the Italian Social Movement (MSI) have created the National Alliance under the leadership of Giancarlo Fini. The Northern League, led by Umberto Bossi, is hegemonic in the northern regions of the country. And the "Forza Italia" grouping — launched by the powerful business magnate Silvio Berlusconi who controls a media empire — which was founded thanks to Berlusconi's close ties to the leaders of the former government, including the "socialist" Bettino Craxi. Berlusconi sees himself as the supreme saviour of a country in the throes of a deep-going crisis.

It is the imperatives of the market and international competition that have compelled the Italian bourgeoisie to unleash a frontal attack against working people — going from salary cuts to layoffs and the erosion of social gains. A major devaluation of the lira has given some breathing room to a crisis-ridden industrial sector, thanks to a spectacular growth in exports. But this has not been sufficient to generally revive the economy, as a result of the decline in internal consumption provoked by austerity measures.

The year 1993 thus closed with a stagnation in GNP and big losses were recorded by a number of big industrial groups, including FIAT and Olivetti.

Indeed, private enterprises are no less in debt than the State. They have often endured failures in their attempts at European expansion and concentration. The example of FIAT is symbolic in this regard. The Turin-based group lost market shares both in Italy and across the European Union, and was obliged to increase its assets by linking up with real estate and insurance companies, and banks such as the powerful Deutsche Bank — which has meant, among other things, a limit on the power of the Agnelli family.

Generally speaking, there have been confrontations between the various powerful economic groups in the country, and it is difficult to say who will emerge victorious. Within the Ciampi government itself, conflicts have broken out between financial lobbies around the question of the privatisation of the massive industrial and financial property of the State. This privatisation would be a major operation that would have a significant impact on the evolution of the relationship of forces within the bourgeoisie.

Conflicts within the economic sphere are intertwined with political conflicts between old and new — or recycled — elites. And all this is taking place against the backdrop of the spectacular scandals that have implicated the secret services, ministers of the interior and the president of the Republic himself.

To understand the crisis of leadership in the Italian bourgeoisie, it is useful to recall the role of Christian Democracy (DC) in the political regime set up after the Second World War.

The DC was able to get a wide range

of leaders linked to the economic strongholds and able to translate into political terms the interests of the bourgeoisie. Moreover, those belonging to this party, or designated by it, led the big enterprises and banks of the State sector. It was also people from DC that controlled the repressive apparatus of the State and managed the State's ties with NATO and the US.

At the same time, in the parliamentary and institutional arena, the DC created a network of allies and political satellites associated with the running of the government. It established a long-term compromise with the Italian Communist Party, which proved helpful for maintaining the equilibrium of the bourgeois State.

Patronage

Through its control over these economic and political levers, and over the resources allocated to the Welfare State, the DC managed to organise a rather sophisticated and broad system of consensus and patronage in the different social layers of the population. It achieved greater social and ideological cohesion as a result of its privileged relations with the Catholic Church and its diverse organisational structures. And we shouldn't underestimate how much it benefitted from its ties to leaders of the Mafia and the Camorra in the south of the country.

All this taken together meant that, in the interests of the bourgeoisie, the DC was able to exercise a hegemony that was not only political but also social and cultural. It should also be added that all this was possible insofar as the PCI — hegemonic within the working class and among other popular layers — accepted the framework of the system and countered any anti-capitalist dynamics of the mass movements, especially following the war and after 1968. No doubt, the

* The author was recently elected to the leadership of the PRC and is a supporter of the Fourth Internationalist journal *Bandiera Rossa*.

1. The progressive alliance has a wave in the colours of the Italian flag as its symbol. It is composed of the following groups: the PDS; the PRC; la Rete (the Network) led by Orlando, the anti-mafia mayor of Palermo; the Greens; the Democratic Alliance, an organisation that will be supported by "progressive" businessmen; social Christians; and two groups left over from the PSI after breaking from Craxi and his supporters.

clientelist system was costly for Italian capitalists but, when all is said and done, it was beneficial over a long period.²

The crisis of the DC first resulted in the departure of broad sectors of the small and medium bourgeoisie in the north — sectors which have been hit by the national and European economic crisis and fear the loss of their privileges. This crisis

was fed by the progressive decline of the Welfare State following the contraction of financial resources, and further aggravated by the revival of the MSI in the south. Finally, this crisis was greatly deepened by the intervention of the justice system into matters of corruption, which played a detonating role in the break-up of the political system.

Phenomenon

A few points should be made concerning what is commonly called the "Tangentopoli" (literally, "the city of bribes"). The phenomenon is not so much one of political corruption, but rather of a political and social reality that goes much deeper. Tangentopoli was the way in which the bourgeoisie and its parties went about "normalising" Italian society after the big wave of struggles in the 1970s and to overcome the 1982-85 economic crisis. They wanted to introduce a system of rule which had precise goals.

In other words, a pact was made between big business figures, on the one hand, and the DC, PSI and other government parties on the other. The goal was to carry out a huge transfer of working class wealth to the employers through the State. This was achieved through a series of measures: the elimination of the sliding scale of wages and State payment for major social costs; aid without condition to enterprises for their investment and State orders for monumentally useless public works; outright presents from the State to individuals (for example, the low-price sale of Alfa Romeo to Fiat and the purchase of Montedison shares); and finally the acceptance of a budgetary deficit that has profi-



Who will gain in strength from the "progressive alliance"? The PRC or the PDS?

ted capitalists that loaned money to the State at very favourable rates.

It is therefore not surprising that the public "guarantors" of these operations have claimed that their "mediation" in these matters were paid off with bribes corresponding to a pre-determined share in the take. At the same time, the State turned a blind eye to the tax evasion of large sectors of the small and medium bourgeoisie, which was a decisive social base for this order built on corruption.

Shrinking

The end of the speculative cycle of the 1980s provoked a crisis of the system: economic margins were shrinking and the Italian bourgeoisie could no longer allow for such costly ruling mechanisms. There can be no doubt that one of the current problems of the big bourgeoisie is that of also getting the small and medium bourgeoisie to pay for the crisis.

Indeed, the introduction of a modest and questionable tax — called the minimum tax — has thrown tens of thousands of small and medium-size business people and artisans out of the market. These are the layers that fear — not without reason — their own proletarianisation and have joined forces with the Northern League.

When we say that the bourgeoisie has to equip itself with a new political leadership, we are not ignoring the fact that it already has aggressive anti-worker policies and that the State executive has gone to great lengths to put them in place. The Amato and Ciampi governments — directly supported by the industrial employers confederation and the trade union bureaucracies with the

agreement of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) — have struck hard against working people.

In the space of two years, 800 thousand jobs have been eliminated. In 1993, for the first time since the war, salaries declined as did consumption. Every month the people's standard of living drops further towards poverty. The financial law, adopted at the end of the year with the approval of the PDS, has gone further in the direction of destroying social gains.

The counter-reform in the area of health and pensions and the school privatisation plan — combined with layoffs in industry and the process of restructuring in the public sector — have had an adverse effect on solidarity, forms of social organisation, opportunities for trade union action and democratic consciousness (that is, an understanding of the importance of democratic rights).

It is from this point of view, and not only from the angle of immediate economic effects, that the consequences of government policy have to be measured. In this context, elementary reactionary reflexes have come to the fore and there is a growth of tendencies favourable to the establishment of "efficient" governments of an authoritarian nature.

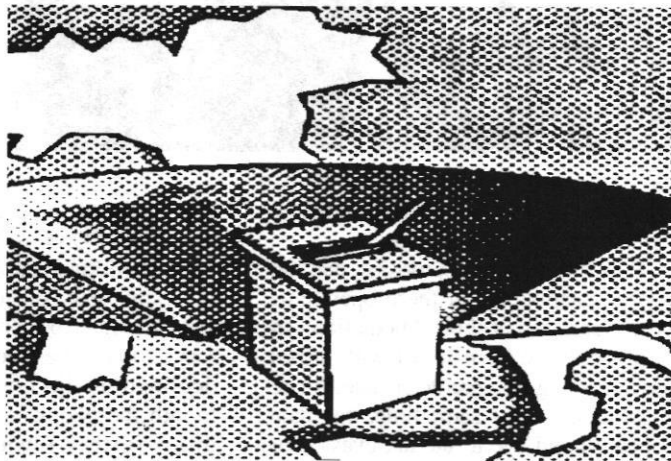
This is the origin of the Northern League and the neo-fascists' successes. In other words, there is a rightward regression that could accentuate within the framework of very serious future

2. This omnipresence of Christian Democracy in Italian life was symbolised by Giulio Andreotti. He was almost always a member of the government and was president of council on several occasions. Today he has been incriminated for the relations he maintained with mafia bosses.

social and political convulsions — independently of the specific political forms of such a tendency in the governmental arena.³

It is in this same context that the problem of the unity of the country and the Northern League's separatist goals have emerged. In the final instance, the fracturing of the country is determined as much by the dynamic of European unification as by the government's neo-liberal measures. These are challenging the traditional forms of the capitalist market and the nation.

Is time running out for Italy?



The Northern League — which is pro-Europe, a partisan of neo-liberalism, and which has roots in sections of the small and medium bourgeoisie, and also among popular layers — serves to aggravate these divisions. The real problem is not one of maintaining the abstract unity of the country nor of defending discredited institutions — but rather in maintaining the unity of the working class and its ties to its allies, in the interest of opposing centrifugal tendencies and avoiding dangerous conflicts among the poor.

In the current context there are still positive elements on which one can rely to revive the struggle and hope for some success. First, there are those social sectors which — while representing a minority — are conscious of the dangers of the extreme deterioration of political and social life in the country, want to fight back and are beginning to mobilise.

There was confirmation of this fact at the demonstration of September 25 against the policies of the government, for the 35-hour work week and democracy in the workplace. The more than 100 thousand people participating represented significant sections of the working population in struggle to defend their jobs, and other sectors ready to mobilise around more general objectives. These

included students and youth groups, trade union and social movement base structures, women, and activists from various political formations that understand the historical stakes of the looming battles.⁴

To describe these forces, the new secretary of the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC), Fausto Bertinotti, used the expression “active remainders” — that is to say, forces that have survived the violent attacks of the adversary and are ready to re-take the initiative. As

far as other sectors are concerned, there are no clear boundaries between those that could either slip into passivity and despair, support an orientation close to that of the Northern League, and those that may react through struggle and the development of their class consciousness — provided that there are clear alternative projects.

Mobilise

Throughout the autumn of 1993, a number of struggles developed in workplaces in defense of employment. Working people have proven their willingness to mobilise in this field, in spite of their isolation and the absence of a broad initiative. Results have been rather modest and precarious, but employers have had to back down, at least in part, on certain occasions.

For their part, youth mobilised massively in November and December 1993 against the privatisation of schools and reductions in teaching staff. This was a significant mobilisation even though it did not achieve its goals, and even if there is a long way to go before a coherent student vanguard can emerge.

Finally, in December 1993-January 1994 a new crisis broke out at FIAT. Management wants to lay off 15 thousand workers over two years, close Alfa

Romeo in Milan — an historic bastion of the working class — and eventually massively cut the workforce at Mirafiori in Turin. For the first time, the list of those laid off includes many white-collar employees who in the past took the side of the employers.

After initial difficulties — when only Alfa Romeo workers in Milan and Sevel workers in Naples seemed ready to fight — FIAT workers in Turin also massively mobilised in January, and the white-collar workers participated alongside the industrial workers.

Workers are demanding the redistribution of production to all workplaces, the reduction of the work week and solidarity contracts that allow everyone to keep their jobs with a small loss in salary. On the level of the city more generally, the traditional prestige of the company management has been shaken. This is a very delicate time, especially when considered that what happens in Turin is a measure of the class struggle in the whole country.

To conclude, we are beginning to see significant developments, but they remain embryonic — above all because the process of rebuilding a democratic class struggle trade union has yet to develop. And the fact that groups of trade union leaders fully accept the logic of the capitalist system has weighed in heavily against struggles.

It is difficult to interpret the results of the municipal elections that were held at the end of November 1993 and the beginning of December. The left and centre-left alliances won against the Northern League and the MSI in the big cities, where the organisational fabric of the working class movement as well as a strong democratic sensibility persist. But they were defeated in a number of small and medium-sized cities. Moreover, the left more often than not actually lost votes, even if its percentage increased as a result of the growth in abstentions —

3. In his report to the PRC congress, Lucio Magri underlined the fact that the Northern League and MSI “got votes not by adopting moderate positions, but by basing themselves on the most extreme and troubling reactions — rejecting parliamentarism and parties as such, based on individualist values of competition and force in a completely irrational way. They hope to consolidate a new inter-class social block through promoting old reactionary myths as well as new myths around ethnic separation [...] As a result, they have won votes not only from moderate voters, but also in popular neighbourhoods and among the youth. So these are not regular rightwing gains, but signal the emergence of a mass reactionary rightwing which is objectively subversive.”

4. The demonstration was organised by the PRC, the Greens, la Rete, oppositional trade union structures (councils, the base committees, the Essere sindacato current) and youth groups. The PDS refused to participate and the trade union federations were hostile to the initiative.

and the Northern League and the neo-fascists received additional votes.

In any event, based on these results the PDS has launched a vigorous political offensive, with the aim of giving credence to the idea of forming a "progressive" government. Such a government would be based on an alliance with "democratic" sectors of capital, and continue to implement the so-called economic and budgetary rectification undertaken by the Ciampi government. Occhetto has made numerous declarations to reassure Italian and international financial circles, as well as the NATO high command and the White House itself.

Re-alignment

It is true that the crisis of bourgeois political formations and their difficulties in achieving a serious re-alignment could lead to a situation in which the left might be able to form a government. However, neither the real relationship of forces within the left nor its current political orientation give any reason to believe that this will be a government that can confront the serious problems faced by the working class.

Even if the progressive front were to win the elections — which, by the way, is unlikely — the government that would emerge from such a victory in the current situation would only represent a passing phenomenon. It would run the risk of being swept away by the explosive social and economic contradictions which it would be unable to address with the approach it has adopted up until this point. And the progressive front is not inclined to changing this approach. The path would thus be cleared for a much more substantial victory by the right-wing.

To conclude, it is illusory to provide purely electoral and institutional solutions to the crisis. The starting point can only be the rebuilding of the organisational fabric of the mass movement, and a framework for social struggles, a renewal of class consciousness and the unity of working people in struggle at all levels. This means a long-term oppositional campaign that seeks to radically change the current relationship of forces.

In other words, the creation of an anti-capitalist social bloc is the necessary condition for any governmental project that does not end up in the kind of defeat suffered recently by the French left. ★

PRC congress

THE second congress of the Communist Refoundation Party was held in Rome from 20 to 23 January. With 59 for, about ten votes against and about 30 abstentions, the national political committee — a body which is more commonly referred to as a central committee, and is composed of 218 members — adopted a set of theses in October 1993. There was meant to have been discussion on these theses in the local bodies of the organisation. But after the elections in the end of November and the beginning of December, the focus of the debate made a marked shift. The question then became one of agreeing to or rejecting a left or "progressive" alliance in the run up to the March legislative elections, and considering the possibility of a government being formed on the basis of this alliance.

In next month's dossier, *International Viewpoint* will be returning to the debates inside the PRC (alongside developments in other European Communist parties), and to the current political approach of this party. Suffice to say here that different approaches were debated in the provincial and national congresses. A majority of the outgoing leadership thought that the broadest possible alliance of "progressives" had to be made, and even put forward the idea of a coalition government after the elections.

There were minorities on the provincial level which while accepting the idea of electoral agreements — imposed by the new electoral law — explained that given the major differences that exist between different groups on the left there is no basis for a real alliance or for a coalition government. Others, while not entirely agreeing with these arguments, wanted merely to stick to the theses adopted in October which, according to them, had actually been abandoned by the majority on the important questions.

In the final part of the congress, these differences led to the presentation of three different motions. The first, put forward by a large majority of the outgoing leadership and signed by Armando Cossutta and Fausto Bertinotti — respectively the president and the new secretary of the party — received 70% of the votes. A second motion, put forward by those that had opposed the orientation of the leadership in the provincial congresses, and also rejected the October theses, was signed, among others, by Giovanni Bacciardi (Florence), Emilia Calini (Milan), Marco Ferrando (Savone), Paolo Ferrero (Turin) and Livio Maitan (Rome). This motion received 20% of votes. The remaining 10% went to those who supported maintaining the October line, including two members of the leadership, Ersilia Salvato and Luigi Vinci.

According to the statutes and the norms of the congress, minorities are represented on a proportional basis both in the national political committee and on the leadership — while the secretariat is composed solely of people from the majority.

A number of diverse foreign delegations participated in the congress, including the Chinese Communist Party, the Cuban Communist Party, Communist parties from western Europe, South America, South Africa, the Vietnamese and North Korean parties, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the Russian Socialist Workers' Party (PST). The United Secretariat of the Fourth International was represented by Alain Krivine and François Vercammen. — Livio Maitan ☉

Government skulduggery

Below we publish an interview with Vasudeva Nanaykkara, a leader of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP, Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International). It was conducted in December 1993 in Brussels, where he spoke at a conference organised to demand the cancellation of the Third World debt.

INTERVIEW

WHAT has the political situation been like in Sri Lanka since the 1 May 1993 assassination of President Premadasa?

The new president was installed in office by a vote in parliament not only without opposition by any factions in the govern-

ment but even with the tacit blessings of the opposition. It was only my single voice in parliament that demanded an immediate election and resignation of the government instead.

The ruling class was frightened that instability would arise. The opposition congratulated the new president and the entire opposition participated in paying last respects to the assassinated president. As the news of the assassination was

known crackers were lit in different parts of the country to express joy. This is quite contrary to our culture. But the hatred and fear was such that the people reacted thus. We maintained that we offer no condolences.

The administration stabilised with the concurrence of the opposition and the new regime made a few cosmetic moves to show that it wasn't authoritarian. In the midst of this air of liberalism the regime continued with the harsh economic policies even more rapidly and brazenly. The police killed two persons by firing at a crowd of opposition supporters in the southern city of Galle. The regime was thus baptised in blood.

The new president attempted to bring back into the government those who had left in opposition to his predecessor and thereby weaken the opposition further and secure a consensus to run the government. As a faction resisted this more, the negotiations became protracted and this section (DUNF) joined with the rest of the opposition to constitute the majority and assume office in three provincial councils on a quid pro quo basis.

But the negotiations with the president are not closed. With the immediate fears of instability wearing out, factional conflicts and manoeuvres by means of cabinet reshuffles had begun within the government and the discussion is increasing.

What is the difference between the new and the old presidents?

The personal authority exercised by the assassinated president was a means of keeping self-preserving political decisions above the pressures of the bureaucracy while the weakness and incompetence of the new incumbent in office has succumbed to all pressures, including those of the World Bank. Therefore the new government has become more vulnerable, while pleasing the ruling clan.

Introduction

SRI LANKA made a brief appearance in the world news spotlight in November 1993 when the 10-year war between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the north and east of the country took yet another bloody turn.

The country had already been in the headlines in May of the same year, with news of the May Day assassination of the president and, a few days before, of a main leader of the opposition.

Yet much to the surprise — and relief — of many observers this spectacular violence has not provoked the dreaded cycle of pogromist attacks and brutal government repression that the south of the country witnessed in the 1980s. While the war rages in the north and east — and the new president refers to the conflict solely as a "problem of terrorism" — in the south the government has charged ahead with the IMF-dictated "modernisation".

This has meant a shift towards export-oriented production — largely textiles produced in Colombo-area Free Trade Zones — and all the usual measures associated with structural adjustment: austerity, liberalisation and privatisation, including of the massive State-owned tea and rubber plantations. While President Wijetunge talks of achieving newly-Industrialised Country (NIC) status by the year 2000, the country has a record trade deficit and is unable to attract anything more than short-term and highly fragile foreign investment — which is now looking to even lower wage zones in Bangladesh and Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Provincial Council (PC) elections held in the south of the country last May produced opposition victories in three of seven PCs, including of the People's Alliance¹ in the decisive Western PC of which the capital Colombo is a part.

However, the ever-present authoritarianism of the United National Party (UNP) government led to UNP figures being named as the Chief Ministers in two of these three PCs. While the Court of Appeal annulled these appointments, the UNP-orchestrated abduction of an opposition councillor led to the dissolution of the Southern PC, which will hold new elections on 24 March.

Suffice it to say that the democratic space is very fragile, and that the UNP's skulduggery around the PC elections does not bode well for the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for the end of this year.

And in spite of the gains posted in the 1993 PC elections, the opposition remains weak and divided — symbolised by the recent defection of SLFP deputy leader Anura Bandarnaike to the ruling UNP, and the return of Democratic United National Front (DUNF)² leader Gamini Dissanayake to the UNP fold. — **Raghu Krishnan** ☉

1. The People's Alliance consists of the bourgeois Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the old left parties, the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL).

2. The Democratic United National Front (DUNF) was formed in 1992 under the leadership of former UNP ministers Lalith Athulathmudali and Gamini Dissanayake who were expelled from the UNP following their campaign to impeach former president Ranasinghe Premadasa.

What is the opposition doing now?

The opposition engages in ritualistic oppositionism without throwing any challenge to the government precisely because it has nothing different to offer except variations in nuances. The trade union bodies controlled by this opposition alliance are reassuring its members that everything will be alright with the political changes at the next elections, to be held by the end of 1994.

Precisely because of the absence of any substantial programmatic political basis for the opposition, it is riddled with personal feuds. The rabid chauvinists formed into a group and acted defiantly. They supported Mrs. Bandarnaike's son Anura's claim to inherit the party leadership.

He resigned from the party very recently while he was under a disciplinary suspension and in less than a week he joined the government. This didn't make a serious dent.

However, negotiations are on to bring the DUNF into a closer political bloc with the opposition alliance, to prevent a shift to any left of centre positions and fill the right-wing void caused by Anura's exit.

The Socialist Party (ex-Trotskyist) and the Communist Party ("pro-Moscow") fused recently into one party. They ably give the red colouring required by the opposition alliance. One of the new party's key leaders, Bernard, has been made a minister in the western provincial council along with ex-UNP dissidents in a coalition whose chief minister is Mrs. Bandarnaike's daughter, a leader of the main bourgeois opposition party.

Following the defeat of the government party in three important provinces in the last provincial council elections, the workers and masses surged forward waging effective struggles in several work place areas and universities.

And serious resistance against privatisation in sectors such as the railway was being prepared. But the opposition did not give encouragement, let alone leadership, to any of these struggles — with the exception of a few MPs here and there.

The militant workers together with students have formed a new centre for action and support of mass struggles, around democratic trade union and social demands, which intervened in several such events. They are also challenging the Sinhala Buddhist fundamentalist student currents in the universities.

The bulk of students are from the JVP. Chauvinist and fundamentalist elements are seeking to form a separate new political axis to oppose the government as well

as the opposition, and they are likely to have quite a bit of success.

What is the N SSP doing?

The N SSP's capacity is limited in comparison to the opposition alliance, in terms of the actual work we are able to carry out.

But we extend our support to the worker-student alliance and seeks to build up a left alliance (including the Tamil and Muslim progressive left) with a notion of democratic content and a socialist perspective, while intervening with all its influence in all areas of mass mobilisation against the government's policies and chauvinist demands, for which any united action is welcome, including from NGOs and social movements.

The new president's hard and belligerent stand against the Tamils and separatist fighters was meant to stabilise himself and the regime with chauvinist and military support. This resulted in alienating national and international opinion whilst embarrassing his own prime minister who was thinking and acting more cautiously. Tamils looking for a political solution were disillusioned.

To this was added the serious opposition of the Tamil Cabinet Minister Thondaman, who represents the Tamil plantation workers, to extending the period of privatised management of the government and the plantations without any guarantees to his trade union regarding the workers' terms of employment and the rights of the trade unions.

This situation has put the president and the government on the horns of a dilemma. After a long period this has opened the door for talks between Thondaman and the bourgeois opposition party which hitherto was biased against the Tamil plantation workers.

A new political axis for Sinhala Buddhist chauvinism appears to be in the offing — to which sections of the ruling party, the opposition and student layers that champion fundamentalism are likely to be attracted. The left and progressive forces will move to counter these forces primarily while retaining its independent platform and programme seeking to advance along with the secular democratic forces that will emerge in the process of the electoral and other conflicts in the current period. ★

N SSP on the campaign trail

THE Southern Provincial Council (PC) stands dissolved and elections are slated for 24 March 1994. The UNP, ruling at the centre, was defeated by the combined opposition consisting of the SLFP-led People's Alliance and the DUNF in the Southern PC. However, the Provincial Governor, the mouthpiece of the government, unconstitutionally installed the UNP in office. Hence the People's Alliance-led opposition sought legal remedy and won the battle, but commanded a slender majority of one. In its bid to oust the opposition-held regime, the UNP abducted SLFP Provincial Councillor Francison and thus destabilised and dissolved the council.

It was only last year that elections to all Provincial Councils in the island, except in the war-torn North and East, were held. The N SSP contested independently and secured 1% of the votes and one seat. The PA, on which the anti-government masses pinned much hope, was able to secure power in three provinces. The right-wing DUNF, which also contested the 1993 PC elections independently, secured 20% of the votes, and was one of the pillars upon which the PA relied to stay in power, including in the Southern PC.

Since the PC elections, Gamini Dissanayake, who became the main DUNF leader following the assassination of Lalith Athulathmudali last April, has re-entered the UNP, of which he had previously been an important minister. And Anura Bandarnaike, former deputy leader of the SLFP, has also joined the UNP and been named minister of higher education.

So the UNP now appears strengthened, whereas the PA has become weaker still. The N SSP is contesting the upcoming Southern PC elections, independently again, and is supported by certain ex-members of the SLFP, Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), and the Communist Party of Sri Lanka (CPSL). A few of them are even contesting on the N SSP ticket. The N SSP is contesting the racist and chauvinist forces in this election but has a chance of doing much better than it did last year — provided it wages a strong campaign.

The N SSP needs a minimum of US\$8000 for its campaign and propaganda, half of which is expected to be raised locally. The party appeals to all friends abroad for maximum possible contributions to its work.

Contributions can be sent to: N SSP Treasurer P.D. Saranapala, 143/3 Kew Road, Colombo-2 Sri Lanka. — **Vickramabahu Karunarathne** ★

SENEGAL

HAVING brutally aggravated the living condition of the population, the devaluation of the CFA franc has led to popular protest in a number of countries. In Gabon, the opposition to the Bongo regime and the trade union movement have called for a general strike. In Senegal, the opposition organised a rally for 16 February.

In both cases, the government responded with violence. There were several deaths in Libreville, the Gabonese capital, and bloody confrontations in Dakar, where several people were killed, including policemen. In both cases, opposition forces have denounced government provocations, the restricting of trade union rights and the right to demonstrate, and its confrontational approach.

In Senegal, the Abdou Diouf government has once again hit out against opposition leaders. It has arrested and charged several deputies, including Abdoulaye Wade — leader of the liberal Senegalese Democratic Party (PDS) — and Landing Savané, leader of the African Party for Democracy and Socialism (PADS).

Heavy sentences

Without even lifting these deputies' parliamentary immunity, the government is trying to hold these two responsible for the violence that it orchestrated itself. There could be heavy sentences, and aim above all to distance the two deputies from the Assembly and the platform it offers to their parties.

This never-ending harassment of the political and trade union opposition reduces to an empty shell the constitutional freedoms the country boasts. Overcome by popular discontent, undermined by the economic crisis, the government of Senegal owes its survival to its various friends in Paris, in the liberal right-wing as in the Socialist Party, who cover for it and support it.

International solidarity is beginning to be organised for Landing Savané and all political prisoners. Appeals should be sent to: **Président de la République du Sénégal, avenue Roume, Dakar, Sénégal.**

Faxes to: (221) 25 80 54. ★

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This edition of *International Marxist Review* will be the last in its current format. A discussion has begun, the aim of which will be to decide on a better format for the presentation of the Fourth International's theoretical views. Details will be published here in *International Viewpoint*. ☪

Choi Il-Bung

The South Korean socialist publisher, Choi Il-Bung, has been released by the government after serving just over a year in gaol.

He was imprisoned for publishing books by a number of diverse socialist authors (see *International Viewpoint*, no. 243, March 1993).

Choi had earlier been forced into a hunger strike to protest against the authorities withholding his mail. Amnesty International had adopted him as a prisoner of conscience.

However, his release on parole is only a partial amnesty and he continues to remain under tight surveillance and deprived of any civil rights until May 1998.

We hope to report further details when they are available. ☪

