

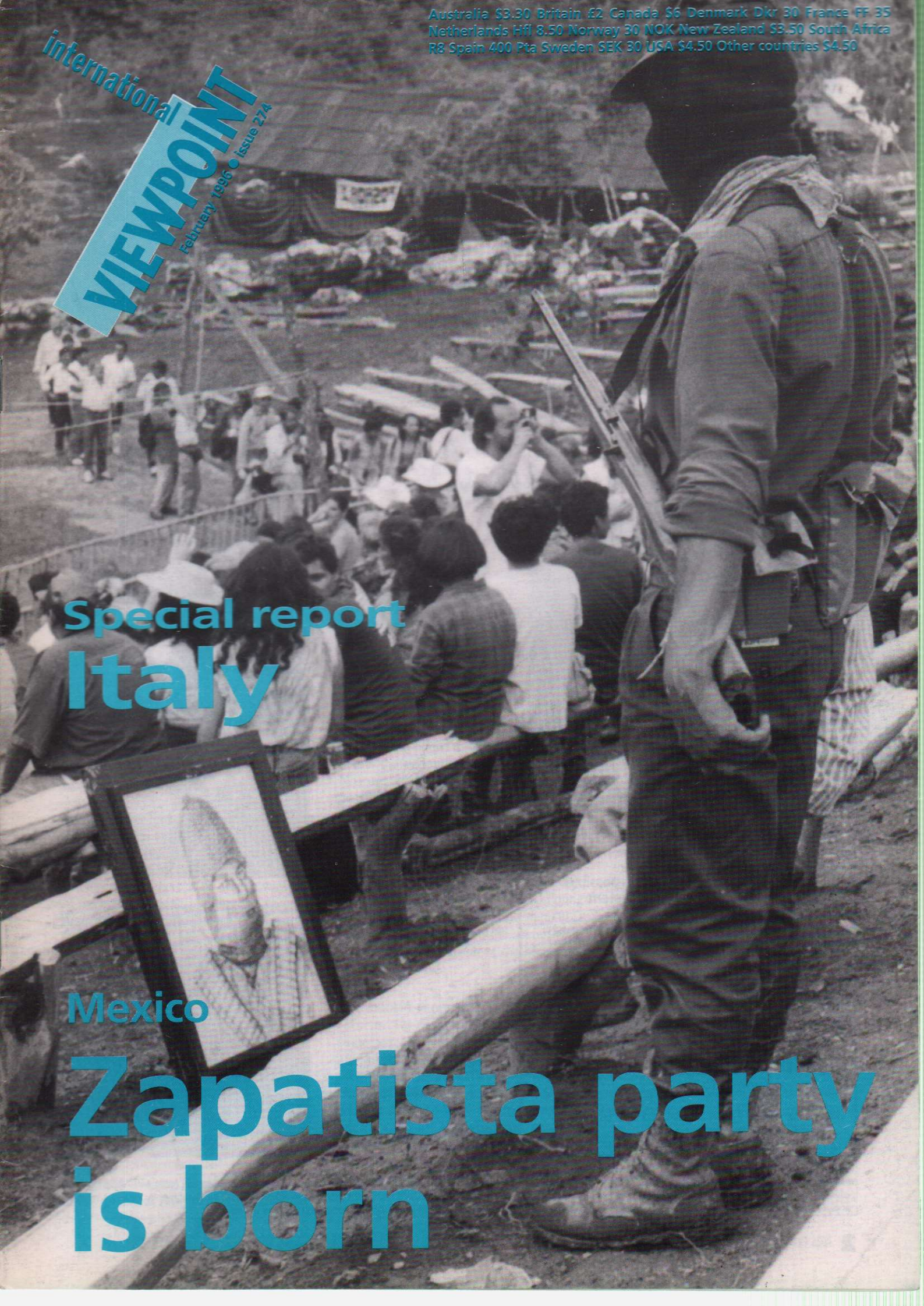
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**VIEWPOINT**  
February 1996 • Issue 274

Special report  
**Italy**

Mexico

**Zapatista party  
is born**



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# Italy's endless political crisis

by Livio Maitan

*There is no obvious solution to Italy's political crisis. If no compromise is reached soon, the country will have its fourth general elections in three years. Which shows the fundamental nature of the crisis.*

ALL THE CLASSIC POWERS OF A BOURGEOIS democracy, legislative, executive and judicial, are being torn apart by deepening conflicts and contradictions. For a time, the judiciary profited from the paralysis of the parliament and the weakness and instability of the government, and played a central role in the dismantling of the old regime. But now it is the judiciary which is being overturned by unprecedented conflicts. Antonio Di Pietro, the hero of the investigations into [Socialist Party leader Bernardo] Craxi and other dignitaries of the First Republic has been dragged through the mud, since he resigned from the judiciary. In other words, there is no visible way out of the crisis. Nothing is filling the vacuum created by the disappearance of Christian Democracy (DC), the party which has dominated Italian politics for 40 years, and its principle ally, the Socialist Party (PS).

The proportional electoral system was abolished in a referendum. Those who voted yes hoped that this would simplify the political framework, creating a situation where voters would choose between two large, clearly opposed, coalitions or parties. After such an election, it would be clear who would govern, and who would be in the opposition. Or so they told us, brandishing arbitrary examples from other "major western democracies".

Wishful thinking. Three poles emerged in the run-up to the March 1994 election,

not two. Left, centre and right. None was really homogeneous. The rightist pole won a narrow victory, taking a majority of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, but a minority in the Senate. Less than one year later the Northern League left the group, dividing the rightist pole, and causing the collapse of the Berlusconi government. The left coalition proved rather ephemeral. The day after the elections its main components, the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) and the Party for a Communist Refoundation (PRC, Rifondazione) adopted quite different positions on all main questions. There was also a split in the centre pole, represented essentially by the Italian People's Party (PPI), heir to the former Christian Democracy (DC). The Buttiglione faction joined the rightist bloc, while the Bianco group joined the centre-left. During the most recent governmental crisis, the President had to consult twenty separate parliamentary groups!

Since then, the situation seems to have become even more complicated. Bitter arguments continue to develop within the various groupings. No-one can rule out the possibility of spectacular new splits and alliances. Within each pole and between them, a whole range of divergent ideas and viewpoints have developed on a whole range of questions. From constitutional reform, the electoral system, and the democratic guarantees to be assured during an election campaign, to the measures which could be taken on the social front, and the possible revision of the Maastricht Treaty.

THE BIGGEST PROBLEM IS CONSTITUTIONAL reform. In principle, there are two strategies: a new constituent assembly, or amendments through the mechanisms provided for in the existing constitution. Given the balance of forces, neither way will be easy to implement. This has encouraged all kinds of intermediary solutions. The PDS and Berlusconi's Forza Italia (FI) are particularly keen on finding a compromise. The former fascists of the

National Alliance (AN) are intransigent in their support for a presidential regime.

The 'presidential' solution is unlikely to be accepted in the current situation. Some right or centre politicians, including the former Christian Democrat Mario Segni, the man behind the referendum against proportional representation, have therefore seized on the catch-all solution of a direct, two-round election for the post of Prime Minister. Parliament could be reduced to one chamber. Elections may be single-member constituencies (possibly in two rounds), or the current 25% quota for



proportional representation may be maintained.

Behind all these sometimes fantastic suggestions, the goal is clearly to minimise the range of political forces represented in the institutions, in the hope of creating "strong governments", or even an regime with authoritarian tendencies.

The differences and obstacles in the way of this reform are not just produced by the political parties. The ruling class itself is hesitant, divided over the route to take. Candidates more or less directly linked, to the employers' organisation Confindustria participated in each of the three poles in the 1994 elections. Later, the employers then considered giving their support to the Berlusconi government. And their support for the actions of the Dini government was only given with considerable reluctance.

If elections are held soon, a large number of employers will support the right, but others will back the "Olivier" coalition of Romano Prodi, a former industry

## ★ Italy

manager in the public sector, and ex-Christian Democrat. The PDS is by far the most important force in the coalition, followed by the centre-left current from the old Christian Democracy.

The major political groups are not the only ones in difficulty. Berlusconi has been unable to restructure Forza Italia. It is still essentially an electoral, parliamentary organisation. It is losing its dynamism. It tried to compensate for this by proposing a compromise with the PDS on



Discussion document

### Full employment is possible!

Prepared for the March 1996 Programmatic Conference of Rifondazione Comunista.

To deal effectively with the problems of full employment, we need two complementary, new tools: a systematic, substantial and generalised reduction in working time, without loss of salary, and the introduction of socially useful labour, not as a marginal form or a new kind of social assistance, but as a lever for development. Such socially useful work should be non-commodity work, an idea-force for satisfying needs and public works which, otherwise, would not be carried out. These two tools demand that there be a new relationship between the private and public sectors, between the state and the market.

The reduction in labour time is necessary. But is it possible? Yes! A 2.5% reduction in working time in the European Union would create, over the next five years, 10 million jobs. Anticipated increases in productivity over the next five years are sufficient to reach an even more ambitious goal than this!

And the increase in productivity will also help solve another problem: the budget deficit. Our opposition to the social security counter-reforms of the Berlusconi and Dini governments is inspired by a fundamental consideration: you cannot reduce the public deficit by cutting social security. The problem of pensions should be posed in connection with the issue of unemployment. Unemployment is the main problem. And if we reduce social security payments and delay the age of retirement, we will need to find more money for paying unemployment benefits.

The Italian workers' movement demanded that, rather than basing retirement on physical age, we retire after 35 years of work. This kind of approach is being repeated in other countries, like Sweden. After all, the reduction in working time can take several forms: a shorter working day, a shorter week, longer annual holidays, or

constitutional reforms. It remains to be seen whether or not an agreement will be reached. The initiative has irritated some of Berlusconi's allies. AN leader Gianfranco Fini has threatened to split with Berlusconi if he goes ahead with the compromise with the PDS. To his left, Berlusconi has received the support of most of the former Christian Democrats.

**ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BARRICADES**, the "Olivier" coalition is in deep crisis. Not everybody appreciates the manoeuvres of PDS Secretary Massimo D'Alema. The former Christian Democrat Romano Prodi is opposed to delaying the elections

an earlier retirement. If we based pensions on a fixed number of years of paid labour, this would in practice mean reducing the total number of hours worked by each individual. Defending this social gain in Italy has been a great occasion. [More and more people] have seen that this would be one way of distributing the increase in productivity.

Despite its utopian aspects (in the work of André Gorz), the formula "work less, so that all can work" represents a concrete solution to a real problem: the lack of work in a situation where work continues to define citizenship and citizen's rights. This is not only a trade union demand. It is a great social programme. If we refuse to go this way, we will encounter insurmountable problems. Only a significant reduction in working time will enable us to place the problems, of unemployment and quality of life, on the public agenda. We should start by reorganising the relationship between life and work, as well as a reorganisation of the relationship between the sexes, with the aim of reducing the contradictions by abandoning patriarchal and family models...

Socially useful work should be considered in its strategic aspect: not as a marginal element introduced to assign a certain number of unemployed workers to socially useful but poor projects, but as an ambitious project, intrinsically linked to a new idea of development, of civilisation even. There is the whole question of maintenance: maintenance of the individual, of the environment, of culture, of arts. This is a key elements in a potential new development strategy... ★

notes

This conference was not intended to culminate with formal votes to approve or amend the texts submitted. The debate continues on these and other subjects raised during the congress.

indefinitely. There is growing consternation in the PDS. Throughout 1995 the leadership moved closer and closer to the centre, suppressing the very identity of the party. Even this did not enable them to prevent the collapse of the Dini government, of which the PDS was the main support. Nor were PDS leaders able to impose their proposals for the reform of the electoral law, or for the democratic guarantees that should be taken in the face of the power of Berlusconi's media empire.

For some time now, the President has been manoeuvring to rebuild a centre pole, which could win supporters from the 'soft' wings of both the left and right poles. One element of this initiative is the attempt to assemble the smaller centre-left organisations, so as to form a counter-balance to the PDS within the centre-left pole.

All this makes Rifondazione (PRC) look more and more like the only left alternative. The party turned top the left in autumn 1994, in phase with the mass movement to defend pensions. It refused to give any support to the Dini government. Rifondazione was almost the only party which opposed the counter-reform of the pension system (accepted by the trade unions). The party has also relaunched its international initiative for opposition to the Maastricht Treaty, and all the political and military initiatives of the imperialist powers. Rifondazione condemned the NATO intervention in former Yugoslavia in clear terms, and voted against the sending of Italian troops to Bosnia.

To avoid losing all parliamentary representation (if elections were held under the current system), and avoid a rightist victory which would increase the danger of an authoritarian degeneration, Rifondazione has proposed an "no challenge" pact with the "Olivier" coalition. But the party is opposed to any collaboration in government.

**RIFONDAZIONE IS AWARE OF THE** contradictory, dangerous aspects of the current situation in Italy. It is true that there is still a real potential for strong social protest. This would create possibilities for reorganising and building the mass movements. But this potential has not resulted in heightened political consciousness. Confusion and disorganisation is growing, encouraging many people to abandon political activity, to abstain when elections come round, or to believe that one or other of the country's charismatic personalities can save the day. After all that has discredited his intellectual and political consistency, Judge Di Pietro is still very popular. And, in some regions,

there is support for the Northern League's threat to adopt a secessionist line if their federalist project is not adopted.<sup>1</sup>

There are two dangers. The current situation could be prolonged indefinitely. This would mean continuing the rampant social and political counter-reform initiated by the Dini government, with the support of the "poteri forti" ("powerful") and the president. A kind of technocratic Bonapartism would be quietly installed. The second danger is that the AN exploits a prolonged crisis, and appears to be the only alternative to the existing system, the only force able to deal with the social problems we face. The AN has a social presence, an wide organisational network, and a leader of indisputable abilities.

Rifondazione must act simultaneously on the political and social front. We must present ourselves as the only party which struggles consistently for democratic demands. This means demanding

elections as soon as possible, so that the population can pronounce itself on all the questions under debate. It also means working for a project of radical social transformation. We also need to develop our thinking about programmatic matters. A national conference is planned for the end of March [see page four]

But we must also thoroughly transform ourselves, so as to become a party which can not only organise large demonstrations from time to time, but above all build living, sustained connections with the masses, in factories, transport utilities, the civil service and in each district. We have to train new cadres, who will turn their backs on the bureaucratic ideas and behaviour which have had too great an influence on the development of the workers' movement, and contributed to the serious defeats which we have experienced. ★



## Thoughts for a new trade unionism

Proposals of the radical new SLAI COBAS union. Extracts from **Dai COBAS al sindacato**, by Gigi Malabarba (reviewed on page 35)

● The world of work has sexual characteristics. Any analysis, any demands must recognise this basic fact. Feminism should be integrated into all aspects of union work. We should abandon the logic of lists of programmatic points which, somewhere, dutifully mention "the women question".

● The same point about our method can be applied to other questions. Notably ecology. The contradiction between

constraints on the conditions of production, will break even the most determined worker resistance.

● While we should be wary of Toyota-style company unionism, we should not underestimate the importance of the immediate workplace and its problems. This is where problems emerge, and where class struggle trade unionism can surge up... We should pay more attention to "guerrilla" campaigns for specific demands. These may seem reductionist and economic, but they are essential for building a consensus and organising ourselves, by exploiting all the room for manoeuvre and contradictions at the various levels of contract, legislation and practice.

The enterprise is still the heart of worker's monitoring and control experiences. New technology does not make the demand for workers' control out of date. Far from it. It makes it possible to imagine workers' control at a much wider scale, from intervention in the way work is organised to control over production itself.

● Resistance, and the winning of guarantees for the workers can only effectively be managed at a more general, inter-professional level. Such global action must include the basic defence: protection of salary. This includes both direct wages and indirect benefits and delayed salary (pensions).

● It is difficult to build a welfare state though the intervention of a public sector discredited by theft, wastage and bureaucracy. We now face a generalised privatisation campaign, and, while we should not give up our defence of the public sector and social security, we should think about re-launching the mutualist-type experiences of the workers' movement at the beginning of this century, in areas like health, training, housing and so on. We should, of course, prioritise self-organisation and self-management, without setting a goal of making profits.

● The recomposition of a combative social bloc necessitates the reformulation of a social and political programme of transformation and alternative, a transitional programme based on "rupture goals" which can bring us all together, and which each of us should strive to realise. ★

people and nature can and should be more and more frequently linked to the fundamental contradiction: between capital and labour. We should approach ecology from an anti-capitalist perspective. Any approach which neglects the relations of production can only lead to the adoption of "green" neo-liberal ideologies, like those of the trade union confederations today...

● The globalisation of the economy challenges any approach which tries to defend national interests. Nowadays that would mean defending the interests of the companies against the interests of those who work there... We should not adopt protectionist measures, particularly now that frontiers are no longer decisive: the crucial decisions are more and more frequently made by the IMF and the World Bank.

A class struggle trade union should demand, in each country and at the international level, equality of conditions in the sale of labour power. This means not simply campaigning for solidarity with the most over-exploited sectors of humanity, but creating conditions for defending the interests of the proletariat of the metropolis itself. Otherwise, the "free circulation of goods", free of all

### Notes

1. Opinion polls suggest that 27% of voters are sympathetic to the idea of a possible secession of the (relatively prosperous) north eastern part of Italy.

# Italy's 'German' economy

by Gianni Rigacci

**The economic situation has been good under Italy's last three, "technical" governments. Prime Ministers Amato, Ciampi and Dini have made serious inroads into the welfare state, abolished certain historic gains of the working population, continued the privatisation of the major public sector companies, and allowed the country's 'entrepreneurs' to make fat profits.**



By sharply devaluing the Lira, the government provoked Italy's departure from the European Monetary System (EMS) and provoked an interest rate two or three times higher than the European Union average. In this sense, they took Italy further away from Europe.

Sectors of the ruling class realised that the path towards European union should be modified. Some politicians began talking about the need to revise the Maastricht Treaty.

The Party of the Democratic Left (PDS) has been the main force which has permitted these "technical" governments to survive. The party can legitimately claim to be a respectable and responsible candidate to see through to the end the necessary construction of a new, "Second Republic". PDS leaders can boast of the role they played in the struggle over retirement pensions. The party initially supported the mass movement and the trade unions in their mobilisation against Silvio Berlusconi's proposed counter-reform. But in parliament they supported Prime Minister Dini's very similar counter-reform. So did the trade union leadership.

FIAT President Agnelli has openly praised the PDS as a force "able to follow the new political direction". Before the March 1994 elections, PDS Secretary Achille Occhetto visited London, to assure the City bankers of his good intentions. Nowadays, there would be no need for his successor, Massimo D'Alema, to make a similar trip. His policy record is a good enough guarantee to reassure large sections of the employer and business classes.

Serious economic problems

Italian capitalism was traditionally based on a limited number of 'leading families'.

This structure no longer functions. The powerful families are no longer the same. Some have disappeared, and there are some newcomers. More importantly, the equilibrium between these families and the state (which, until very recently controlled the general credit system and a number of public enterprises which had a key position in the economy) has been broken. In effect, the state has decided to sell its entire industrial portfolio.

At the end of WW2, the 'anti-fascist' banker Raffaele Mattioli created the business bank Mediobanca. His goal was to assemble the capital needed to restart the economy, and to solve the immediate, pressing problems of reconstruction. And to make a profit in the process. His formula was brilliant. Most of the capital would come from state-owned banks. But a strict pact would ensure that the leading families would enjoy effective control over these funds, though each family would only own a very modest portion of the bank.

Over the years, this bourgeois 'smart set' has lost ground. Great dynasties have died out. The sons and grandsons have not exhibited the same talents as their fathers. Some have fallen flat on their face while trying to take too large a piece of the cake. The nouveau-riche Silvio Berlusconi didn't want to enter the club. He thought he could do all right on his own. Some say that this impertinence is at the root of all his current troubles.

The Italian state's massive intervention in the economy began in the 1930s. It grew in importance after WW2, for two reasons. There was a real need to overcome the backward nature of Italian capitalism. And there were the political interests of the Christian Democracy party. No part of the private sector had the necessary capital. So the development of a strong public sector reflected the needs of the private capitalists. They needed a source of basic and intermediate products, available at cheaper prices than those paid by their foreign competitors. And they needed a much better infrastructure.

This is all over. Today, Mediobanca thinks it can act on its own. It has taken control of the banks which the state has made available for sale. The banks which, until yesterday, financed Mediobanca's activities! The bank has begun to assemble a massive industrial group, uniting the chemical, newspaper and financial sectors. The project is temporarily frozen, since one

of the companies concerned has been found to have much larger debts than expected. Whether this continues to be a problem for Mediobanca or not, one thing is clear. Italian capitalism cannot continue its reconstruction programme without the investment of much more significant quantities of international capital.

It will not be easy to find a solution. They could establish a stock exchange on which a much larger number of companies would be quoted. This would make it possible to draw in much larger sections of personal and institutional savings. Such a stock exchange would also be the ideal institution for assuring the various privatisations which are being planned. But there is little chance of success as long as the national debt soaks up 10% of GDP. This debt means that a large part of savings are soaked up by treasury bonds. For the moment, a US-style stock exchange, which could regulate the system, is no more than a dream. For some.

## THE GERMAN SOLUTION?

If the 'American' solution is out, the only alternative is the German model, [based on strong banks, closely linked to the industrial sector]. The fusion and take-over battles among Italy's main banks are proof of the interest in such a solution. The drastic reduction in the number of banks will create a few extremely powerful financial groups. And now that Italian banks are no longer forbidden from holding shares, most banks have built up impressive portfolios. These are mainly the result of "debt for equity" swaps. In other words, those major companies which are in crisis, or particularly indebted, have surrendered some of their shares to the banks, in exchange for a reduction in their debts.

Will these developments bring a new stability to Italian capitalism? With a generous dose of state aid, they probably will. And such a choice is perfectly compatible with the ruling class's support for Maastricht Europe.

## THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY

The foreign press regularly reports that Italy is about to fall into the abyss. A little later, the same media report that "il belle paise"???? has once again muddled through. The reality is, of course, that the Italian economy is not in a disastrous situation. It has even shown itself capable of adaptation. The key is the large number of

very dynamic small and medium enterprises. The economic tissue of the north eastern regions is entirely made up of such enterprises. Behind the dynamism is, of course, the virtual absence of trade unions. With all the effects on working conditions, salaries and social relations that you can imagine.

GDP increased by more than 3% in 1995. Industrial production rose by about 6%. Wholesale prices rose an incredible 11.8%. An unprecedented rise for an industrial country. Consumption by households rose only 1%. Hardly surprising, since wages fell by 1.4% compared to 1994 (the worst wages fall in the European Union). Investment rose 5%, but this only represents about one quarter of total consumption. The increase in profits is the result of a significant increase in exports. Italy now has the third highest export-import surplus in the world, behind only Japan and Germany. None of the other large European countries had comparable or better results. Profits have been rising so quickly that, already in 1994, the Governor of the Bank of Italy publicly invited the country's capitalists to stop speculating on the currency markets, and invest in production! In Italy, the capitalist class does not seem too interested in long term projects. The capitalists count on the state to come to their aid. Like it always has before.

### DEVALUATION

The 1992 devaluation of the Italian currency obviously made it much easier for companies to sell their products abroad. But the devaluation was also a recognition of Italy's high inflation rate. In other words, unless inflation is dramatically reduced, the lira will again become overvalued in relation to the currencies of Italy's main trading partners.

The world economy will grow less quickly in 1996 than in 1995. This can only have a negative effect on Italy's export boom. The government will be obliged to adopt austerity measures to deal with the budget deficit. But, as the battle over pensions, and recent events in France show, attacking the welfare state can have a negative effect on the normal functioning of the economy! And the Italian government does not yet have sufficient power and support to fight and win a major social battle. ★

## CGIL: an alternative strategy for the union

This is the month of the preparatory meetings for the forthcoming congress of the Italian General Labour Confederation (CGIL). This text is the introduction to the document proposed by the left current *Alternativa sindacale* (Union Alternative), which builds on the *Essere sindacato* (Union Way) movement. It argues for reintroduction of the mobile salary scale, a 35 hour week without reduction of salary, 32 hour week for shift work, and intransigent defence of social security and workers' rights.

An economic model which cancels values, destroys regions, and increases the imbalance between the north and south is imposing itself on this country. Some parts of the north are dominated by a model of production without rights or rules. In the south, entire generations are excluded from work. And a series of very dangerous forms of intervention are being proposed. The risk to be generalised across Italy.

We propose, the strategic goal of a politico-social struggle against this state of affairs. A state of affairs which the Italian trade unions, notably the CGIL, accepted when they signed the 31 July 1992 and 23 July 1993 accords which abolished

number of workers and senior citizens, is inspired by the same logic. It weakens our rights, and makes the welfare state even more vulnerable.

The country is going through a serious democratic and institutional crisis. In this framework, massive privatisations have taken place. Enormous riches and power have been concentrated in the hands of a small number of people. The living conditions of millions of workers and retired people have deteriorated. This makes it necessary to redirect our programme and strategy, by rejecting the demands of recent years, which were subordinated to the imperatives of the current economic and social model. This has had the result of weakening, dividing and tearing apart the workers' movement.

We must rebuild a movement of struggle. A strong, generalised, unitary initiative aiming to readjust salaries and other revenue, and reintroduce a mechanism for a mobile salary scale. We should define a platform which raises the question of working time, in a framework of generalised reduction of the working week. We should defend the welfare state and relaunch an adequate, public social security system.

We should raise the question of a different, balanced development model. Subordinate, manual labour has suffered a social and material marginalisation. Its revaluation should be one of the main elements of any future contractual campaign.

These policies (different development, an autonomous and efficient public service, and a fair tax system) should be based on a network of democratic power, supervision and participation. Which means relaunching local autonomous authorities, and regionalism.

These are the essential points for rebuilding a mass movement and relaunching the CGIL as a wide social subject, committed to a change. This is the proposition for which we invite the support of the membership. To give back to the CGIL a class struggle, conflict dimension. As a democratic, confederal union. ★



mobile salary scale. Or in 1995, when they accepted an agreement on retirement pensions. The unions have accepted 'economic compatibility', submitting themselves to the existing political framework. These accords, particularly the agreement on old age pensions, were opposed by workers and the trade union membership. Those CGIL leaders and members who opposed the accord are proposing a document to this, our Eighth Congress, so that we can continue the political battle which has already started.

This Congress will evaluate our strategy and our demands of the last few years. We propose an alternative, radically different strategy.

The agreement on wage policy has not ensured the defence of salaries. Instead, it has reduced the contractual autonomy of the unions. The agreement on retirement pensions, rejected by a large

# A Congress of mutation...

**THE 14TH WORLD CONGRESS OF THE FOURTH International** took place on 5-10 June 1995.

Mutation was a constant theme in the deliberations of the Congress: the mutation of the world system after the collapse of the Stalinist states of the ex-USSR and eastern Europe, the mutations in the anti-capitalist left around the world, and of course the mutation of the Fourth International itself.

The collapse of Stalinism and the continuing capitalist crisis (corresponding to the extension of the long wave of crisis which began in the 1970s) has contradictory effects. Myths and illusions connected to the restoration of capitalism in the post-Stalinist societies have dissipated, faced with the actually existing market economy. But reactions to the socio-economic crisis, in this period of loss of credibility of the socialist project, all too often take the form of reactionary tendencies of an ethnic, nationalist, racial or religious character. Hence the urgent need to rebuild a world-wide movement of anti-capitalist struggle, within the socialist perspective, taking account of the recomposition of the workers' movement which is underway as a result of the double failure of social democracy and Stalinism.

The political disorder in the ranks of the anti-capitalist left, in the context of a global balance of forces dominated by imperialism, had resulted in many political, even ideological capitulations. But it has also led to a spectacular overcoming of the sectarian traditions generated by the existence of Stalinism which have taken root in the anti-capitalist left over the decades. Regroupments of forces determined to learn the lessons of the historical abomination that was Stalinism and to continue, against the winds and the tides, to fight against capitalism are being realised in a number of countries so large that it is legitimate to extrapolate a general tendency in the new period.

This process can take a variety of forms. In some cases there are wide re-groupments of anti-capitalist forces where the major element comes mainly (though not exclusively) from the decomposition of Stalinism. In other cases, there are narrower re-groupments of tendencies which are based in the mutation under way inside the revolutionary left. Sometimes this takes the form of the creation of new political formations organised on the basis of democratic pluralism, respecting the diversity of the component parts and their individual identities, yet founded on the basis of unified action and collective discipline, and acting both on the electoral level and in the field of general social and political struggles.

In all the countries where one or the other of these possibilities exists, the organisations of the Fourth International are ready to be part of the re-groupment process. We consider this as an important step towards the recomposition of the anti-capitalist left on a world scale. At the international level, the Fourth International is an active participant in re-groupment, bringing with it the advantages of a long tradition of combat against capitalism and Stalinism. ★



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# Unions in trouble

Franco Turigliatto

*One year ago, extraordinary mass struggles permitted the fall of the right-wing Berlusconi and Fini government. Today, the workers movement faces difficulties, uncertainty, and division. Struggles are fragmented, and sometimes isolated.*

IN AUTUMN 1994 THE GOVERNMENT'S project of radical reform of welfare, the capstone of the welfare state and an historic conquest of the working class since 1968, met with vigorous resistance, coming spontaneously from the great steel fabrication plants, but rapidly involving the whole working class, private and public-sector, bringing millions of people into the streets. Joining with the workers were the homeless, youth, and students. Confronted by a right-wing government which put into question their role in mediating social conflict, the three trade union organisations (CGIL, CISL, and UIL) had no choice but to lead, broaden, and co-ordinate the movement.

Having re-established a certain credibility on the basis of this initiative, the bureaucracies of the CGIL, CISL, and UIL (responsible for a long time for administering a worsening retirement system) imposed a compromise agreement on the government. This meant calling off the general strike, which in all probability would have brought down Berlusconi. The compromise resolved nothing; it simply postponed until June 1995 new legislation on this question. Berlusconi, worn out by the mass struggle, soon afterwards had to step aside in favour of his former finance minister, the banker Dini, supported by a heterogeneous parliamentary coalition which combined the strengths of the centre left (of which the foundation is the PDS of D'Alema) and the Northern League, but also with the support in of the employers' organisations and the trade union leaderships. Dini, with the support of the unions and the PDS, succeeded in carrying the bosses' welfare counter-reform to its conclusion: that which was chased out the door under Berlusconi came back in through the window under Dini.

The government and the CGIL, CISL, and UIL leaderships agreed on draft legislation on pensions, which differed little

from Berlusconi's original proposals. The Italian parliament approved this law on the eve of the summer vacation period, in spite of the very strong opposition of the workers and of Rifondazione Comunista (Communist Refoundation, PRC).

This was a weighty defeat, following closely on the heels of other setbacks over the course of the last several years and which profoundly affects the workers' state of mind and consciousness. A series of mechanisms for division and fragmentation of the working people have by now been firmly put into place: it is no longer only a question of wage losses, serious as they may be, but of means of division which operate continuously, and with greater effect as each year passes.

## THE CONTRACTION OF WAGES

Also on the wage front we have seen very serious setbacks. The causes can be traced back to the policies carried out by the leading groups in the trade unions. In July of 1992 they signed an agreement which put an end to the indexing of wages, and the same for the sliding scale. A year later these same bureaucracies pledged with the government and the employers to hold wage demands under a ceiling defined by the rate of inflation, as defined each year by the government. In other words, whatever raises are requested in labour disputes would have to be strictly pegged to increases in productivity, in quality, and above all to business balance sheets!

These suicidal agreements put an end to any real independence of trade union organisations, therefore blocking any adequate action for wage increases. Today the result of these agreements, which were soundly criticised by the workers, are clear to everyone's eyes. In 1994 inflation was 3.9%, not the 3.5% of government predictions. 1995 was worse: the predicted inflation rate was 2.5%, but the real rate was 6%! In only two years real wages were

reduced about 4%, a median loss of about 130,000 lire per month. Public sector workers were the worst hit. As well as the lowering of real wages, they had to accept concessions which can be classified as the "privatisation of work relations."



It must be taken into account that the above wages data refers only to official and regular wages: there is also a widespread black market in labour which involves not only many immigrant workers but Italian workers as well, and which causes further downward pressure on wages.

The consequence leaves no doubts: from 1992 to 1994 the national income (in current prices) rose 8.7%. Wages only rose 2.8%; Profits were up 14.8%. As for productivity, it has been estimated that four Italian workers produce the equivalent of five of their Japanese counterparts. Exports have also risen considerably, largely as a result of the devaluation of the lira.

For many workers, lower real wages means the search for overtime hours. The average working week in the iron and steel sector is now 45-48 hours, while a typical full time contract sets a 38-40 hour week.

The trade unions are no longer capable of monitoring the organisation and rhythms

of work, and preventing "speed-up". It is hardly surprising that 1,200 workers died as a result of workplace accidents in 1994. The balance sheet of this increased exploitation at Fiat is quite clear. There are 2,400 workplace accidents every year, but productivity has risen by 27% since 1992.

In many workplaces the trade union bureaucracies have accepted that management impose a new period of night, Saturday or Sunday work. There is increasing use of "small teams", groups of mainly younger workers contracted for extra, weekend hours not covered by a standard contract. At Fiat's new Melfi plant in the Basilicata region, the trade unions have even accepted a different contract system from that in force in other Fiat workplaces.



### THREE MILLION UNEMPLOYED

About 12% of the work force is out of work. In the south, unemployment is about 20%. An estimated 40% of young people are out of work. Restructuring is threatening the future of tens of thousands of workers. Alfa Romeo Arese (owned by Fiat) has cut its work force from 12,000 to 6,000. It may close altogether. Olivetti has cut its work force from 46,000 in 1990 to just over 26,000. Reform of the public utility Telecom threatens 9,000 jobs. Private sector "steel barons" have taken control of the heights of the metallurgical sector which, under public management, enabled Italy to become one of the worlds leading industrial powers in the post-war period, and which represented one of the bastions of the organised workers' movement. Under the "barons" a process of reform without end has been launched. In some parts of the public sector, notably public transport, the Dini government and trade union leaders are working to produce new, harsher anti-strike legislation. Their common goal is to eliminate the superior contracts (from the workers' point of view) which still exist in these sectors.

### PARTIAL AND FRAGMENTED STRUGGLES

Mobilising workers is difficult in such a situation. But there have been defensive struggles in the industrial sector, particularly in the sectors most hit by restructuring. Workers at the Ilva steel plant in Tarante have won a partial victory, by preventing the mill's new, private sector managers Lucchini from making drastic reductions in the production programme.

The highly qualified and highly skilled work force of the Alenia military aeronautical and aerospace company has been fighting a long battle against the dismantling and piece-by-piece privatisation of the enterprise. So far, they have succeeded. Management has been unable to close the main workshop (in Turin), which employs 3,000 workers.

Struggles like these exist. But they are isolated one from another. The Piedmont region is particularly hit by restructuring, to the point where there is a visible process of de-industrialisation. Nevertheless, the trade unions still refuse to unify their struggles, even at the modest and partial level of a joint strike of all metalworkers. The unions have even 'theorised' the necessity of separate struggles. The most scandalous example of where this leads is the text produced by the FIM-CISL metal workers union in Naples. These unionists demand that Alenia management be firmer in its project to close the Turin workshop!

This is not just a problem of "reformism". Even the "class struggle" conscious trade union sectors have failed to construct an efficient co-ordination structure.

The transport sector has been shaken by a strong mobilisation among workers at the country's airports, the Alitalia airline, the FS railways, and the municipal transport utilities. This sector has the advantage of possessing alternative trade union structures, outside the three big federations. As well as workplace and sectoral questions, mobilisations in the transport sector have also been motivated by workers' opposition to the pension counter-reform.

Last but not least, there has been a significant mobilisation among school teachers, who refuse that their employment contracts be amended just because the neo-liberal government has decided to cut spending on education. Students joined in this struggle, protesting against cuts in the education budget, as well as 'school autonomy' legislation which paves the way for the gradual privatisation of a sector of the public education system.

### UNION RECOMPOSITION

Criticism of the big three trade union confederations continues to grow. But it has not yet led to the construction of a real alternative leadership. The massive public demonstrations, like the June 1995 demonstrations in Rome, at the initiative of the 'class struggle' sectors of the trade unions, are not in themselves sufficient. Intense upheaval is combined with political weakness.

There are a number of radical trade union structures outside the big federations: COBAS (base committees) in the public sector, Reppresentance sindacali di base (Rank and File Union Representation, RDB) and the Unitary Federation of Metal Workers (FLMU). Some of these organisations have a real weight in the workplaces where they are present, or in particular sectors, even if they are obviously much weaker than the big confederations. But these groups have a general orientation of seeking an alternative trade union practice. Unfortunately, there have been a number of sectarian diversions. Some of these groups persistently refuse to participate in mass mobilisations called by the CGIL-CISL-UIL 'big three'.

The SLAI-COBAS (Self-managed Workers' Union) is different. This organisation was born at the Arese and Pomigliano plants of Alfa Romeo, but has grown and developed considerably since. It sees itself as a transitional instrument in a democratic process of construction of a 'class struggle' trade union. SLAI-COBAS policy is to promote unity, on the basis of whatever common demands really exist, and through mass mobilisation.

And the strongest federation? The CGIL still contains the most important avante garde sectors of the workers' movement in the factories. Inside the federation, the Essere sindacato (To be a Union) group, which was formed a few years ago, has not proved capable of building an alternative leadership. An important part of the Essere sindacato leadership has proved to be dependent on the confederal bureaucracy, and has rejoined the majority current. During the 1992 mobilisations, Essere sindacato did not seize the leadership of the movement, by boldly going beyond the framework of the union structures. This proved to be the beginning of a deadlock which has since plunged Essere sindacato into crisis.

But the opposition inside the CGIL is reforming. It has presented an alternative document to the upcoming conference. It seems more aware of the need to present the workers with a global alternative than Essere sindacato has been.

What is needed is the real co-ordination of activities inside and outside the confederation. Militants of Rifondazione Comunista have an important role to play. The recent conference of Rifondazione trade unionists was an important step forward. But the obstacles are considerable, and there must be further meetings and debates in order to refine the party's orientation and the practical intervention of Rifondazione militants. ★

# France: Economy, politics and Juppé

*Maxime Durand explains how the implementation of a classic neo-liberal project combined with a very specific political situation to produce the events of November and December 1995.*

FRANÇOIS MITTERRAND'S RE-ELECTION AS President in 1988 marked the beginning of a five year period when the governing Socialist Party (PS) had a parliamentary majority. The economic upturn of 1988-1990 led social democratic leaders to think that they had a new space for manoeuvre, which would enable them to add a human veneer to the neo-liberal adjustment programme to which they were committed. New jobs were being created, unemployment was no longer rising. For several months, the socialist government did not have to think about any other measures, like, for instance, adjusting working time. But the end of the upturn in 1991 created much harder conditions. The Rocard government chose to follow the orientation of the European Commission (presided by the French Socialist Jacques Delors). They adopted a stricter version of neo-liberalism, as set out in the Maastricht Treaty. The Socialist Party threw all its weight into assuring the narrow victory of the "Yes" vote in the September 1992 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty.

The terrible balance sheet of this incoherent policy led, naturally enough, to the Socialists' failure in the 1993 elections. François Mitterrand now 'cohabited' with a conservative Prime Minister, Edouard Balladur. The new government adopted classic, though relatively cautious, neo-liberal policies. Balladur proposed, but under pressure from the youth movement withdrew plans to reduce the minimum wage by 20% for those under 25. But he did begin a chain of privatisations, and seriously weakened the pension system of private sector workers. His "reforms" increased the number of years workers must contribute before receiving a full state pension from 37.5 to 40. Pensions were no longer calculated on the basis of a worker's ten highest-earning years, but the top 25. Balladur reduced social security payments for employers, and made it easier to discriminate against women workers by increasing subsidies for part time employment. In each of these policies, Balladur could claim to be continuing in the direction set by the Socialist Rocard.

## CHIRAC'S CONTRADICTIONS

Six months before the 1995 presidential elections, Balladur seemed certain to take the

country's highest office. His neo-liberal measures had slowly eaten into his popularity, but the left opposition was unable to benefit from this, since it had no credible alternative programme, and was associated in people's minds with a similar neo-liberal policy to that of the rightist parties. The Socialists' only innovation was their verbal support for a reduction in labour time.

When Jacques Delors, the former head of the European Commission, presented himself, Balladur was in trouble. But the most popular Socialist Candidate withdrew, presumably when he realised the contradiction his party was in.

It was in this context that the conservative Mayor of Paris Jacques Chirac presented himself, leading a demagogic campaign on the theme of struggle against the "social fracture" in French society. Some right wing voters were attracted by the chance for an "alternative" policy within the conservative camp. And some left wing voters found Chirac's messages more convincing than those of the Socialist Party. Chirac beat Balladur into third place in the first round of the presidential elections in June 1995, and beat the Socialist Party candidate Lionel Jospin in the second round.

Chirac's new government faced one major problem: in reality, they had no "alternative" policies to offer. All they could do was return, as quickly as decently possible, to the neo-liberal positions Chirac had distanced himself from in his speeches. All that remained to be done was to avoid making this look like a complete about-turn. Prime Minister Alain Juppé allowed himself the 'treat' of raising the minimum wage, but, almost immediately afterwards, he was obliged to raise Value Added Tax (a sales tax) by two percentage points.

Things were getting very confused. Ultra-liberal Finance Minister Alain Madelin, a man who would find it difficult to give even lip-service to an "alternative" policy, was removed from his post. Propositions for the state budget mixed attacks on the working class with marginal compensation measures. Modest as they were, these proposals were not to the liking of "the markets". Nevertheless, the general tone of the budget can be judged from one of its principle measures, a freeze on civil servants' wages. Or, in other words, a reduction of their



buying power. This attack provoked a day of action on 10 October 1995. One could already sense a growing feeling of general refusal of the government's policies. The protest by civil servants was supported by a majority of the population (according to the opinion polls), despite government attempts to present them as over-privileged.

## THE JUPPÉ PLAN

This set-back for the government led Juppé to choose a strategy of counter-attack. He proposed a plan for social security reform. This "Juppé plan" was a fairly subtle mixture of measures aimed at reducing the deficit of the Social Security system, and "reforming" the social protection system as a whole. The short term goal was to finance the deficit through an exceptional 0.5% tax on all revenue. Juppé called this an egalitarian 'solidarity' tax. But 77% of the revenue taxed was wage income. And the plan called for a 0.5% tax on child benefit, old age and invalidity pensions, and unemployment benefit.

The Juppé plan also proposed a ceiling on the yearly increase in health spending, and a rather symbolic tax on the pharmaceutical industry. His health propositions also included clearly discriminatory measures, like the 27% increase in the hospital forfait (non-refundable contribution towards hospital treatment).

Juppé also proposed that the management of social security be put under the control of parliament. This would require amendments to the constitution, and is probably the most significant aspect of the plan, in the medium term.

But none of these were the element which sparked such massive opposition to the Juppé plan. That honour goes to the

Prime Minister's propositions for standardising the pension system in the public sector, and his proposed cuts in the SNCF (national railway company). The strike started among railway workers following a day of action on 24 November, quickly spreading to the RATP (Paris public transport utility), the Post Office, France Télécom, and the electricity utility Électricité de France.



Many commentators criticised Juppé for bad timing and other errors of method. In the end, this is the only real criticism the Socialist Party has put forward. Bad timing and clumsiness certainly contributed to the situation. Finance Minister Jean Arthuis even managed to announce, during the mobilisation, the abolition of tax relief on 20% of salary.

But the reality is that the government had so many measures they wanted to introduce that they were very short of time. Particularly given the rigorous convergence criteria of the Maastricht Treaty. The government's inability to spread these measures out made some risk of confrontation inevitable.

### IDEOLOGICAL SHIFT

But such a strong social movement can't be explained without also looking at the shift in the ideological balance of forces. Until these events, neo-liberalism had been gaining ground. Neo-liberal policies more significant than the Juppé plan had been implemented. People had accepted that the norm for salary growth is "inflation only". In other words, zero growth in buying power, despite continual increases in productivity. But now, the government was attacking health and social security, the two pillars of the welfare state. In both cases the plan is to make profitable, to privatise and to reduce to a minimum anything which could be considered to be an indirect salary benefit. This is a systematic attack, based on a neo-liberal programme which, generally speaking, is accepted in society. But this acceptance is starting to change.

The idea that adjustment (not a neutral word) corresponded to a transitional phase of adaptation, mutation, and transformation which it is beyond our power to control is starting to dissipate. To begin with, people are starting to realise that this is an endless "phase", and that every victory of neo-liberalism leads not to a new relative status quo, but to a new attack in a different field.

Second, people can see that it doesn't work. Like Chirac himself, neo-liberalism doesn't keep its promises. Several of the key theorems of the model have been invalidated. Not by theoretical means, but on the basis of a widespread practical

experiment with neo-liberalism, over the last decade.

- the neo-liberals claim that wage austerity leads to a durable upturn in the economy. But we have frozen salaries, and investment has not risen in a durable way. On the contrary, it is financial revenues which benefit from the falling proportion of the surplus which goes to wages.

- They also claim that reducing social overheads for employers and increasing labour vulnerability (they call it 'flexibility') will lead to "growth with more job creation". But unemployment is not falling significantly. The only result of "flexibility" has been to de-stabilise the conditions of wage labour a little more than before.

Neo-liberalism is losing its legitimacy. Because its discourse of "necessary modernisation" appears to be increasingly out of step with reality as people experience it. People can't see what is so modern about wage freezes, rationing of social services, increased labour vulnerability and greater marginalisation. The big question which is emerging, and to which the dominant economic ideology does not have a real answer, is as follows: why is it that a country which is becoming richer and richer should be characterised by what we can only call a process of pauperisation? French GDP [the total value of goods and services produced] increased by 50% between 1974 and 1994. But how many people in France can say that their standard of living is 50% higher than it was 20 years ago? The mystery is easy to solve. Twenty years of neo-liberalism have allowed an incredible deepening of social inequality. From this point of view, capitalism is returning to the way it worked 100 years ago. This is what people are beginning to see. And the great discourse of modernisation is slowly emptying of any content.

### SOCIAL SECURITY BLUFF

Such feelings are particularly justified, given that the urgent need for social security reform which the government proclaims is the result of the negative effects of neo-liberalism, in the form of the very severe recession of the early 1980s. As one respectable study argues, "if the French economy had grown modestly between 1990 and 1995 (2.3% per annum rather than only 1.5%) then the 1995 deficit would be 1.1% of GDP, rather than 5.3%. The various parts of the social security system would not be in deficit... The deficits we face now are, therefore, entirely the result of the recession of 1991-93. [As a result,] the measures which are being considered have more to do with counteracting the effects of that recession than with reforming a system which is somehow structurally in deficit."<sup>1</sup>

Most of the dramatics about the structural crisis and the need for reforms is a bluff.

"Runaway" health costs also reveal a complex reality. It is true that there is a general problem of over-consumption. But this is largely the result of the pharmaceutical industry's policies. These companies make one false "innovation" after another, half-drown doctors with 'informative' publicity, and lobby against the use of 'generic' medicines which bring them less profits.

The government's plans have one central claim: health spending is rising faster than GDP, which means that we French are 'living beyond our means'. But this argument is groundless. Why shouldn't health spending represent a growing proportion of total spending, if the increase corresponds to an evolution in social needs? If the social security system did not reimburse health care, people would simply be spending a growing part of their incomes on private health care.

In any case, the argument is thin. The relative growth in health spending is not so alarming in reality. It is true that the population is growing older, but nevertheless, the rate of growth in health spending is slowing down. By 2002 health spending will probably not be rising any faster than GDP.

The real problem, for the neo-liberal logic, is of course the way which our specific need for health care is satisfied in countries like France: through a socialised salary. Our need for health care creates a non-market mechanism which leads to the provision of funds for socialised health care. The neo-liberals say they want to control health spending. But in essence, what they want to control is our global salary. A new form of austerity.

The social debate becomes clearer as the current wave of struggle continues. The movement in November and December expressed the aspiration of a society which has different priorities and criteria for the redistribution of society's riches. A new project for social transformation is germinating. This project is being defined through analysis and discussion of those rights which it should be a priority to ensure: full employment, health care, housing, and so on. Neo-liberalism no longer has a perspective to offer. Its mask has fallen. Behind all the talk of modernisation, workers in struggle have recognised the crafty, obsessive protection of extremely narrow class interests. The other side wants to preserve its interests, whatever the cost. Even if it means social regression, taking us back to the 19th century. ★

Note

1. See this author's "La grande amaque" in *Rouge* weekly, 23 November 1995.

# Single currency: for the few

The "core" countries of the European Union will adopt the Euro as their common currency, before the end of the century. François Vercammen

explores this unprecedented pooling of sovereignty by advanced capitalist countries, and suggests responses for the left

"Before the end of this century, the European Union will have a single currency, strong and stable," claims the European Commission. "This is what the peoples of Europe and their leaders wanted when they signed and ratified the Maastricht Treaty".<sup>1</sup> What an indication of the spirit of modern despotism, the wishful thinking and the disdain for the population which characterise the self-proclaimed elite of Europe.

The introduction of a single currency by a series of developed capitalist countries with a long tradition of sovereignty is unprecedented.<sup>2</sup> Behind the Commission's optimism, the difficulties are enormous.

The single currency might look like the logical extension of the single market already in operation. A common currency would certainly facilitate the comparison of goods from different countries, and help the consumer make a rational choice. The circulation of goods and services would increase.

Take this example. A British tourist leaves home with £100, which s/he changes into each local currency as s/he travels round the European Union. S/he would return home with less than £50. The rest would be eaten up in bank commissions.

This is all true. But it is only part of the story. After all, money is not just a mechanism allowing the circulation of commodities. It itself is a commodity, with a fluctuating price (the exchange rate). Money is also a basic tool of national states and their governments, a key component of fiscal policy. Looking closely at these two characteristics of money, the move to a single currency seems quite different...



Money is bought and sold at a market price (the exchange rate). The world-wide volume of currency sales in just three days is greater than the volume of commercial transactions (sales of goods and services) in a whole year.<sup>3</sup>

Many governments have now liberalised the import and export of currency. The sheer size of speculative transfers of currency can turn the social relations in such a country upside-down with a few keystrokes.

The management of the national currency is one of the key attributes of a state. It is part of monetary policy, which influences that state's general fiscal policy, public sector provision, budget and social security. Control over the national currency

is part of the day-to-day management of the class struggle. It affects the division of wealth, the formation of salaries, price policy, collective bargaining agreements and so on.

Replacing national currencies with a new single currency is an extremely voluntaristic

step, given the great differences in the various economies, and the entrenched, specific structures of the state in each country.

For this reason, the Maastricht Treaty has fixed "convergence criteria"<sup>4</sup> to ensure the harmonisation of monetary policy. For example, the public deficit should not exceed 3% of GDP, while the public debt should not exceed 60% of GDP. Other criteria fix rules for inflation, long term interest rates, and stability between the various currencies.

Things are not going well. According to EU statistics,<sup>5</sup> there is greater monetary instability than at any moment since the Maastricht Treaty was signed back in 1992. Only two countries now meet the convergence criteria: Germany (the biggest member state) and Luxembourg (the smallest). Ireland meets all the criteria except the limit on the public deficit. At this rate, when the EU decides which countries can adopt the Euro (in 1998), only a few countries will be eligible. The Euro will certainly not become the currency of the European Union as a whole.

## GROWING INSTABILITY

This reality has important economic and

## Trade union membership

As a percentage of total workforce

	1970	1980	1990
France	22.3	17.5	9.8
Germany (West)	33.0	35.6	32.9
Italy	36.3	49.3	38.8
Sweden	67.7	79.7	82.5
Britain & N.Ireland	44.8	50.4	39.1
USA	23.2	22.3	15.6

Source: *Perspectives de l'emploi*, OECD, 1994

## ★ European Monetary Union

political consequences. First of all, it demonstrates the failure of Maastricht. In other words, the central goal, in the name of which the employers and governments of all the EU countries justify their economic and social policies, has not been reached, and will not be reached on time. It is no longer credible.

Since it will not be the currency of the entire EU, none of the "indirect" benefits claimed by "Euro" supporters will accrue. The "common" currency will not be a 'currency of reference' able to compete with the dollar. Nor will it represent a tool for an EU-level socio-economic policy. Nor will it create a new, large zone of monetary policy. In fact, the introduction of the Euro will probably increase tension between the "core" countries and the others.

The real criteria for participation in the common currency will not be economic, of course, but political. If the Euro is to have any sense, it will have to be adopted simultaneously by Germany, France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg.

This would, of course, increase the monetary instability between the new core group and the Italian lira, British pound, and Spanish peseta. What will stop these countries continuing to devalue their currencies, in order to increase exports? The December 1995 Madrid Summit of European leaders agreed, in principle, to a currency stability system similar to the ill-fated European Monetary System.<sup>6</sup> This would oblige non-Euro countries in the EU to maintain their currency's exchange rate within a narrow band against the new Euro. Countries which leave the band (because of financial or speculative pressures) would be obliged to take measures to re-enter it.

### LEGAL QUESTIONS

The European Union is supposedly made up of all the countries which have signed the Maastricht Treaty. What will be the "community" (supra-national) value of decisions made by the Euro-zone countries and the autonomous Central European Bank? And what will be the effect of the existence of this Euro-zone on the socio-economic relations within the common market? How will it affect the chances of the "outside" countries [like Britain] to join the core countries in the future?

### 1999: A FATAL MOVE

In the mean time, a new element has emerged: serious resistance from youth and workers. The "social fracture" Jacques Chirac talked so much about has arrived!

The French movement of December 1995 was not the first in the series. Resistance in Italy, which began in July 1992, has been in many ways wider, stronger and deeper than the events in France at the end of last year. Belgium too had a significant strike wave, which peaked with a "total" 24 hour general strike on 26 November 1993.

But France's geographical position and economic weight, the country's key role in European integration, and the specific traditions of the workers' movement all gave a particular importance to the December 1995 strikes in the French public sector. Especially now, as we enter the 'final sprint' towards monetary union. In France, social resistance became highly symbolic: Europe's first general strike against the Maastricht Treaty!

Such resistance will become stronger across the region. Events in France offer a new socio-political framework for the public sector labour forces in France, Italy, Belgium and Luxembourg: all of whom are currently in dispute with their employers and the state. The determined resistance in Britain against the (disastrous) privatisation of the railways and water supplies is another such sign.

European Union faces two new



obstacles. The 1986 Single Market Act, which led to the creation of the 'Single Market' in 1993 is the framework which has allowed simultaneous and co-ordinated attacks on the public sector in a range of domains (privatisation, deregulation, employee privileges) in all the countries of the Union. Attempts to split the public sector into autonomous 'parcels' has not prevented co-ordinated attacks on the work force and on the notion of public service in general. The result is that attacks on the public sector have become the reference point for social resistance as such.

The possible introduction of a unified currency in some EU countries depends on the economic situation in 1996-7. Results in this period will be used to as a measure of the 'progress' made by each country in each of the "convergence criteria". If 1996-7 is a good year for the capitalist economies, there may be room for manoeuvre. But if the

current miserable situation persists, applying the Maastricht criteria would be to throw oil on already tense social relations. Because it would mean spontaneous and cumulative increases in the deficits, a slowing-down of economic activity (which means more unemployment, so more social security payments, and less social security contributions.) Consumption could only fall as a result of the contraction of social demand.

In such a context, maintaining the reduction of public deficits as the top priority could be a real fatal move. All the reports made to show how this or that country could meet the key convergence criteria of reducing its deficit to less than 3% of GDP come to the same conclusion: an enormous attack against the working class, and a serious deterioration of the economic recession, due to the reduction in the buying power of the workers.

That leading German social democrat Helmut Schmidt used to say that "today's profits are tomorrow's investment, and the jobs of the day after tomorrow." It seems that today's credo is "lower deficits means lower interest rates means more investments means more jobs." The second phrase is no more true than the first one was. In reality, business profits are only partially recycled as investments in the productive sector. An even smaller proportion goes into the kind of expansive investments that create jobs.

Europe and the market economy are bankrupt. That's the conclusion that large layers of the population are coming to. This is a major reason why the resistance has been so massive. Why those on strike have been so determined. And why public opinion has been so sympathetic to the strikers. We should ask ourselves: is the bourgeoisie ready to unleash a social war in conditions like these?

### THE BOURGEOISIE HESITATES

The ruling classes of Europe are sure that the Euro is a good idea. But they are no longer absolutely sure that its introduction is feasible. Getting ready for the Euro means breaking down the welfare state in every country of the European Union. But how then to realise the political integration of Europe? Modern Social Democracy and the European Parliament were supposed to bury forever any ideas of an alternative socio-economic model. "*Il n'y a pas d'alternative*" ("There is No Alternative") screamed the *Financial Times* (a newspaper famous for its anti-Maastricht convictions).

Bankers are one sector of the boss class increasingly nervous about Maastricht. They don't just see their Bureau de Change profits disappearing. They sense the beginnings of a huge process of



deregulation and restructuring within the new Euro space. Even those industrialists who do business in both the potential EURO core countries and the rest of the EU would prefer to go more slowly. Because if the new Euro appreciates in value, and the other countries of the EU opt for competitive devaluations, these exporting companies will face more unstable conditions with the EURO than they do nowadays.

Neither Britain nor Italy will find themselves in the core countries, though for quite different reasons. Both countries try to spread panic about the dangers of a "German Europe". Part of the French ruling class shares these fears, but has decided that the only means to contain the Bundesbank is to steam ahead with Maastricht and monetary union.

German Finance Minister Theo Waigel portrays himself as a Maastricht fanatic. But underneath, he may yet prove to be a Euro-sceptic. Waigel is the author of the Stability Plan adopted by the EU at its Madrid Summit in December 1995. This plan

- reinforces a very strict interpretation of the convergence criteria established at Maastricht.
- proposes that an agreement like the current European Monetary System be created to govern the relationship between the Euro zone and the other EU currencies.
- reduces the 'norm' for maximum budget deficits from 3% of GDP to only 1%, with compulsory fines for offending countries!

In other words, Waigel is imposing a Maastricht Two plan on the European Union, before Maastricht One has been realised! This suggests that he is convinced that some countries will indeed meet the original Maastricht criteria by 1997-8. But it does nothing to guarantee monetary stability and social peace after the introduction of the Euro. Austerity policies will continue as before. You have been warned!

Monetary union is based on iron rules. It removes monetary and budgetary control from the hands of the rulers of each member state. But it entrusts them with the management of the "local" class struggle. And the austerity imposed is already confronted with growing social tension. The Madrid accord has pushed each EU government that little bit closer to a major confrontation with its public sector work force.

If the bourgeoisie is to fight, they will want to win as quickly as possible. Margaret Thatcher's victories in Britain in the 1980s might seem to be a good model



Students demonstration in Paris (December 1995)

for them. Except that Thatcher did her dirty work before Maastricht came into force.

The bourgeoisie also recognise that if any major country makes concessions in this new convergence period, the whole Maastricht-single currency scenario will be delayed or derailed.

A number of politicians are agitating for delays in the Maastricht timetable. Former Interior Minister Charles Pasqua argues that France needs some economic stimulation, inventive social programmes, and better co-ordination of reforms with trade union leaders. He combines these measures with a nationalist and security-obsessive stance which offers a populist-Bonapartist solution to France's malaise.

Pasqua has few takers among the elite or the media barons. After all, his plan implies a rupture in long-term foreign policy strategy. And the consequences, for France and for the European Union, are impossible to foresee. Nevertheless, if the social movement picks up again, Pasqua may prove more attractive than Chirac or Juppé for a nervous bourgeoisie.

Theo Waigel's policies are the complete opposite of Pasqua's. The German Finance Minister refuses all social concessions, and insists on maintaining, even sharpening the Maastricht criteria. But, faced with the same difficulties (expressed through "D-Mark nationalism") Waigel comes to the same conclusion as Pasqua: it would be better to lengthen the timetable for full European monetary union.

Monetary union raises questions about the institutions of the new Europe. A Franco-German agreement has set the tone: reinforcement of the weight of the larger and richer countries, particularly Germany;

and reductions in the powers of the European Commission and European Parliament (which has always been virtually powerless). These powers would be transferred to the European Council, which brings together direct representatives of the governments of the member states.

This is a clear retreat for the supporters of a supra-national European state. It will allow some kind of compromise with Britain.

The Spanish presidency of the EU, which finished on December 31, 1995, confirmed the final details of preferential trade accords between the EU and Eastern Europe and the ex-USSR, Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay), the USA and the North African and other Mediterranean countries.

### A SOCIALIST ALTERNATIVE

There are four essential elements to any socialist alternative strategy in Europe.

#### ● There is no Social Europe

One thing the ruling classes of Europe do agree about, is that anti-social policies must be continued. There will be no social Europe after all. Only our trade union leaders still read and debate the mountains of pages of resolution, scenario and draft treaty which are still produced on this theme.

What welfare state does and will exist, exists at the national level only. It is being dismantled. This dismantling is made easier by the lack of convergent social legislation in the various member states could at least partially oppose the logic of the single marketplace.

There is a legislative basis for developing a European social policy. But

the European Union has clearly decided not to do so. The little that remains is an alibi.<sup>8</sup>

● Mass unemployment

The balance sheet of the policies of the governments of the member states, and the European Council, is clear. White Books and Green Books from the European Commission proclaim that the struggle against unemployment is a top priority. But the key text, Delors' White Book of 1993 is a neo-liberal plan for job creation.



In any case, the European Council is free to take all the social decisions it likes, not necessarily taking into account the 'rules' of social Europe. Only a change in the social and political balance of forces will force these gentlemen to change their minds.

● Monetary union

The single currency of the Maastricht Treaty, and the monetary union of all the social democratic dreamers will not see the day. But the reactionary policies which are supposed to create the conditions for the single currency will continue to be applied. This is the only concrete conclusion of the Madrid summit. It is the only thing all the member states' governments agree about.

● EU loosing popularity

Resistance is beginning. The EU is loosing the popular sympathy it once enjoyed. The more the social movements dominate the foreground of European politics, the more space there is for the development and articulation of an European left, social alternative.

It is high time the workers' movement

regained its autonomy concerning its evaluation of EU policy. The starting point is a rejection of the Maastricht criteria and the Madrid scenario. Let there be no doubt: the workers' movement (national and European trade union leaders, political leaders of social democratic parties, the worker wing of Christian Democracy) could stop the neo-liberal offensive now, if they wanted to. Belgian Euro-MP Raymonde Dury argues that we could "provoke a crisis just before the start of

negotiations. This would put the governments up against the wall."<sup>9</sup> A crisis at the summit of the EU is the lesser of two evils for the workers' movement. It would mean the end to the current project of capital. A project which millions of working men and women have already expressed their opposition to in the streets these recent months. Provoking a crisis is not a programmatic response. But it would enable us to re-launch a debate that has been stifled these last ten years. ★

## More subtle repression for Spain's opponents of military service

YOUNG SPANIARDS, BASQUES AND CATALANS who refuse military service will face a wider range of penalties when Spain's new Penal Code comes into effect in May. The aim of the new legislation is to separate political opponents of militarism from the mainly religious conscientious objectors, in order to allow more effective repression of the more radical.

Starting in May, there will be two main categories of offender. Those who are recognised as conscientious objectors, but refuse to complete the (civil) Substitute for Military Service (PSS) face 8-10 years suspension of civic rights, a heavy fine, or (in case of refusal to pay) one days' imprisonment or community service for every two days alternative service refused. Those who refuse military service and are not considered to be conscientious objectors will receive 16-24 months prison and 10-14 years suspension of civic rights.

The heavier treatment for the second group is the result of pressure from the Ministry of Defence. They consider this *insumisión total* as more dangerous for the state than the "selfish" behaviour of those who ask the state to recognise them as conscientious objectors, but refuse to carry out PSS service in a hospital or town hall.

The reform aims to break the links of co-operation and solidarity between the population and the anti-militarists. These links were generated, in large part, by the visible harsh treatment of all *insumisos* (of whom there are over 300 in Spanish jails).

The new law will create a situation where "only" *insumisos* who have a criminal record will go to prison. By bringing the minimum sentence down to two years, the law enables judges to give suspended sentences to any *insumisos* and conscientious objectors without prior convictions. This also reflects the

unhappiness of many judges with the current obligation to incarcerate, and the stiff minimum sentence of two years, four months and one day imprisonment.

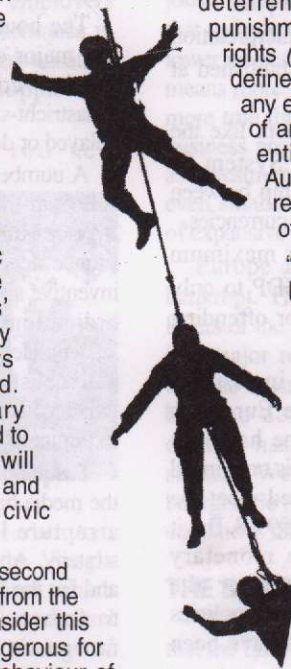
But it would be a mistake to see the reform as a softening of the law. The new penalty reinforces punishment, and (they hope) the deterrent effect, by instituting a punishment of 8-14 years loss of civil rights (*inhabilitación absoluta*). This is defined as "impossibility to carry out any employment or role in the service of any [state] administration, public entity, nationalised enterprise, or Autonomous [regional] organ, or to receive any grant, pension or aid of any kind".

"Some political-judicial circles have started calling this loss of civil liberties a 'civil death,' writes Santi Alminyana in *El Viejo Topo*. "Civil assassination" would be a better name for it. Those affected will be barred from an important part of the labour market, and from all public aid." Unemployment in Spain is an estimated 22%. For those under 25, unemployment is higher than 40%.

"The aim is to stop any dynamic of solidarity generated by any kind of conduct which opposes the political hegemony" argues Alminyana. "And to isolate and repress those concerned in a more subtle way. The visible, massive imprisonment of *insumisos* provoked more social response than this supposedly democratic regime could support. Hence the reform. The regime knows that you can punish firmly and yet democratically, as long as the repression is not visible.

"They have no intention of accepting an open debate, in which the population could participate in the taking of important decisions such as 'Who or what are we defending ourselves against?', 'How should we defend ourselves?' This is the type of debate which we provoke with the civil disobedience called *insumisión*." ★

Source: *El Viejo Topo*, January 1996



notes

1. *Green Book on the transition to the single currency* (May 1995), European Union (p.4 in the French version).
2. Armand Denis Scor, *La monnaie unique*, PUF, Que sais-je? 1995, pp. 11-36/
3. Bank of England study, cited in Oliver Piot, *Finance et économie - la fracture*, Marabout, 1995, p. 11
4. *The Economist*, 9 December 1995, p.20
5. Economic Profiles of the European Union (in Dutch), *Weekberichten-Kredietbank*, vol. 50, #32, 24 November 1995.
6. Instituted in 1979, replacing the currency "snake." EMS participants are obliged to keep their exchange rate within a narrow pre-arranged band in relationship to the ECU, and therefore the other European currencies.
7. The OECD recently published rosy predictions, on the basis of which the European Commission announced the virtual success of a core consisting of Germany, France, Great Britain, Netherlands, Denmark and Luxembourg. Belgium was presented as "within 0.5%" of convergence. Such optimistic predictions are contradicted by the most recent reports of France's INSEE, a number of German banks, Chancellor Helmut Kohl himself, and the Belgian Employers' Federation (FEB).
8. Daniel Lenoir, *L'Europe sociale*, La Découverte, 1994. Bruno Mauliulo, *L'Europe sociale*, Nathan, 1991. E. Vogel-Polsky, "Maastricht ou la voie étroite du social", in Marco Telo (ed.) *Quelle union sociale?* ULB, 1994, pp.91-92.
9. *Le Soir* (Brussels daily) 8 December 1995



# The Palestinian elections

by **Salah Jaber**

The elections in Gaza and the West Bank on 20 January brought no big surprises. Yasser Arafat's victory had been announced well in advance. His victory became a kind of plebiscite. As he had hoped.

The Islamic and secular opposition had decided to boycott passively the elections. They could not be surprised by the high rate of participation on the day, easily predictable in light of the previous, massive voter registration.

The opposition lost nevertheless, by giving Arafat's bureaucratic and collaborationist Palestinian Authority the monopoly of "legitimate" representation of the Palestinians.

**TO BE SURE, THIS WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME** a rotten regime won a vote without having to tamper with the ballot boxes. But this is a leadership which even the best-intentioned observers are unanimous in criticising for autocracy, repression, nepotism and corruption. A leadership which has transformed itself into the proxy police force of the Israeli occupation. Most of the Palestinian territory invaded by Israel in 1967 is still occupied and riddled with colonial settlements. And almost one Arab resident in 1,000 is still confined in an Israeli prison.

How could a leadership like this win a plebiscite-type vote in a population which, only yesterday, was engaged in an exemplary *intifada*?

True, there were a number of irregularities in the electoral process, which did not match all the rules of parliamentary



democracy. The entire opposition, including the institutional opposition, represented by many of the "independent" candidates (those who were not nominated by the Palestinian Authority), protested in vain against the particularly short official campaign period. Among these 'independents' were a number of Fatah militants from the occupied territories, who had been selected by their comrades, but removed from the 'official' candidate list to make place for notabilities, or more docile Fatah candidates. The chief of the European Union observers delegation himself felt the need to protest publicly, after being on the spot for a few days. Nevertheless, no-one could say that the election results were substantially deformed by fraudulent practices.

There are two fundamental explanations for Arafat's clear success. Neither is connected to electoral fraud. The first is the political and social nature of the support which the President of the Palestinian Authority enjoys in the territories which the Israeli government has entrusted him with. The second is connected to the nature of the opposition facing Arafat, and the political choices this opposition has made.

Even if the opposition to Arafat had been impeccable, the head of the PLO would still have benefited from the allegiance of an important part of the population of the Palestinian territories under his control. Several factors contribute to provide him with a secure social base.

One is that Arafat has, for decades, personified Palestinian identity. He has managed to maintain this image to this day, through lying about the Accords which tie him to Israel, and in cultivating the duplicity in which he has long been a master.

## ARAFAT'S DOUBLE TALK

So, Arafat presented his condolences to Hamas for the assassination on his "autonomous" territory of Yehia Ayash, considered to be the main organiser of the anti-Israeli attacks of recent months. Meanwhile, Arafat's numerous and diverse "security services" continue to collaborate with the occupying authorities in seeking out those Fundamentalist militants who are determined to continue their struggle against the occupation. And only a few weeks earlier, Arafat used an Israeli Army helicopter to visit Yitzhak Rabin's widow in Tel Aviv, to present his condolences...

Moreover, the possibility of holding an election was seen by most Palestinians as an important achievement, and the confirmation of their desire for independence. Few of them though have any real illusions about the nature of the events which are under way. But they see no alternative, except for continuing the occupation, in those towns and villages from which the Israeli Army has withdrawn. And the regime of house arrest to which the Palestinians are submitted today is preferable, without a doubt, to the

collective imprisonment which they have suffered for nearly 30 years.

There is a strong feeling of resignation in this part of the world, five years after the Gulf War inaugurated the era of unchallenged US domination. The Iraqi population is still suffering under the assassin-blockade, and the embargo on Libya is carried on, while world public opinion is indifferent, if not supportive.



These political factors combine with a crucial social factor in shaping the popular foundation of Arafat's leadership. As a matter of fact, the authority of the PLO leadership has always rested on a combination of material and political factors. But the relative weight of these two pillars has varied with time. The fact that the prestige of the leadership is seriously weakened today could only increase the importance of material factors in establishing the leadership's social base. It just so happens that, for the same reason, the PLO leadership does have greater resources available. For more than 20 years now, we have characterised the PLO as "a state apparatus without territory". We used this analysis to explain their orientation towards the acquisition of a territory at any price. This step has now been made. The state apparatus has its territory, at the price of a signed and dated capitulation.

Arafat's rump state might look like an operetta dictatorship, but it already has many of the bureaucratic and police features which characterise several states in the Arab world. If the state bureaucracies of the world were measured as a proportion of their host population, the Palestinian Authority would be somewhere at the top of the list. Several months ago the Palestinian-American writer Edward Said, member of the Palestinian National Council (PNC) from 1977 to 1991, estimated that the Arafat government supports roughly 350,000 people (employees and their dependents) from a total population of only 2.2 million. As you would expect, the police apparatus of the dictatorship is particularly bloated: something like 2% of the population. Not counting the clouds of informers, brokers, businessmen and speculators of all kinds, the traditional parasites of 'lumpen states' like this one.

### THE WEIGHT OF TRADITION

Palestinian society has not escaped either from the lot of the traditional societies of the region, despite the massive pouring in of refugees in 1948, years of occupation, and the *intifada*. Its social tissue is similar to that

of southern Lebanon and Jordan, with which Palestine formed a continuous socio-geographic entity until successive partitions established barriers between them. The West Bank, Gaza, and the Palestinian islands within the State of Israel still suffer under the weight of structures of hierarchy of tribal or feudal origin, and religious traditionalism. Far from seeking to overturn them, Fatah has tried to integrate itself into these structures and traditions, adding the weight of its own authority and material resources. And these same structures have been reproduced inside Fatah.

So it is hardly surprising that the electoral system chosen by Arafat conforms to the Lebanese and Jordanian model of adaptation to traditional structures, rather than the Israeli model of full proportional representation, which is a much more democratic and modernising system. (And don't forget that the smallest details of the Palestinian Authority's electoral system were subject to approval by the Zionist government, under the 1993 Accords). One of the best western observers, *Le Monde* correspondent Patrice Claude, recently noted that

*"Mr Arafat has preferred to divide the small territories in which his compatriots live into sixteen distinct constituencies, rather than applying a simple, proportional representation system, with a single constituency, as in Israel. This would have significantly reduced the clan phenomenon, and allowed the smaller parties to take their place in the Legislative Council. Instead, Mr Arafat has made an alliance with the leading families, and taken the risk of awakening the old demons of his people"*

*Le Monde*, 17 January 1996

### OPPOSITION IS POSSIBLE

Taken together, these factors largely explain Arafat's success. They could have been challenged nevertheless. Perhaps not enough to put Arafat in a minority position. Not in a system he had tailor made for himself. But enough to challenge the popular legitimacy which he appropriates (now more than ever). The fact that the *raïis*' (leader's) only rival, Samiha Khalil, a woman who is a mild critic of the Israelo-Palestinian Accords, could win almost 10% of votes in such a traditionalist society is a real exploit.

All other potential candidates were discouraged, by verbal and physical intimidation. Arafat allowed Khalil to stand because he knew she would not put him in a shadow, and this would give him a

democratic alibi, a 'feminist' one moreover. In fact, only 28 of the 700 candidates in the election were women.

A detailed breakdown of results was not available as *International Viewpoint* went to press. But the resounding victory of several opponents of Arafat demonstrates the existence of a real potential for the expression of opposition ideas in the electoral sphere, which went largely untapped for lack of credible candidates. Victories like that, in Gaza, of Dr Haidar Abdel Chafi, former President of the Palestinian delegation at the Israelo-Arab peace negotiations, and a harsh critic of the Accords Arafat signed with the Zionist government behind his back. If Chafi had presented himself in the presidential election, he would have represented a serious threat to Arafat. This might have led the PLO leader to use fraudulent tactics, something he did not judge necessary this time. But such a candidature would have demanded an extraordinary moral and physical courage. Too much for a single man, unless he could have been supported by the entire nationalist opposition.

The latter, both the left and the Fundamentalists, preferred passive abstention however. Some of its members broke with the official position of their organisation and "played the game", sometimes with the tacit support of their group. They got elected as independent candidates in several instances. But the leadership of the various opposition forces shut themselves up in a sterile refusal to challenge Yasser Arafat on the electoral front. Even though it was clear that the population's desire to vote was unstoppable (which was why the opposition did not go so far as to actively call for a boycott). Their abstentionist line was not followed by all their own militant base, and certainly ignored by most of their sympathisers.

### HAMAS

Hamas, the Islamic Fundamentalist movement, hesitated for a long time before deciding to abstain. They were involved in negotiations initiated by Arafat for an 'amicable' division of seats (to his own benefit). But it was difficult for Hamas to reconcile their Islamic-nationalist 'maximalism' with the legitimation, through participation, of the structures of an evil Palestinian Authority. They are unable to formulate realistic goals, starting from the *faits accomplis* of the process established by the Washington Accords, in order to subvert the whole process by refusing to endorse the continuing Israeli occupation, and re-affirming the national rights of the entire Palestinian people, including its Diaspora. The Fundamentalists preferred to stick to their traditional

intransigence. In so far as this position results in real acts of resistance and challenge to the occupation and the settlers, it ensures continued and new sympathy from the population.

The proof, cited in apprehension by the media of the world, was the funeral of Yehia Ayash, Hamas' bomb chief. This was Gaza's biggest ever mass meeting. And much bigger than the demonstration to mark Arafat's return to Palestine! In short, the Fundamentalists' chiefs have chosen, for the moment, to prefer the rifle to the ballot box. A sign of their political incapacity to combine the two. The high rate of voter participation seems to criticise them. But their strategy may prove a winner in the long term. The Fundamentalists expect that, once the joy of voting "freely" has passed, there will be rapid disillusionment with a Council even more rump than the Authority it is supposed to represent.

After all, the new assembly should have been named the consultative Council, given the limits of its powers. The political system which Arafat has designed, under the supervision of his Israeli sponsors, reflects the reality of the Palestinian Authority, and justifies the non-flattering comparisons which have been made with Vichy France or the Bantustans of South Africa. The powers of the Authority itself are restricted to the tight limits and constraints imposed by the Israeli protectorate on which it depends. As for the Council, the questions it is supposed to deal with are even more modest. It will meet as and when the President decides. Arafat is allowed to reject any of the Council's propositions. Definitely.

It is reasonable to expect that the Palestinian masses will quickly be disillusioned with the assembly which they have just elected, just as they have become disillusioned by their contact with the 'actually existing' Palestinian Authority. Then there will remain the great frustration of having lost the dignity of a people of resistants, to be granted the status of Bantustan population. The role of an African National Congress must be met again among the Palestinians, now that the PLO has capitulated. This is what Hamas is counting on, even though the Fundamentalist movement is still incapable of formulating a democratic programme like that of the South African organisation.

#### A DISASTER FOR THE LEFT

The left opposition has lost on every front. After years of adapting itself to the Arafat leadership of the PLO, the left cannot go back to a secular version of the Fundamentalists' present nationalist



maximalism. This was the trade mark of George Habash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) in the 1970s. And it seems that, for both objective and subjective reasons, the left's militant network in the occupied territories is unable to relaunch an armed struggle against the Zionist occupation. There is no renewal, and a continual drain. Arafat's security services, which collaborate with their Israeli 'counterparts' know plenty about this network. The militants are deeply demoralised moreover, sandwiched as they are between the bankruptcy of their long history of adaptation to the rightist leadership of the PLO, and the sterility of their new line of adaptation to the Fundamentalists. Then as now, everything in the name of 'national unity'.

There was a lively debate in these left circles before the elections. One opportunist wing suggested participation, aiming at a reconciliation with Arafat's Authority. A second, nationalist wing, supported by the leadership in exile, argued for a boycott. Their tactical view was similar to that of the Fundamentalists. But they lack Hamas' strategic efficiency. Only a small minority of the left argued for a third position, that of participation with the aim of presenting a revolutionary challenge to the Washington Accords, and the Palestinian Authority which is the result. Unfortunately, these militants did not convince the others. The left turned its back on a golden opportunity to campaign openly against the Israeli occupation and domination, and the Palestinian capitulation and dictatorship. The left also cut itself from an assembly which, even if it has no real authority over events, is nevertheless an ideal platform for political agitation. By participating in the assembly, it would have been much easier for the left to put the Palestinian Authority "into the corner."

Yasser Arafat is now obliged to respect the next step of his contract with the Zionist

government. He must repudiate the PLO's nationalist political heritage, as symbolised by its Charter. To do so, the Palestinian President must call a meeting of the Palestinian National Council (PNC), which is the only body entitled to amend the Charter. Just as Israel made an exception to its opposition to the return of the Palestinian Diaspora to allow Arafat, his bureaucrats and his policemen to return, so as to assure a better domination over the population of the territories conquered in 1967, Prime Minister Shimon Peres has now 'magnanimously' authorised the entry of all members of the PNC into Arafat's "autonomous" territories. There is, of course, a flagrant contradiction between the alleged "autonomy" and the fact that it is Shimon Peres and not Yasser Arafat who gives out the visas.

Arafat needed this green light from Israel because he wants to organise the PNC meeting in territory under Israeli control. This way he knows some of his opponents will refuse to attend. He did the same thing in 1984, when he called a PNC meeting in Amman, Jordan. Arafat was allying at the time with the Jordanian monarch, who had been responsible for the Black September massacre of Palestinians in 1970. The statement by George Habash, born in Haifa and exiled since 1948, that he will not go to the territories conquered by Israel in 1967 until all the exiled Palestinians are able to do so is an honourable decision.

Contrarily to the case of the massive elections which have just been held in Gaza and the West Bank, it is quite useless to lend the PNC any representativity. As is well known, the PNC composition is controlled by Arafat, and the only purpose of the planned meeting is to rubber-stamp a pre-determined transformation of the PLO into a diplomatic appendage to the Palestinian Authority of collaboration with the Zionist state. ★

# Indian fishers strike for jobs and

*Eight million fishers and allied workers across India joined a one-day strike on Thursday, 18 January. Their immediate demand is the cancellation of all licences issued to joint venture fishing vessels, and any chartered, leased or*

*"test" vessels under foreign ownership. The strength of the movement increases the chances of a complete review of the Indian Government's anti-worker, and anti-environment policy for the management of deep sea fishing.*

**THE STRIKE WAS CALLED BY THE NATIONAL Fisheries Action Committee Against Joint Ventures (NFACJV), a coalition of groups representing small-scale traditional fishers, medium sized trawler and mechanised boat operators and fish processors. The national trade union federations<sup>1</sup> also endorsed the strike. Port and dock workers belonging to these unions struck in support of the fishing workers. Strikers and fishers blockaded the harbours of Bombay, Kandla, Porbunder,**

**(inland) capital of Karnataka state, and the Government Secretariat in Hyderabad, capital of Andhra Pradesh state.**

Most wholesale fish markets were closed, including Andheri in Bombay, Diamond Harbour in West Bengal, Vasco and Panjim in Goa remained closed. Most processing plants also remained closed all. In many parts, port and dock workers also supported the strike.

According to Thomas Kocherry of the (non-affiliated) National Fishworkers Forum (NFF), "if the rulers have any faith in democracy they should respond to the united power of the fisher people in India. If they don't cancel the licences, the fisher people will cancel the ruling class in the coming Lok Sabha [parliamentary] elections".

India's 1991 Deep Sea

Fishing policy throws open deep sea fishing in the country's waters for exploitation eg. oil, fishing to joint ventures between foreign and Indian industry, with foreign firms being allowed up to 51% equity. Incentives include easy financing, the supply of diesel at international rates (a fourth of the rates Indian consumers pay), and reduced import duties on fishing vessels, machinery and parts. Some 194 licences for these completely export-oriented units had been issued by the end of 1995. Major benefactors are the Mitsubishi Corporation

of Japan and Consolidated Sea Foods of the USA, who have signed agreements with Indian industrial houses like Mahindra and Mahindra and Tata Chemicals.

## EXPORT RATHER THAN LOCAL CONSUMPTION

The Deep Sea Fishing policy (DSF) is part of India's shift to an "outward looking", liberalised economy and is aimed at increasing export earnings. It is based on an estimation that only 2.2 million tonnes of fish are being harvested, from an estimated annual potential yield of 3.9 million tonnes. But most of the additional "exploitable" potential is assumed to be mainly in deeper waters (beyond 50 m depth), beyond the reach of Indian boats. Exploiting these fish resources, therefore, requires foreign vessels. The Government says that exports of these landings could increase foreign exchange earnings by up to US \$ 500 million per year.

The NFACJV argues that Indian fish landings are not static at 2.2 million tonnes, but may soon reach the estimated annual potential yield. The present landings are almost entirely made by the 180,000 traditional and 34,000 mechanised indigenous craft, and these fishers are well poised, if the same incentives and facilities were offered to them, to venture into deeper waters. Increased export earnings would then accrue to Indian producers instead of to foreign firms. It also argues that, unlike temperate waters, India's tropical waters do not host concentrations of high value fish but rather a large variety of low value fish. This makes reliance solely on deep sea resources unviable, and will force the new, bigger ships to stay inshore, competing with smaller craft.

The new scheme could also lead to a speedy depletion of the fish. Factory ships can process the catch at sea and export it directly, with the Government having no control over actual amounts caught. "The



Verawal, Jamnagar, Mangalore, Madras, Vishakapattinam, Paradeep, Gopalpur, Shankarpur and Diamond Harbour. No ships were allowed to pass during the blockade.

About 20,000 fisherpeople marched to the Governor's residence in Trivandrum, capital of the southern state of Kerala. About 15,000 fisher people picketed the Port Office of Paradeep. Similar numbers of fishers, port workers and their supporters staged 'sit-ins' in Jantar Mantar, at the Governor's residences in Bangalore, the

# sustainable development

gear and vessels which these joint ventures have deployed in India's economic zone have been banned in most of the West and Japan," says Thomas Kocherry of the NFACJV. "The industrial trawlers and huge purse-seiners idling there have been pressed in to exploit Indian waters. If these joint ventures become fully operational, they could replace the 8 million fishworkers of this country." Last summer a Soviet joint venture vessel landed some 2000 tonnes of perch and snapper in the West coast port of Kochi. It would take one thousand hook and line fishers a whole year to catch the same amount of these species, very popular with local consumers.

Fish is a major source of protein for some 300 million Indians, but Greenpeace estimates that over a third of the world's catch and most of the fish exports from the developing world are used to make animal feeds and fertilisers. Because joint venture units can export all their catch, domestic consumption is threatened. Prices could rise.

## A STRANGE ALLIANCE

Artisan fishers and mechanised trawler operators, traditionally enemies, have come together under the NFACJV to deal with an enemy larger than both. Their two year long campaign has included a national strike on February 4, 1994, a "Black" Day of local actions on July 20, 1994, another national strike on 23 and 24 November 1994, and a hunger strike by leaders in May 1995. They have won the support of all the MPs from coastal constituencies, who have raised the question in Parliament and called for a review of the policy. The largely unorganised workers in the fisheries have won the support of the organised trade unions.

International support for the Indian fishers has also been building up, with

Canadian fishworkers organisations like the New Brunswick based Maritime Fishermen's Union co-ordinating a massive letter writing campaign for the November 1994 strike. In October 1995, Thomas Kocherry, in Quebec City for the FAO

The first, "Marrier" committee was boycotted across the country because it did not represent any genuine fishers. This led to the formation of a new committee, including Thomas Kocherry and three other representatives of various sectors of the



anniversary convention, issued a declaration with representatives of several Canadian fishers' organisations as well as those from other parts of the world, calling for a ban on the use of destructive technologies like trawling and for management of the fishery by the communities that depend on them for a livelihood.

The response of the Indian government so far has been disingenuous. It set up a review committee headed by P. Murari, the (now retired) bureaucrat who issued the first licences. This committee failed to include representatives of the fishers, and went back on commitments made at meetings not to issue new licences or renew those already issued. The Ministry has violated explicit promises in the Parliament. Both Tarun Gogoi (Ex-Minister of Food Processing Industries which gives out the licences) and present Minister K.P. Singh Deo continued issuing licences even after their promises in the Parliament.

fisheries. The various sub committees that travelled to different parts of the country to hear testimonies have all recommended a complete cancellation of licences and a review of the policy, but it is suspected that the Chair will not agree to make this recommendation, nor the Government to accept it. January 18 1996 represents the Indian fishers biggest effort yet to have their voices heard. ★

For more information contact:  
National Fisheries Action Committee against Joint Ventures,  
41/1771, Veekshanam Road, Kochi - 682018, India.  
Telephone 91-484-370617. Fax: 370914

Notes  
Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), affiliated to the Congress (I) Party, All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) affiliated to the Communist Party of India (CPI), Centre for Indian Trade Unions (CITU), affiliated to the CPI (Marxist), Bharat Mazdoor Sabha (BMS), affiliated to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), Hind Mazdoor Sabha (HMS) and the non-affiliated National Fishworkers Forum (NFF).

## Open letter to President Chandrika

# The taking of Jaffna is not the end of the problem

Sri Lanka's New Socialist Party (NSSP) wrote to President Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, just after government troops re-conquered the "Tamil Tiger" stronghold of Jaffna.

Your Excellency recently made an appeal to the people of the North, exhorting them to come forward to work for the sake of the future generations. You have also said that, as a mother with two children, you are quite concerned with the sufferings undergone by the people in the North.

The said appeal was reportedly air-dropped in the North. Unfortunately, the appeal has been addressed [to the people of the North] after inflicting upon them the worst sufferings ever undergone during the 12-year war. This, in fact, is the sum total of military operations, commencing with "Operation Leapforward" in July [1995], through operations "Dragonfire", "Handshake I", "Handshake II", and "Thunderstrike", to the present "Operation Riviresa", which began on 17 October.

The Government keeps propagandising that it is sincere in its approach to the Tamil national question, asserting that the devolution package presented in August [1995] is a confirmation of the Government's earnestness. The package in question clearly aims at no more than devolution of power uniformly on an Island-wide basis. In other words, this exercise is not confined to the North and East, the real seat of the whole problem, which led to the ongoing war. So, one cannot see any particular significance in the package, in so far as the Tamils are concerned. Quite apart from that, the package was put out after launching "Operation Leapforward", which served to traumatise the people as never before, with aerial bombings and shells raining on them, forcing them to keep fleeing for their lives from place to place, in their mortal fear that they are not safe anywhere, even in places of worship. It cannot be gainsaid [contradicted] that "Operation Leapforward" in July followed by, rather than preceded by, the devolution package in August, was a clear case of putting the cart before the horse.

[...]

We must reiterate, Excellency, that the Tamil National Liberation Struggle adopted non-violent methods for three decades, until frustrated Tamil youth took up arms in the late 1970s in their perception of the futility of non-violent methods in the face of mounting State repression and repeated riots let loose against the Tamils, and occasionally against the Muslims. Today, the war is being prosecuted by the People's Alliance (PA) Government without, so far, addressing the root cause of the problem created by the diabolical policies pursued by all opportunist Governments.

The people gave your Excellency and unprecedented 62.9% presidential mandate, a remarkable component of which was the

overwhelming support from the Tamils, who sincerely believed that the PA Government would "concede to their demands/rights, and honourably withdraw the armed forces", as you yourself indicated in public shortly before the August 1994 Parliamentary election. Unfortunately, this was not to be.

Whereas you had stated, as far back as May 1994, that the outline of a political package was already being drawn up, it took over one year after the PA Government assumed office before they came out with the package as such.

This package, finally revealed in August this year, contains nothing by way of a merged



The 'common man' interrogates Minister G. L. Peris

North-East Province, which is the rightful and consistent demand of the Tamil parties. What is more, even such a package is being whittled down in substantive terms, succumbing to the Sinhala chauvinist forces. The package seeks indeed to divide into two, or rather three parts the North-East province (which today stands merged, albeit temporarily, under the 13th amendment to the Constitution).

Excellency, isn't a merged North East Province, with its plurality and diversity, in perfect consonance with the plural character of the Sri Lankan polity? Isn't it a healthy arrangement, rather than a demarcation on purely ethnic lines? It need hardly be said that this problem can never be resolved if one succumbs to Sinhala chauvinists, who have hardly played a positive role for uplifting, say, the poor Sinhala peasants.

[...]

The government asserts... that the purpose of the ongoing war is to bring peace, liberating the Tamils from the clutches of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). This can never be the road to peace in the country, or the liberation of the Tamils. At a time when the people of Jaffna are suffering extreme privation and hardship, with food shortages

and fear of death as their constant companions, with hundreds of thousands displaced, Colombo authorities have kept maintaining that there have been no shortages of food and medicine. They always come out with some foggy figures, so as to confuse and to mislead.

[...]

As your Excellency has rightly said, the taking of Jaffna is not the end of the problem. But you have exhorted the people to celebrate it, without harming the Tamils in the South. There is little doubt that Tamils in the South already live in fear and panic, with indiscriminate arrests and detention of Tamils, in addition to the so-called Defence Committees, [which, for the Tamils, represent] the sword of Damocles. Those in the North, of course, live in horrendous, sub-human conditions, with well over 450,000 displaced, going through the worst of misery and hardship. Side by side with such a scenario, there is to a celebration of the victory!

V. Prabhakaran [LTTE leader] has said that the recapture of Jaffna by the Government is only a temporary military setback for

the LTTE. In any case, there is little doubt that the war will continue, notwithstanding the Government's victory in the battle for Jaffna.

How long it will take to work out a political solution, and how successful it will be in practice, remains to be seen. With Rs. 38 billion in 1996, the biggest ever budget provision for the war effort, it is apparent that a political solution is not on the horizon in the near future, especially if both sides insist on mutually unacceptable conditions for negotiations.

Let me state in conclusion, Excellency, that so long as the ongoing war, purportedly a war to bring peace, continues, then peace will be elusive. And elusive it will remain until and unless a political solution that is reasonable and acceptable to the minorities is put in place and properly implemented. ★

yours truly,

V. Thirunavukkarasu

Member of the Political Bureau

Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP)

29 November 1995

# The Tyranny of Compassion

*Non Governmental Organisations bear part of the responsibility for the debacle of disaster relief in Ethiopia, Sudan, and Somalia.*

*Nicholas McBride explains why these well intentioned initiatives go so disastrously wrong.*

WITH THEIR RELIANCE on demeaning pictures of starving children and the like, relief agencies descend into disaster pornography. Alex De Waal of **African Rights** argues that the very concept of founding action for famine on com-compassionate charity is flawed, because it relies on viewing the third world as the "supplicating world". And yet, the vast majority of the citizens of the third world are economically self-sufficient people, who find it degrading to be seen as in need of charity from abroad.

Of course, marketing is by no means the major problem with relief efforts. 20 years ago Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia had excellent anti-famine projects. They received huge infusions of foreign food. So why is it, asks De Waal, that they today seem to be in a state of chronic hunger and dependence on foreign food? The answer is that there is more than just a correlation between massive western-led relief efforts, and vulnerability to famine.

FAMINES CREATED BY CIVIL WAR demonstrate this disconcerting reality. Take Ethiopia and Rwanda. Civil wars in both countries impoverished the countryside. And generals discovered that famine is an excellent counter insurgency measure. The Ethiopian dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam succeeded in fooling much of the world that the weather was to blame for the Ethiopian famine. And he found a strategic use for the humanitarian relief which arrived as a result. He diverted substantial quantities of food aid to maintain his army, and used food distribution points to lure people away from insurgent-controlled areas towards garrison towns. And all this time, he gained bogus humanitarian credentials by permitting the relief effort to operate. And as De Waal notes, "other military commanders, notably in Sudan, Somalia and Angola, have discovered they can supply their forces



courtesy of the World Food Programme".

Similar embarrassment has resulted from the relief efforts in Rwanda. The UN believes that more than \$700 m. has been spent on refugees, including the killers, while less than \$300 m. has been provided for the victims and their rehabilitation. One UN official was quoted as saying "the refugees — that includes the killers — have been much better provided for than their victims... We know that food goes astray, reaching even the former army. And numbers of refugees are hiked up by the camp commanders so that they can get more".

Another charge is also causing red faces. "The international community has been employing killers wholesale", claims Rakiya Omar of **African Rights**. "In the panic to be seen to be providing, most looked the other way, asking no questions of those who turned up to be interpreters, cooks, drivers or guards. Even when lists of people implicated in the genocide were available, they turned away".

CONSIDERING THE BAD POLITICS USED IN marketing the disaster, and the naïveté they display concerning their own

efforts, the growing role of Non-Governmental Organisations and the humanitarian agenda in filling the geo-political vacuum in countries like Rwanda and Angola is worrying. It partly reflects Western disinterest and the failure of World Bank and UN programmes. As De Waal comments, "a handful of white nurses in a feeding centre has a higher public profile than \$10 m. to support a national health system".

Relief agency personnel have relished this opportunity, keen to be seen lobbying the UN and speaking authoritatively on TV about human rights, and the prospective of cease-fires.

Their frequent lack of expertise is only one of the problems. A more serious issue is the way these NGOs end up dominating the debate on poor and marginal countries, giving the impression that their role goes beyond a minor contribution to social welfare, and that they can provide answers to the problems these countries face. In Somalia, this led to the call, by a handful of private charities, for intervention by the US Marines. The invasion, which was to protect relief agencies, privileged them in the war-stricken country above the population, which became effectively disenfranchised. The resulting fiasco should not have surprised anybody. The recipients of this tyranny of compassion are increasingly bitter and resentful. There is an increasing estrangement between African professionals and the international charities, which increasingly form a hegemony of humanitarianism, above all criticism. As De Wall points out, good intentions are their own justification. But why has no one been sacked for the failure of relief efforts? Why are no public inquiries made?

The author is a member of the New Zealand solidarity organisation CORSO. This organisation started as a fairly traditional 'aid' body, but became increasingly critical as it was confronted with the reality of "aid" interventions in the "third world".

## ★ Disasterous relief

REFORM IS NOT EASY. THERE WILL ALWAYS be unscrupulous NGOs who take advantage of the opportunity for a simplistic emotional appeal, and thereby justify their own existence. Similarly, there seems little chance of a



more constructive role by the Western press, who are too ready to avoid analysis by wheeling out the disaster pornography clichés and making heroes out of white relief field workers.

In countries like Rwanda, the problems are so grave and so complex, it is so difficult to conceive of solutions, that we are grateful for anyone trying. However, the need for accountability and transparency is a vital first step to reform. Ultimately, De Waal favours an International Famine Commissioner, able to scrutinise international social welfare and call its practitioners to account. More useful would be an abandonment of any relief effort modelled on previous efforts, in favour of a coordinated and effective effort organised and conceived by the "victims" themselves, who can be "empowered" (a favourite NGO word) to help themselves, rather than always be the recipient of philanthropic imperialism.

Relief efforts within the affected areas should not be underrated. Before the invasion, Somali groups worked alongside the more enlightened foreign NGOs to provide effective relief

outside the capital city, Mogadishu. And perhaps the worse famine crisis of the last 25 years, in Maharashtra, India in 1973, was averted by the efforts of the Indian government, facing democratic pressures from those who faced starvation — politicians faced losing their jobs if they did not provide food. The government implemented measures to provide income to five million labourers, and set up 30,000 "fair price" shops to sell essentials. Failure to provide relief would have been a political scandal.



The Maharashtra example provides valuable lessons: people can and will help themselves in a democratic environment where actions are accountable and decision makers can be judged. But this valuable example and heartening message is buried by the ubiquitous face of a starving black child standing next to the heroic white reporter or glamorous nurse. Another tragedy of western-led disaster relief.

★

### Notes

Sources: Alex De Waal, "Compassion fatigue", *New Statesman and Society*, 17 March 1995, and "Mixed blessings of Rwandan aid", *Guardian Weekly*, 9 April 1995. For a discussion of "disaster pornography", see "Every picture tells a story", by A. Choudry, *Overview*, February 1995. This article is reprinted from issue 54 of *Overview*, the quarterly newsletter of the solidarity organisation Corso, PO box 1905, Christchurch, New Zealand. Phone: (03) 477 3395, fax 474 0736, e-mail <cd.small@educ.canterbury.ac.nz>

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# New Zapatista party

The EZLN rebels of Chiapas state have called for the formation of a new political party, regrouping large sections of the country's radical left. Sergio Rodríguez Lascano reports.

ON THE NIGHT OF DECEMBER 31, 1995 AND during the morning of the first of January 1996, the Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle was issued from the jungle and the highlands of Chiapas by the Zapatista National Liberation Army.

It is appropriate to remember the objectives of its previous declarations:

- The First declared war on the government and its army;

- The Second called for the creation of a National Democratic Convention, as a lever to promote the organisation of "civil society";

- The Third proposed the creation of a National Liberation Movement, as a unifying bridge of all the opposition forces seeking to evict the PRI from the National Palace.

The Fourth contains the response of the EZLN to the National Consultation (*Consulta Nacional*) on the possibility of building "a political force of a new type based on the EZLN." In a way, these two years express the lived experience and the predicaments of the "journey from pain to hope," to use the words of Subcomandante Marcos.

Subterranean Mexico, the Mexico of those who are lower than the lowest, the descendants of the original inhabitants of these lands, after having formulated dozens of proposals, has come to the conclusion that the only hope of organising the Mexico of the bottom and, somehow, of the middle, lies in the launching of an awesome adventure: to build a rainbow, a rainbow

## ● Party and nation

Those projects which belong to the new opposition lack something which today has become decisive. We are opposed to a national project which implies its destruction, but we lack a proposal for a new Nation, a proposal for reconstruction.

Part, but certainly not all its vanguard, has been and is the EZLN in its effort for a transition to democracy. In spite of the persecution and the threats, beyond the lies and deceptions, the EZLN has remained legitimate and accountable and forges ahead in its struggle for democracy, liberty and justice for all Mexicans.

Today, the struggle for democracy, liberty and justice in Mexico is a struggle for national liberation. ★

Extract from the EZLN Declaration



which, besides being multicoloured, must also constitute a bridge linking the Mexico of the past with the Mexico of the future, and then, also, almost immediately, become a project of liberation and transmodernity, to paraphrase Enrique Dussel.

*"Between 1492 and 1992, a long history unfolded, in the time of the 'Sixth Sun', in which the Latin American people, the 'social bloc' of the oppressed, created their own culture. They received the impact of a modernisation which is forced to ignore their history, because they are the invisible 'other face' of modernity. Such a 'people' can hardly realise a Modernity in which they have always been the exploited, the oppressed part; the 'other face' whose death has paid for the primitive accumulation of capital, for the development of the metropolitan countries [...] This is why the 'liberating project' [...] is also an attempt to surpass Modernity. It is both a project of liberation and a project of 'transmodernity'".*

E. Dussel

1492, *Covering the Other*

The sector which has been most offended by the Zapatista proposal has been the so-called "political class", right and left.

The representatives of the latter in particular have had to unearth their "Marxist" texts and manuals, to debate against real or imaginary anarchist and utopian visions. There is a reason for this annoyed reaction. The Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle, this message from the basement, poses problems which are not easy to face: all of a sudden *Zapatismo* seeks to organise social sectors in which, until now, it only had a moral presence. Thus words cease to be literature or, to be more precise, besides being literature they now also become building and organising tools. All of a sudden, to lead while obeying ceases to be a catchy phrase to be deployed in the internal debates of the political apparatuses, and becomes instead a subversive arrow which questions the very basis of the exercise and the theory of power. It places the political elites, government functionaries, as well as those, both right and left, who have made politics their profession, under a magnifying glass. It seeks to uncover the secret they have monopolised until now. It seeks to have "a cook leading the State."

The exasperated response of the Mexican "political class" demonstrates the

The author is a militant of Democracia Radical (formerly part of the Partido Revolucionario de las y los Trabajadores, PRT). Democracia Radical is the Mexican section of the Fourth International.

validity of these words of one German intellectual:

*"The substance of the secret of the state is infused into its bearers and it makes them immune, depending on their degree of initiation, against any questioning. In this fashion they are exempted from responding. They thus become, in the true and precise sense of the word, irresponsible.*

*Categories and privileges within a very precisely structured hierarchy are thus assigned in accordance with the state secrets one may have access to. Those*

*of the lower subject mass are denied all secrets. That is to say, they have no right to share Power, to criticise it, to control it."*

**Hans Magnus Enzenberger**

*Politics and Law Breaking*

Some sectors linked to the traditional Mexican left, expected the Zapatista proposal to question the "party-state system" and not the political game as such. This left, in a sense is not only part of the game, but also a supporter of the game as such. We should not forget the brilliant and terrible words of Jesús Reyes Heróles, one of the theorists and practical agents of the actually existing antidemocracy: "to resist us is to support us."

Extract from the EZLN Declaration

## ● National liberation

On January 1 of 1995, after breaking the military blockade with which the bad government pretended to submerge us in surrender and isolation, we called upon the different citizen forces to construct a broad opposition front which would unite those democratic voices which exist against the State-Party System: the National Liberation Movement. Although the beginning of this effort at unity encountered many problems, it lives still in the thoughts of those men and women who reject conformity when they see their Homeland under the rule of the Powerful and foreign moneys. This broad opposition front, after following a route filled with difficulty, regressions and misunderstandings, is about to concretize its first proposals and agreements for coordinated action. The long process of maturity of this organizing effort will bear fruit this new year. We Zapatistas, salute the birth of this Movement for National Liberation and we hope that, among those who form it there will always be a zeal for unity and respect for differences. ★

*"And they were... thinking themselves, that is to say knowing themselves, that is to say learning themselves, that is to say standing in themselves, when the rain unfurled itself at the very centre of the afternoon, without falling or rising, just standing there and the men and the women of corn also stood watching the earliest gods and at that very moment a bridge of light, of clouds, of colours began to take shape and the bridge came from the mountain and it went to the valley, then it could clearly be seen that the bridge of lights and clouds and colours did not go anywhere and did not come from anywhere, it was just there, above the rain and the world."*

**Subcomandante Marcos**

*Men Live Building Bridges of Seven Colours*

The Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle has now banged its fist on the table where the cards of power are dealt out. This is why some, after welcoming the willingness of the EZLN to transform itself into a political movement, immediately chide it for its unwillingness to play according to the rules of the political system and the rules which modernity has laid out for both the political struggle and the struggle for power. What is being criticised is precisely everything that is new in the proposal.

On the left, those who have attacked the Fourth Declaration are the very same people who never understood that the main goal of the struggle against capitalism was not a more equal distribution of income but the transformation of the core of that system. In other words, the transformation of the capital-wage labour relationship itself and, in particular, of everything in it that is linked to commodity fetishism. This is why they always thought that what existed in the USSR or Eastern Europe was socialism. They are incapable of understanding that, besides commodity fetishism, there also exists the fetishisation of power, or of the State. In the same manner that a relatively greater control of commodity production does not do away with exploitation, the taking of power by a group of professional politicians with good intentions does not do away with the political domination of an elite over society. This is why the Fourth Declaration is an arrow which reaches the very heart of politics as it has traditionally been conceived.

The Declaration tries to alter the relation between those who rule and those they rule over. In other words, the relation between command and obedience which follows from all relations of political domination. Acceptance of the fact that some have to

rule and the majority has to obey is the ultimate basis of capitalist domination, once it is stripped of its ostentatious Sunday clothes.

Representative democracy represents those ostentatious clothes. Periodically, the political elite consults the electorate about diverse options and programs. Of course those options and programs are rarely carried into practice, but once in office that is a minor matter. The fundamental aspect is that people delegate their decision-making power to a group of professional politicians (the guardians of the secrets of state) whose differences are located at the level of global projects, but never at the level of the relation between command and obedience itself. What are the differences between a paradigmatic character from the *Partido de Acción Nacional*, such as Fernández Cevallos, or one from the *Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, such as Muñoz Ledo, with Zedillo? They are all authoritarian, antidemocratic, personalistic (perhaps the first one less on this score), they are all disdainful. Without question they represent at least partially different social interests. But they feel at ease in a political system which seeks to maintain the difference between rulers and ruled. That is why each time they seek an agreement they are bothered not only by the presence and observation of the process by society, but even by the presence of their own companions. That is why their method is that of striking a deal, of reaching an agreement, in order to turn conflicts and contradictions into simple disagreements which can be easily patched over.

The method which comes from the jungle and the heights of Chiapas involves a rupture, not simply with the "party-state system" but with the political system as a whole. This is not connected, as some

*"Chiapas is a deep ethical call, from the very depths of the history of all modernity. It addresses Latin America in its substance, but it also addresses Europe, as it reminds it of the genocide carried out in the sixteenth century: the first holocaust of modernity, with fifteen million Indians dead, and fourteen million Africans sold as slaves [...] Ethical situations which invite co-responsible solidarity with the oppressed, the poor, the excluded. We will have a lot to reflect on, to analyse, to conclude in the coming years, from the already quite intense first weeks of 1994"*

**E. Dussel**

*The Ethical Sense of the Maya Rebellion of 1994*

stubborn electoralists think, with an anti-electoralist or abstentionist position. The crisis of the command-obedience relation is not conceived exclusively in the terrain of the relations between the regime and society. Instead, it involves all the aspects which have penetrated from above into the totality of social relations, whether in the electoral, social, cultural, psychological, educational or medical fields. It takes as point of departure the fact that the hierarchy in which a few command and the majority obeys exists in all the pores of society, becoming the foundation of the cultural domination of the oppressors, which is much more perverse in that it has achieved the consolidation of the relations among the poor themselves. The tableau which comes to life before the eyes of the worker, which Marx utilised to describe commodity fetishism, issimilar to the spectre which comes to life in all human beings when someone else decides for them, when someone else is more prepared or more capable of making the decisions which belong properly to the community.

While the EZLN understands power as a social relation and not simply as something that can be seized and transformed, it simultaneously raises the fact that all social relations contain the embryo of exclusion and domination. In this sense, the struggle is against the power of the state but also against the transmutation of that power into all human relations, even those which seem harmless but are sometimes as perverse or even more perverse than those directly established by the power of the state. And

Extract from the EZLN Declaration

## ● Intercontinental dialogue

THREE NEW INITIATIVES WERE LAUNCHED by the Zapatistas as responses to the success of the Plebiscite for Peace and Democracy.

An initiative for the international arena expresses itself in a call to carry out an intercontinental dialogue in opposition to neoliberalism. The two other initiatives are of a national character: the formation of civic committees of dialogue whose base is the discussion of the major national problems and which are the seeds of a non-partisan political force; and the construction of new places for encounters between civil society and Zapatismo.

Three months after these three initiatives were launched, the call for the intercontinental dialogue for humanity and against neoliberalism is almost complete, more than two hundred civic committees of dialogue have been organized in all of the Mexican republic, and today, five new "Aguascalientes" will be inaugurated: one in the community of La Garrucha, another in Oventic, Morelia, La Realidad, and the first and last one in the hearts of all the honest men and women of the world. ★



this is done without much verbal gibberish, without so many fireworks.

This radical critique acquires even greater importance when applied to traditional concepts of modernity, because, in its "neo-liberal" phase, capitalism and its mediations are showing more clearly their harmful and perverse effects. What was "strange," what was difficult to understand (what created the crisis of our western and modern vision) was the fact that the alternative came from indigenous Mexico, whose rebellion raised the slogan of *Enough!* It addressed everyone ethically, particularly the thinking and the practice of the left. That is the special importance of the call for an Intercontinental Meeting contained in the Declaration, under the slogan: *For Humanity, Against Neo-liberalism!*

The Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle takes one more step towards making concrete one of the utopian principles (utopian in the best sense of the world) which have historically driven human beings, men and women, towards rebellion: the right to control one's own destiny, not to let someone else decide for oneself.

To command while obeying, those fortunate words which emerged in January of 1994, now enters a new phase, a gigantic challenge. Is it possible to maintain this prophetic vision and at the same time organise a new political force? I don't know, but the dilemma is worth the effort. At least so we can approach the words of that great German philosopher, Elias Canetti:

*"The system of orders is accepted universally. It was neatly coined in the armies. But many other spheres of civilised life are dominated and stamped by Order. Death as a threat is the currency of power. It is easy to pile coin upon coin and accumulate enormous capital. Those who want to reduce power, must look at the order in every signal, without fear, and find the means to take its sting away."*

**E. Canetti**  
*Mass and Power*

Another "strange" fact should also be remembered: all these civilian and civilising proposals come from a politico-military organisation. All of this is happening in a country called Mexico where "we are all Marcos." "Zapata is alive," and, in dinner conversations, as the great poet said, "the tablecloth smells of gunpowder." History is coming at us despite the fact that the clerks of power have tried, in vain, to turn this country into the paradise of weak thought. ★

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# Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle

**WE CALL UPON ALL HONEST MEN AND WOMEN** to participate in the new national political force which is born today: the Zapatista Front of National Liberation. A civil and non-violent organization, independent and democratic, Mexican and national, which struggles for democracy, liberty, and justice in Mexico. The Zapatista Front of National Liberation is born today, and we extend an invitation to participate in it to the factory workers of the Republic, to the laborers of the countryside and of the cities, to the indigenous



peoples, to the *colonos* [residents of poorer districts] to teachers and students, to the Mexican women, to young people across the country, to the honest artists and intellectuals, to responsible priests and nuns, and to all the Mexican people who do not seek power, but rather democracy, liberty, and justice for ourselves and for our children.

We invite national civic society, those without a party, the citizen and social movement, all Mexicans to construct this new political force.

● A new political force which will be national. A new political force based in the EZLN.

● A new political force which forms part of a broad opposition movement, the National Liberation Movement, as a space for citizen political action where there may be a confluence with other political forces of the independent opposition, a space where



popular wills may encounter and co-ordinate united actions with one another.

● A political force whose members do not exert nor aspire to hold elective positions or government offices in any of its levels. A political force which does not aspire to take power. A force which is not a political party.

● A political force which can organize the demands and proposals of those citizens and is willing to give direction through obedience. A political force which can organize a solution to the collective problems without the intervention of political parties and of the government. We do not need permission in order to be free. The role of the government is the prerogative of society and it is its right to exert that function.

● A political force which struggles against the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and against the centralization of power. A political force whose members do not have any other privilege than the satisfaction of having fulfilled its commitment.

● A political force with local, state and regional organization which grows from the base, which is its social force. A political force given birth by the civic committees of dialogue.

● A Front because it incorporates organizational efforts which are non-partisan, and has many levels of participation and many forms of struggle.

● Zapatista because it is born with the hope and the indigenous heart which, together with the EZLN, descended again from the Mexican mountains.

● A political force with a program of struggle with 13 points. Those contained in the First Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle and added throughout the past two years of insurgency. A political force which struggles against the State-Party System. A political force which struggles for a new constituency and a new constitution. A political force which does not struggle to take political power but for a democracy where those who govern, govern by obeying.

We call upon all those men and women of Mexico, the indigenous and those who are not indigenous, we call upon all the peoples who form this Nation; upon those who agree to struggle for housing, land, work, bread, health, education, information, culture,

independence, democracy, justice, liberty and peace; to those who understand that the State-Party System is the main obstacle to a transition to democracy in Mexico; to those who know that democracy does not mean simply replacing those in absolute power but government of the people, for the people and by the people; for those who agree with the need to create a new Magna Carta which incorporates the principal



demands of the Mexican people and the guarantees that Article 39 be complied with through plebiscites and referendums; to those who do not aspire or pretend to exercise public privileges or elected posts; to those who have the heart, the will and the wisdom on the left side of their chest; to those who want to stop being spectators and are willing to go without pay or privilege other than participation in national reconstruction; to those who want to construct something new and good, to become a part of the Zapatista Front of National Liberation.

Those citizens without a party, those social and political organizations, those civic committees of dialogue, movements and groups, all those who do not aspire to take Power and who subscribe to this Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle commit themselves to participate in a dialogue to formulate its organic structure, its plan of action, and its declaration of principles for this Zapatista Front of National Liberation.

Today, this January 1 of 1996, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation signs this Fourth Declaration of the Lacandona Jungle. We invite all the people of Mexico to subscribe to it.

**Indigenous Clandestine  
Revolutionary Committee  
General Command of the Zapatista  
Army of National Liberation (EZLN)**

# Tahiti: towards independence?

Six weeks before elections to the "Territorial Assembly of French Polynesia", Laurent Durose talks to Gabriel Tetiarahi, President of the NGO confederation Hiti Tau.

● *What is the state of the anti-nuclear movement in Polynesia?*

There isn't any mobilisation any more. People have realised that, whatever they do, [French President Jacques] Chirac will not reverse his decision. People have understood that they don't have the right to their indigenous spirituality any more. This has all confirmed the fears they already had.

There are still activities from time to time. There are some symbolic demonstrations. Each time there is an explosion, you can see a mixture of anger, concern and humiliation. People are waiting for the end of the series of tests. Eyes and ears are locked on the territorial elections of March 1996. Otherwise, people are agitated and humiliated. This means that there could be some outbreaks of violence.

● *So how do you evaluate the mobilisation against French nuclear tests in 1995?*

My overall evaluation is: excellent! We have never seen so many people rise up against nuclear tests, or so many demonstrations. Here in Tahiti, three groups have stood out: Tavini, Hiti Tau, and the evangelical churches.

Excellent in quality as well as quantity! We have seen some innovations in forms of action, like the Peace Flotilla idea, which Greenpeace stole from us.

Let me be clear. We are grateful to Greenpeace for bringing the international media to Tahiti. But they also made an important mistake. They were unable to produce pictures of anything more than a conflict between themselves and the French state. Their media work hid the fact that these tests were not taking place in a human desert. The people of Polynesia and their representatives were somehow forgotten.

Greenpeace must be taught to work with local groups. They never tried to coordinate their activities with ours. They always tried to impose their own point of view. Nowadays they are quite isolated in Tahiti. They tried too hard to make this island into a means of fund-raising for themselves.

A number of events reveal much about Greenpeace's essential politics. For example, it was very difficult to persuade them to accept the presence of Polynesians on the Rainbow Warrior! The second time they came to Papeete, Stephanie Milles arranged for her boat to enter the harbour at the same time as a Hiti Tau press conference! And, as a last example, Greenpeace used Hiti Tau for logistic support for a certain period of time, but has never made the slightest financial contribution.

● *A number of people were arrested following the Autumn riots...*

Atrocities, acts of torture were inflicted on five A Tia I Mua trade union members. One of them, Henri Tematitahio, is now paralysed in half his body. Some of the younger detainees have been released, but others, particularly trade union militants, are still in prison. Amnesty International and the Ecumenical Council have been contacted.

People cannot understand why those policemen who were responsible for the violence have not been arrested. No judicial enquiry has been made. This is two-track justice. A real colonial judicial system.

The A Tia I Mua trade union has not been dissolved. But the state was able to ensure the resignation of its leader, Hiro Tefaarere. He has since been sacked, and only survives by renting out most of his house.

Those who come under the most systematic attacks are the trade union leaders, political and NGO activists who work for the territory's civil service. Some are assigned to new offices in a different region, others reprimanded for the slightest lateness in arrival at work. As for me, I have been subjected to 10 years of harassment at my workplace, and I have been prevented from travelling abroad. If I want to take leave, my application goes straight to Territorial President Gaston Flosse! In December 1994 he prevented me from travelling to the United Nations to address the commemoration for the Decade of Indigenous Peoples. Those militants who do



not work for the territory's civil service still face harassment, for example by customs officials at the airport. Many of these militants are used to seeing a police car parked outside their home.

Such harassment has blocked a number of initiative. But it has also helped create a certain consciousness. An understanding that we must group together to fight back. Hence the birth of Hiti Tau.

● *Many of the participants in the 1995 riots at Faa'a airport were young. What is the social situation behind such violence?*

The working population is 62,000 people. Then there are 20,000 unemployed workers, 85% of whom are younger than 25. Every September, 2,000 young adults join the labour force. Only 700-800 find a job. Society has no place for the others.

This is the real political failure of the nuclear test programme. Billions of francs have been wasted, and youth has become disoriented. The family structures here still allow them to find stability again. But, with the economic difficulties and our shrinking resources, these family structures are disintegrating. Young people feel very deceived. They aren't interested in the future because they don't have a future. Some of them orient themselves towards the Tavini party, because it has structures for young sympathisers.

One of the problems among the youth today is the growth of racism, particularly directed against those from mainland France.

## ★ Te Ao Maohi (Polynesia)

### ● What about the 1993 Pact for Progress?

This Pact (signed by President Flosse and then French Prime Minister Balladur) is similar to the Matignon Accords (for Kanaky/New Caledonia), but without a political clause. The Pact was supposed to rest on a package of financial compensation for the period after the nuclear test programme. It has now become a package of financial measures to compensate for the re-launching of the nuclear test programme!



When Balladur was Prime Minister of France, President Flosse asked for 200 bn. Pacific Francs (CFP) over ten years. But all France provided was 60bn, spread over the period from 1994-1999.

Flosse then called for a vote for Chirac. When Chirac was elected, Flosse asked him to unlock supplementary credits for Polynesia. He did. This money was earmarked for social programmes — giving a higher proportion of civil servants full-time, regular contracts, improving the urban

environment, and so on. In reality, these programmes were electoral operations, targeting the municipal elections in particular. For example, the keys to social housing units were handed to the new tenants just before the municipal elections.

Unfortunately, non of this money went on agriculture, and non on fishing. Flosse managed to commit the French state to provide subsidies to Polynesia at least until 2006, but for what purposes?

### ● Territorial elections will be held in March 1996. The rumour is that [nationalist leader] Oscar Temaru will not be standing.

Oscar made some [hasty] statements without consulting his party, Tavini. The situation is unclear. But I don't think Tavini is ready for a real boycott. A real independentist boycott campaign requires a real, active campaign, the creation of a 'provisional government', and opening offices in New York and Geneva. Tavini doesn't dare go this far. After all, they get most of their money through their participation in the [colonial] institutions.

My electoral prediction is that Flosse will win an absolute majority. It's almost certain. He has the structures, he has the money, and the opposition he faces is weak.

### ● What do you say about independence?

It is legitimate to gain our independence. But it is not just a question of demanding our rights. There is also the issue of our self-education in our responsibilities and obligations. The problem with the independentist movements is that they have no propositions for a state budget, or for a constitution. They don't have any alternative project. Not even the beginnings of a sketch of a debate on these kind of questions. They nourish themselves on the deceptions and corruption which the colonial system generates. But the electorate is not convinced.

Hiti Tau is not a political party. Our contribution to the debate is to ask a number of questions. For instance, what will be the rights of the minorities in an independent Polynesia? What development model will we adopt? What role will non-governmental organisations play in that development...?

## New Times on the Polynesian left?

Hiti Tau (New Times) is a confederation of non-governmental organisations. Its founder members include many activists of the CSIP trade union, a pro-independence movement which draws inspiration from the USTKE trade union of France's other Pacific colony, Kanaky (New Caledonia).

Founded by seven organisations in 1992, Hiti Tau had fifty affiliated groups by 1995. According to Gabriel Tetiarahi, the possibilities for further political activity are "enormous". One challenge will be to decentralise the organisation, "to give people in the island as many responsibilities as those in Tahiti". Hiti Tau also serves as secretariat for the Pacific Island Association of Non-Governmental Organisations (PIANGO), of which Gabriel Tetiarahi is president.

Hiti Tau's campaigns include

- opposition to France's nuclear tests
- the environment: protection of the tortoise, opposition to the extension of the Mataiva mine
- Defence of human rights and civic liberties
- Defence of the rights of indigenous peoples. Public debate on the 1847 treaty of annexation of Tahiti by France. Re-inscription of Polynesia on the UN's list of territories awaiting de-colonisation.

The organisation also runs a vanilla plantation at Moorea, which provides jobs for

135 young people. Financial support for this project comes from NGOs in Australia, New Zealand and Germany. After a loss-making period of training, construction and irrigation, the project is now an economic success. A co-operative has been formed for marketing the vanilla. According to Tetiarahi, the next stage of the project is to help family structures evolve, so that agricultural co-operatives can be managed 'naturally' by the village population.

Hiti Tau is also active in women's activities. There are programmes to develop economic activities for women (clothes-making, handicrafts). The organisation sent a representative to the UN Conference on Women in Beijing. Women already hold three of the seven posts on the Hiti Tau management committee. This will soon be expanded to eight members, with the new post reserved for a female candidate. As a general rule, half the members of any Hiti Tau delegations are women. The women's organisation, Hiti Tau Tuahine has organisational and financial autonomy from the main organisation.

Some French supporters of Hiti Tau worry that the "NGO focus" is "not political enough". Tetiarahi disagrees. "We are already politically active, in a certain sense. We discuss questions which are eminently political. I'm not interested in losing my time with the interminable debates they have in the Territorial Assembly." ★

### ● How important is the Maohi cultural heritage in the independence of Polynesia?

A heritage, a culture, allows us to meet with other peoples as equals. Having our own culture is not about being better, or worse. Just different. In the political sphere, this means convincing the electorate to accept cultural differences, and to accept to protect the rights of minorities, particularly in the cultural sphere [...] There is no debate on this in Tahiti at the moment. Leaders ought to make sure that the rights of minorities will indeed be guaranteed in an independent Polynesia. Not make populist speeches along the lines of "those [French] who want to stay can stay. All the others should leave!"

I was the only one at the first PIANGO conference who argued that we should deal with the question of identity before discussing organisational questions. The independentists confuse identity with citizenship or nationality. These three things are different. For me, independence should come in the framework of a multi-cultural country, where the French [as a minority of European origin] would have certain rights.

There is another problem, a cultural one. French is, *de facto*, the exclusive language. No official documents are translated into *teo maohi* (Polynesian). None of the mainstream political leaders propose to change this. But in Hiti Tau meetings, we speak (Polynesian)! ★

# Canadian state

## New labour radicalism in Ontario

IN JUNE 1995, THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC government of Ontario, Canada's most populous and industrialized province went down to a crushing electoral defeat at the hands of the Conservative Party. Neo-liberal deficit reduction with its panoply of vicious cuts to social services, the health system, education, childcare, workers' and women's rights became the order of the day for the new government led by Premier Mike Harris. Coming on top of the federal government's attack's on immigrants, social welfare and unemployment, the right-wing anti-labour, anti working class offensive provoked at least a very large segment of the union and community movements into what is potentially the largest mobilization in the history of English Canada since the post-war strike wave of 1946-48. Throughout all of the fall, there were numerous protests and mobilizations led by anti-poverty, childcare and other community-based organizations. Then, in spite of the existence of sharp divisions among organized labour — fundamentally along public versus private sector lines — the Ontario Federation of Labour organized a one day general strike in the usually conservative small city of London on December 11 1995.

The federal and provincial civil service, municipal workers, elementary, secondary and college-level teachers and support staff were joined by the Canadian Auto Workers local unions in the region in what some hope will prove to be a general rehearsal for much

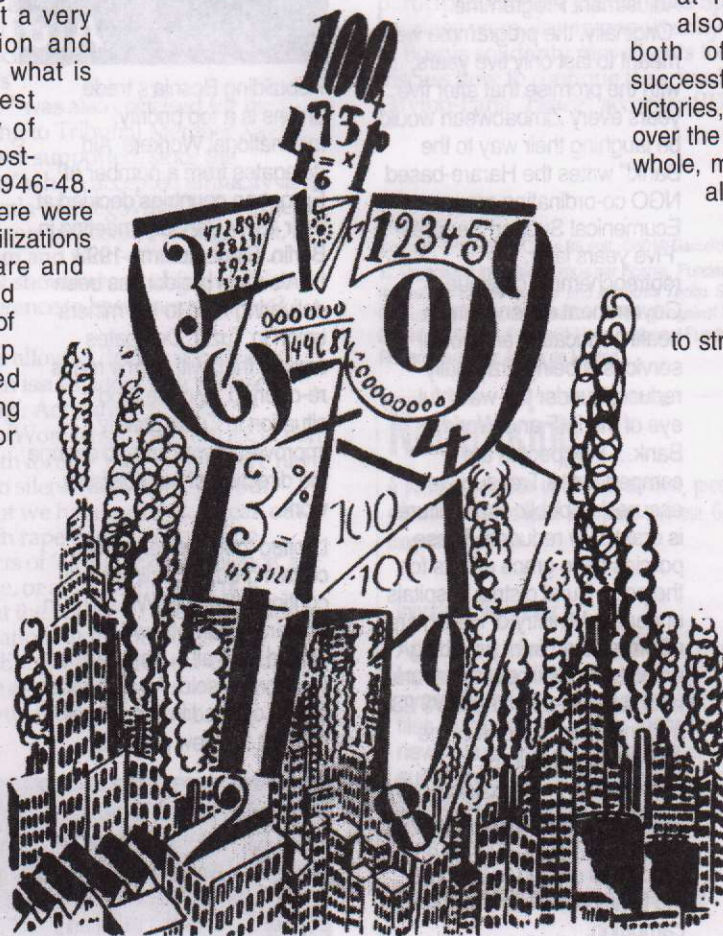
broader strikes in other cities and regions. Most recently, on January 13th, the Catholic teachers' federation, an unaffiliated union not particularly noted for either militancy or radicalism called a demonstration on the theme of "cuts hurt kids" which drew some 37,000 participants: considerably more than their total provincial membership. The refusal of three large private sector unions, the Steelworkers, the Food and Commercial Workers and the Communications, Energy and Paper Workers to take part in the mobilizations has however been a serious

weakening factor. The next round in the mobilizations is likely to be a strike in mid to late February by the provincial civil servants, organized by the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union (OPSEU).

Although the civil servants have only recently won the right to strike and do not have a tradition of militant job action, they are facing an election promise by the Conservative Party to fire 13,000 of them or more than 20%. So far this right-wing government has kept all of its promises to slash and burn. At the same time, workers at Toronto Hydro-Electric have also voted to strike. If either or both of these two strikes are successful in at least winning partial victories, they are likely to be followed over the spring by Ontario Hydro as a whole, municipal workers, teachers at all different levels and others sections of the broader public sector.

In September, the Canadian Auto Workers are expected to strike against General Motors in Ontario and Quebec. Although there has been some joint mobilizing with the community-based organizations, no broad democratic coalition between organized labour and unemployed or precarious workers, particularly immigrant workers and women, has yet seen the light of day. Such a coalition would seem to be almost a precondition for stopping the neo-liberal offensive and could make possible a real, and not symbolic, general strike. ★

by Michel Lafitte



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## IMF World Bank WTO Enough

### The re-colonisation of Bosnia

Bosnia's new constitution entrusts the International Monetary Fund with the choice of Director of the new Central Bank of Bosnia. The all-powerful Minister of Public Enterprises and Services will be named by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD).

This kind of interference in the internal affairs of a state is uncommon, even for the IMF. A just-published study by CACAD member Michel Chossudovsky shows quite clearly that the real priorities of IMF involvement in Bosnia are not post-war reconstruction, nor development, but obtaining reimbursement of existing debts, and controlling the economic levers in the new country. The first IMF loan to Bosnia will be used to repay an earlier debt to the Netherlands, the lead country in the IMF group which includes Bosnia-Herzegovina.

### Zimbabwe

It is five years since Zimbabwe began its IMF/WB funded Economic Structural Adjustment Programme. "Originally, the programme was meant to last only five years, with the promise that after five years every Zimbabwean would be laughing their way to the Bank!" writes the Harare-based NGO co-ordinating group Ecumenical Support Services. "Five years later, retrenchments continue. Government expenditure in health, education and social services is being drastically reduced, under the watchful eye of the IMF and World Bank... IMF people are camped at the Treasury, to ensure that public expenditure is drastically reduced. These policies have grave effects for the poor. Rural district hospitals under the Ministry of Health are now restricted from providing ambulance services to the rural poor, as a result of the ZW\$ 23 million budget cut. One of the African organisations participating in the collection of signatures for the COCAD "50 Years is Enough" appeal, and which has offered to become the local contact for the campaign.

The IIRE and COCAD have co-edited. Many of the texts have previously been published in French COCAD publications. This new brochure should help extend the campaign in the English-speaking countries, particularly in the Third World. We are currently investigating the possibilities of a similar brochure in Castilian. This

would be a co-edition with the Catalan COCAD preparatory committee, the IIRE, and a number of organisations in Latin America.

The French version of "World Bank, IMF, WTO: Enough!" will be published in book form at the end of this month. The initial 2,500 copy brochure has sold out.

The French "Other Voices of the Planet" Committee will hold a weekend discussion on 17-18 February, to plan events to mark the June 1996 G& meeting in Lyon, France.

COCAD: Plantinstraat 29, B-1070 Brussels, Belgium. © +32.2/523 4023, fax 522 6127

## International Workers Aid

Rebuilding Bosnia's trade unions is a top priority, International Workers' Aid delegates from a number of European countries decided at their 13-14 January meeting in Berlin. Since autumn 1993, IWA's main project has been delivering food to the miners' union in Tuzla. Delegates argued that, with many roads re-opened, and the food situation in Tuzla greatly improved, it was time to change the direction of our solidarity work.

Limited food-deliveries for certain groups of miners will continue. But the IWA office in Makarska, Croatia will be closed, and all but one of the IWA lorries sold. An IWA office will be opened in Tuzla itself, to support the new projects.

Lone Rasmussen from Danish IWA presented the first issue of the Tuzla miners' newspaper (dated 21 December), produced with IWA financial support. The Berlin meeting

voted to continue financial support, so that the paper can be published on a regular basis.

An international trade union conference is planned in Tuzla in September 1996. "I think we can get broad participation from the European union movement" said Theo Mewis, Belgian IWA, who represented IWA in Tuzla in Autumn 1995. Mewis hopes that this IWA-sponsored international conference will lead to new direct contacts for the Bosnian unions, in the difficult period after the "peace" settlement.

IWA also decided to continue its Tuzla schools programme, which has broad support in Denmark and Belgium, and its support for a women's magazine in Tuzla.

Source: Arbetaren, Stockholm

## Portugal 96 Youth Camp

It's official! The organisers of this year's summer camp of youth organisations in sympathy with the Fourth International have fixed the dates of the 1996 camp, late July, and the place, in northern Portugal. Representatives of all the participating organisations will meet at the International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE) in Amsterdam in April to fix the final agenda. According to Vincent Scheltiens, one of the camp co-ordinators, "the Portuguese comrades suggest that we focus the camp on the themes of police and state repression, racism, and the campaigns against the G7, IMF and World Bank".

For more information, contact your regular International Viewpoint seller, or write for the address of the participating youth group nearest to you.

## Internationalists' World Congress

The resolutions of the 14th World Congress of the Fourth International, held in 1995, are now available in English, French and Spanish, for £5/\$10/60FF plus 10% postage charge for orders of four copies or less. Order from your local agent, or directly from International Viewpoint.



## Conference reports

# War crimes in Bosnia

AN INDEPENDENT INTERNATIONAL TRIBUNAL OF legal experts close to the peace movement met in Barcelona from 7-10 December 1995, in the second session of the Permanent People's Tribunal to deal with former Yugoslavia.

After hearing depositions from a range of Bosnian, Croatian and refugee groups, and representatives of the Spanish and West-European solidarity movements, the Tribunal confirmed the arguments (expressed in *International Viewpoint* and elsewhere) that the major attacks on human rights come from Serbian and Bosnian Serb forces, and, to a lesser extent, Croatian and Bosnian Croat forces. Indeed, the Tribunal considered that "there exist sufficient grounds to charge the Presidents of Serbia and Croatia, Slobodan Milosevic and Franjo Tudjman," neither of whom is likely to be accused by the Hague Tribunal.

"The Tribunal's global position in favour of the victims did not prevent it from denouncing war crimes (albeit in a smaller measure) committed by the Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina in the territory under its control," adds Tribunal member José Luis Gordillo, Professor of Law at Barcelona University. "There is nothing heroic about war. Atrocities are committed by the supporters of even the best causes".

The "international community" was also criticised for its complicity in the horror. According to Tribunal Member Xavier Giró, "UN and EU negotiators have supported, since the beginning of the war, 'peace plans' which accepted ethnicity as a valid criteria for reorganising Bosnia-Herzegovina. These criteria are those presented by the aggressors in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in opposition to the multi-culturalism and pluri-ethnic criteria of the government in Sarajevo. How should we qualify the EU and UN? Negligent? Careless? Indifference to basic moral values? Connivance? Co-operation?"

The Tribunal's public hearings allowed deeper debate of a number of legal and humanitarian issues, including the use of rape as an arm of 'ethnic cleansing'. According to the presentation of Dones per Dones (Women for Women) a Catalan feminist solidarity movement with former Yugoslavia, "We have to respect the individual's right to silence and secrecy about crimes committed against her. But we have a duty to speak out on the generalised problem which rape in war poses". The Tribunal criticised the fact that acts of 'ethnic sexual violence' are still not recognised as a war crime, or as a potential act of genocide, and recommended that the Hague Tribunal amend its remit accordingly. Other presentations at the hearings condemned the practice of most European Union states, which do not recognise rape in wartime as proof of persecution as a member of a particular social group (such as women, or Muslim women). As a result, women who have fled ex-Yugoslavia after being raped cannot claim refugee status.

The Tribunal also stressed the important role played by bellicose, chauvinist and authoritarian media, "above all those controlled by the Serbian

government, and, to a lesser extent, those controlled by the Croatian government," according to Xavier Giró, Lecturer in Journalism at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. But the tribunal was careful not to condemn all the media of former Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, because of time constraints, the Tribunal was unable to analyse and discuss the role of the media in as much detail as it had hoped.

The Tribunal, which has no judicial or diplomatic authority, aims to provide an independent, but thorough and impartial

evaluation of the claims of human rights groups. Organisers hope that this process will create a stronger momentum of concern about those accusations which the Tribunal considers to be well-founded. According to the organising committee, "the persons and organisations who have participated actively in the protest against the war during these past years must make our dissent more widely known. We must also insist on punishment for those responsible for the crimes against humanity, and demand peace negotiations which do not grant territorial distributions which reward the aggressors, but rather re-establish the principles of justice. The session of the Tribunal should become an instrument for pressuring in favour of and demanding a just peace. At the same time, it should especially support the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as the organisations from other republics which have taken part in the fight against totalitarian and xenophobic governments."

The Barcelona hearings were organised with the wide participation of the Catalan and Spanish peace movement.<sup>1</sup> The hearings were also an opportunity for activists from a wide range of Bosnia solidarity movements to exchange information, and discuss how to continue their work after the signing of the Dayton-Paris "peace" accords. [JD] ★

### Notes

Contact: TPP, c/Pau Claris 89 entl., 08010 Barcelona, Spain. Fax +34.3/301 7562

1. Organisers included Europa per Bòsnia, Fundació per la Pau, Justícia i Pau, and the magazines *En Pie de Paz* and *Mientras Tanto*. Supporting organisations included Workers Aid for Bosnia (Spain), the Catalan Campaign against the Arms Trade, Comitè Oscar Romero, Dones per Dones, Fundació Nous Horizons, Fundació Pau i Solidaritat de CCOO, SOS Racisme and Paz Ahora de Madrid

## Networking

A personal selection of Internet services, produced by the editors of *International Viewpoint* and our German sister magazine *Inprekorr*



### Inprekorr list server

All the articles from our German language sister magazine *Inprekorr* are distributed automatically to a mailing list. Articles are available one to four weeks before they appear in print. As text files, they can be easily incorporated in your local documents or newsletters. For individuals, this service costs 50% of the regular subscription rate. Special arrangements can be made for other radical publications.

Contact: <inprekorr@oln.comlink.apc.org>

### Canada: Socialist Challenge Web page

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~rdaum/sc.html>

The Socialist Challenge WWW page offers access to several articles and documents from our organization, access to the full-text articles from the German magazine *Inprekorr*, and links to other pages of use to activists. Coming soon: articles from *La Gauche*, the paper of Gauche Socialiste (the Quebec organisation of the Fourth International), and articles from the winter issue of *Socialist Challenge* magazine.

Send your suggestions, questions and contributions to this column to <100666.1443@compuserve.com>



## Danish left votes against IFOR

The Red-Green Alliance was the only left force to oppose the law authorising Danish participation in the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia, in a debate and vote on 12-13 December 1995.

"The Red-Green Alliance doesn't evaluate Danish participation in the NATO-led force in Bosnia from a self-centred or nationalistic point of view", Deputy Søren Søndergaard told the parliament. "But we ask one question: what kind of peace agreement are Danish troops supposed to defend, or even die for? Is it just? And will it lead to peace at all?...You don't need to be an expert on the Balkans to realise that the Dayton agreement will cause the partition of Bosnia that we have been warning about! Serbia will get control over half the country, Croatia over the other half. And this is exactly what the nationalistic war criminals on both sides have murdered, plundered and destroyed to obtain. Now they get their reward, recognised by the international community, and neatly written down in an agreement: the partition of Bosnia!..."

At the same time, the [Dayton] agreement could easily cause new outbreaks of ethnic cleansing and killings. As the international community have accepted a partition along ethnic lines, the logic is, of course, that the various sides will try to make their territory ethnically clean, by all the means they find appropriate and usable."

Søndergaard, a leading member of the Fourth International, pointed to UNPROFOR's failure to protect the population in Srebrenica as evidence that "we can't trust the implementation force to ensure peace, never mind a just peace".

Danish participation in IFOR will cost the country's taxpayers an estimated 500 million Danish Krone. Søndergaard argued that the money would be better spend on supporting multi-ethnic forces and initiatives in Bosnia. "There is a need for help," he said, "but the ethnic partition of Bosnia is not worth fighting for or dying for. ★

1. The ultra-right Danish People's Party also opposed the law, for their own reasons.



## Timorese occupy embassies in Jakarta

Some 97 Indonesian and East Timorese activists occupied the Dutch and Russian embassies in the Indonesian capital of Jakarta on 7 December 1995, in protest against continued repression in East Timor.

The occupations were organised by PRD, an umbrella organisation formed in 1994 and made up of a number of activist organisations including PPBI (Indonesian Centre for Labour Struggle), SMID (Student Solidarity for Indonesian Democracy), STN (National Peasants Union), JAKKER (Peoples Art Network) and SPRIM (Indonesian People's Solidarity Struggle with the Maubere People). PRD and its affiliated organisations have been working to build an East Timor solidarity campaign within Indonesia for several months. Central to this strategy is making Indonesian workers and the general public aware of the similarity between the repression Indonesian workers and peasants face in response to demands for greater

freedoms, and the repression and violence experienced by the East Timorese.

Due to pressure by staff at both embassies and duplicity on the part of the Indonesian government, activists in the Russian embassy were "persuaded" to leave, believing they would be safe. Dutch embassy staff simply handed the demonstrators over to the waiting Indonesian military. All were arrested and taken to the Central Jakarta Police Offices where they were interrogated and in some cases tortured.

Police told the activists that they would be returned home by bus. Most have simply disappeared. PRD member Wilson, who escaped from the bus, believes that the others are being held at the Military Intelligence Headquarters where they may be undergoing further interrogation and are at serious risk of mistreatment.

Source: AKSI, PO Box 458, Broadway, NSW 2007, Australia. Phone: 02 690 1230. Fax: 02 690 1381. E-Mail: links@peg.apc.org

## Save this Kenyan journalist

Francis Okoth Oswe is a Kenyan journalist who fled to Sweden following "routine" harassment and torture by security agents. At the time of his departure, he was working on a book about the murder of Dr. Robert Ouko, late Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Co-operation, who was brutally murdered by Daniel Arap Moi's regime in February 1990. Ouko had opposed Moi's decision to lease Kenyan forest interests to the IMF in exchange for a loan package.

Osewe's application for refugee status has been turned down, as has his first appeal. The Swedish immigration Department argued that, since Osewe was released after being tortured, "his life cannot be said to be in danger".

His last chance is his current appeal to Sweden's Aliens Appeal Board. A decision is expected at any time.

Osewe will probably die if he is deported to Kenya. Ten witnesses in the Ouko murder case have already been eliminated by the Moi government.<sup>1</sup> Ouko himself died after torture by the regime's "smart boys" — a torture unit

## Solidarity Subscriptions

*This magazine is too expensive for readers in many countries. For many political prisoners, International Viewpoint is the only link to the socialist movement outside the prison walls. Until recently, we have been able to distribute one third of our print run to these activists and prisoners. But our current financial difficulties have forced us to reduce the number of magazines we distribute free to the bare minimum.*

*You can help! As soon as we receive contributions marked "solidarity sub." equal to a six month or one year subscription, we add another solidarity reader to our mailing list. And if you wish, we will inform him or her of your solidarity.*

Osewe claims were trained in Israel. Amnesty International reports that, in 1995 alone, more than 800 Kenyans died in prison, while the use of torture has become "routine" in police investigations. ★

Appeals, beginning "Dear Sir," should be sent to

The Swedish Aliens Board, Box 45102, 104 30 Stockholm, Sweden. tel. +46.8.301539

Please send copies to

Okoth Osewe Defence Campaign, c/o Arne Johansson, Oslogaten 11, 164 31 Kista, Sweden. fax +46.8.605 9402

1. Tommy Lindqvist, "Ouko man still fighting", *New African*, November 1995, p.25

2. Kenya: *Torture compounded by denial of medical treatment*, Amnesty International, December 1995.

## Mandel in Mozambique

We have recently received an obituary for our leading collaborator Ernest Mandel, which was published in Mozambique's independent weekly *Savana* on 21 July 1995. Ernest is presented as "one of the principle Marxist thinkers of our times... one of the animators of the debates around the student revolts of May 1968, and a member of the Fourth International, founded by Trotsky in 1938."

*Savana* also reports that "Mandel's fundamental work, *O Tratado de Economia Marxista (Marxist Political Economy)* was forbidden at the Faculty of Economy of the University during the first years after independence, after the school was captured by an academic faction with pro-soviet sympathies."

## Remember this?

- Russian left demonstrates against Chechnya war
- International Women's Day 1995 in Algeria
- Salvador's FSLN becomes a single party
- Indian feminists debate the UN Conference on Women
- "Land and Freedom" debate on Spanish left
- 1 million African Americans march in Washington DC

Just some of the articles we published in 1995. Documents worth reading again if you don't want to lose your bearings in 1996.

The bound collection of *International Viewpoint* costs only £5/\$ US 10 per year (1982-1995), plus 20% postage charge for orders of less than 5 volumes. Order now!

# Book notes

## *Dai COBAS al sindacato (From COBAS to the union)*

by Gigi Malabara, Data News, 1995

The "Base Committee" (COBAS) was formed at the Alfa Romeo plant in Arese (near Milan) in March 1990. COBAS demanded that the enterprise committee be elected directly by the work force, rather than nominated 'from above' by the heads of Italy's main trade union federations. In June 1990 elections finally took place, and COBAS candidates managed to break the monopoly of the main trade unions.

In this book, Gigi Malabara, a worker at Alfa Romeo, and one of the leaders of the factory's COBAS movement synthesises the history of the movement, its main debates, successes and failures. His perspective is all the more interesting since Malabara is also secretary of the Rifondazione Comunista group at Alfa Romeo, and a regular collaborator of the revolutionary Marxist monthly *Bandiera Rossa*.

Malabara argues that "it was the awareness, on the basis of day-to-day experience, that we were facing a change of epoch, and the awareness of the necessity to resist the attempts of FIAT management to completely sweep away the company's working class avant-garde, which the trade union federations had failed to tame, which pushed the trade union opposition at Alfa Romeo to create COBAS in Spring 1990. The force, made up of shop stewards and workers, organised itself above all in order to demand the election of the enterprise committee, which, for years, had been filled, by nomination from above, with the representatives of the trade union confederations. We needed an organisation which could organise the conflict with FIAT, and defend the future of the plant.

"The name chosen was a reference to the only precedent we knew: the mass movement among teachers in 1986-87. That movement was the high-point of a process of re-conquest of their political and collective bargaining autonomy by that category of workers.

"The form we chose was that of a movement struggling for class objectives, and worker self-organisation. It based itself on numerous experiences of the Italian working class, including the election of workplace representatives by the entire work force. We also re-launched the debate on trade union unity, a debate which had been blocked and side-tracked ever since the 1970s. This project did not imply any 'adaptation' to a logic of defending the particular interests of a workplace or industrial group, but building one wing of a new, reconstructed, class struggle trade unionism.

"In the public sector, critical sectors of the trade union movement demanded the right to participate in negotiations through the selection of representatives of all those who did not feel themselves to be represented by the CGIL, CISL and UIL. Others dashed ahead with political plans, claiming that the trade unions were "out of date". But in the workplaces, the idea that we needed to rebuild an unitary, democratically elected representation of the workers to take part in the negotiations gained strength. People wanted to avoid the increasingly clear tendency for certain organisations to lobby for separate negotiation."

In 1992 COBAS was a major force behind the creation of the all-Italian Self-Managed Workers' Union (SLAI-COBAS). In Alfa Romeo elections for trade union representatives in May 1994, COBAS won 44% of votes, compared to 43% for CGIL, 7% for CISL and 6% for UIL.

*Dai COBAS al sindacato* is published by Data News, the publishing house close to the Rifondazione Comunista Party, and carries a foreword by Rifondazione leader Fausto Bertinotti.

# Ernest Mandel

## Study Centre in Amsterdam



This Centre has been created by Ernest's colleagues at the International Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam.

Ernest helped create the institute in 1982. Since then, hundreds of militants from all parts of the world have taken part in seminars, courses and conferences. All this was supported with a programme of publications in English, French and Castilian, and an unique library - 25,000 books and pamphlets, in a wide range of languages

The Centre is an example of the kind of internationalism in which Ernest Mandel believed. Directed by the needs of its students. Enriching all those who participated in its activities.

Ernest himself was a regular participant in these events. He gave dozens of presentations, and participated in hundreds of debates. Much of this material is available for consultation and study on paper or audio tape.

But Ernest also came to learn. To meet with new militants from Eastern Europe, North Africa and South America, and test his ideas against their experience.

The new Ernest Mandel Study Centre will continue Ernest's favourite activities. It will bring third world militants, socialists and feminists, to Amsterdam to discuss economics, politics, and building the revolutionary alternative. It will facilitate the translation of important texts into the languages tomorrow's revolutionaries will speak. And it will place Ernest's invaluable stock of articles, speeches and books at the disposition of these new generations of militants.

The Centre is just beginning. We need funds to start these activities. A regular newsletter will be sent to all those who want to support us, so that you know how your money is being spent.

Send donations to "IIRE: Mandel Study Centre", account 630-0113884-65, at Caisse Privée Banque, Brussels, Belgium. For more information write to the IIRE: PO Box 53290, 1007 RG Amsterdam, Netherlands. Fax +31 20/673 2106. E-mail <iire@antenna.nl>