

international

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sex, violence and solidarity

Feminism today

conferences

Tuzla international trade union conference March 14-15 1998

Bosnia-Herzegovina's Autonomous Trade Union of Coal-mine Workers (*Samostalni sindikat radnika rudnika uglja*) is organising an "International workers' conference against privatisation, casual labour and unemployment."

Contact: Resad Husagic, Secretary, Tuzla Miners. Mije Kerosevica Guje 1, 75000 TUZLA, Bosnia-Herzegovina. Tel: (+387) 75 282 111 ext. 542. Fax: 283 412

Asia Pacific Solidarity Conference

Sydney, Australia, April 1998

Organised by the Asia Pacific Institute for Democratisation and Development. See full page advertisement in September 1997 issue.

The Institute welcomes applications to present papers at the conference, and suggest specific themes for discussion under the general framework of supporting democratisation, self-determination and social justice and opposing the neo-liberal austerity offensive.

Contact: Dr Helen Jarvis, School of Information, Library and Archive Studies, (SILAS) University of New South Wales, Sydney NSW 2052 Australia. Or Email to: apiaustralia@peg.apc.org. Or fax to: 02-96901381

EuroMarch Assizes

Brussels, Belgium, 18-19 April

EuroMarches against Unemployment will hold new 'hearings' to look at unemployment campaigns in 1997, and plans for the future. Special focus on European institutions, the reduction in the working week, debates on minimum revenue, and links between civic groups and associations and trade unions in building the European unemployment movement.

Registration: through your national EuroMarch network, or at Rue Potagère 103, 1210 Brussels, Belgium. Tel: +32.2.223 3533. Fax 223 3982

Socialist Action (Canada)

May Day celebration, Saturday 2 May, 7 p.m. 58 Cecil Street, Toronto

Theme: Fight for an Unlimited General Strike. Speakers (so far) include: Sid Ryan, CUPE; John Clarke, OCAP; Joe Flexer, CAW and SA. Music by InfraRed, Marie-Lynn Hammond and Len Wallace. East Indian veg. and non-veg. multi-course buffet dinner.

Tickets: advance \$15 waged, \$8 non-waged; at door \$20 waged, \$12 non-waged

Info: 416-535-8779, fax 416-535-9079

Finnish young commuists

Finland's Young Communists and others will organise a Solidarity meeting in Helsinki on June 5-6. A summer camp will be held at the end of June.

PL 288, 00171 Helsinki, Finland. <komnuor@dlc.fi>

Internet: www.dlc.fi/~komnuor/

International socialist youth camp

Jutland, Denmark. 25-31 July

Denmark's Socialistisk Arbejderparti (SAP) will host the 15th European camp of youth organisations in solidarity with the Fourth International.

This year's theme is "Reclaim Freedom." In the North, our democratic freedoms end when we confront economic power. In the South, economic exploitation is often combined with authoritarian regimes. This camp will be a place for young women fighting to liberate themselves from discriminatory traditions and rules, for unemployed youth demanding decent work and decent pay, for activists in solidarity work with freedom movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia, anti-racists, and students opposed to elitist education.

Costs inside the camp are adjusted to reflect the differential revenue of young people across Europe. Participation costs from US\$100-200.

For more information contact your *International Viewpoint* distributor or write to SAP, Box 547, Nørre Allé 11 A, DK-2200, Copenhagen N. fax +45-35373217. E-mail <socinf@inet.uni2.dk>

Trade Unions, homosexuality & work

Amsterdam, 29-31 July 1998

The 1998 International Conference on Trade Unions, Homosexuality and Work will bring together lesbian and gay workers from all over the world to discuss ways of building on the work that is already being carried out and to develop proposals for action by trade unions, employers, and other bodies. The aim is also to bring together representatives of trade unions, employers, experts and politicians as part of the conference.

The conference's aims are to:

- provide a forum for lesbian and gay trade unionists to exchange information, policies and strategies
- educate participants on campaigning for lesbian and gay rights in the workplace and ensuring that policies are implemented and address the concern of all lesbian and gay workers

- look at strategies for work within and alongside the trade union movement at national and international level

- determine outline agendas for action towards and by such bodies as the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, the European Union, governments and local authorities

- draw up recommendations for action by employers

- develop links between lesbian and gay members of trade unions in all regions of the world

- establish an international network to provide a means of continuing to exchange information, co-ordinating initiatives, and providing international support and solidarity, particularly to lesbian and gay workers in countries where homosexuality and/or trade union organisation can lead to persecution.

The conference is the result of many years of joint work by a number of trade union lesbian and gay groups and a growing level of international networking between lesbian and gay activists involved in the labour and trade union movements.

The Steering Group consist of members of the lesbian and gay workers groups in the following unions: AbvaKabo, AOb, Onderwijsbonden CNV and AFMP (Netherlands), ÖTV (Germany) and UNISON (UK), together with representatives of ABVV-BTTK Antwerpen (Belgium), CGIL (Italy), AFT, AFL-CIO (United States), Egalité (the European Union Lesbian and Gay Workers Group), and the ILGA.

The Steering Committee is seeking the widest possible endorsement and support for the conference from the trade union movement. So far, six unions (UNISON [UK], PCO, KOV, AOb, AFMP, AbvaKabo [NL] & ÖTV [D]) have agreed to support the conference, and many of these unions have also agreed to contribute towards some of the costs of organising it. The two largest Dutch trade union federations FNV and CNV are also supporting the conference, both in organisation and financially.

The registration for the conference starts in May, 1997. The conference fee will be 225 Dutch guilders for those who register early, increasing to 325 nearer the date. Travel costs, housing, breakfast and dinners are not included in this fee. Applications for financial assistance *must* be received by 1 April 1998.

PO Box 732, NL 2700 AL, Zoetermeer, Netherlands

Tel: +31-30-273 2627. fax: 271 0512.

E-mail: <modijk@knoware.nl>
utopia.knoware.nl/users/modijk

Solidarity Summer School

Chicago, USA. 3-6 August

The US socialist and feminist group will hold its annual summer school at the usual venue. The group's convention will run from 7-9 August.

4. INTERNATIONALE/SAP:
**INTERNATIONAL
SOCIALISTISK
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Germany's unemployed take to the streets

On February 5th over 50,000 people demonstrated in response to new statistics showing an official unemployment rate of 12.6% (20% in east Germany). **Angela Klein** reports.

The real number of Germans unemployed or under-employed is closer to 7 million than the official estimate of 4.8 million. But, even according to official figures, unemployment is now twice as high as the post-war 'structural unemployment' level. Despite continued growth in the economy, which is expected to expand by 2% in 1998.

Over 50,000 people, most of them unemployed, demonstrated in 200 towns and cities in all parts of the country. This was the first national demonstration of the unemployed since the early 1980s. As such, it represents an important step in the growth of political awareness by the unemployed, and in their capacity to express their strength through their demands by putting pressure on official political bodies – governments, political parties, and the trade unions.

Most actions on February 5th were "conventional." But, in a handful of towns, demonstrators copied their French counterparts and occupied social security administration offices. The best-attended actions took place in the East of the country: Berlin, Erfurt and Chemnitz (formerly Karl-Marx Stadt).

Germany has no national organisation of the unemployed. The call to demonstrate on February 5th came from the Co-ordination Office of Trade Union Initiatives of the Unemployed – which also supported last year's European Marches against Unemployment. The planning of the day of action depended solely on local initiatives.

Despite these structural difficulties, the day of action attracted nation-wide media coverage, and had a tremendous political impact. Several days earlier, the conservative government had insisted that "action against unemployment" must take place in accord with the EU Luxembourg Agreement of November 1997 – a "back to work" plan based on cutting unemployment and welfare benefits to force more of the jobless to accept any job offered at any wage. The current minimum revenue guaranteed by the social security system is to be abolished.

Local authorities have been given responsibility for creating jobs and schemes for 200,000 people over the next two years. Planned liberalisation of the labour market will allow private employment agencies to manage much of this work.

For those school-leavers unable to find work, there will be some temporary schemes to help them find some kind of



insertion into the labour market. But it is still not clear how these programmes will be financed.

Keep up the pressure!

The unemployment question has heightened tensions between the Christian Democrats and their coalition partners: the Liberals and the Bavarian CDU. The "social tendency" led by Heiner Geissler, and half-heartedly supported by Labour Minister Norbert Blum, wanted the government to spend DM4-5bn (\$2-2.5bn) on job-creation schemes. This provoked violent protests from CDU leader Wolfgang Schaube.

If unemployed groups and trade unions can maintain the pressure with further demonstrations, unemployment will probably become the main issue in the run-up to parliamentary elections later this year. The plan is to organise monthly protests to coincide with the publication of new unemployment statistics. The biggest challenge facing activists is to use this time to resolve the political and organisational problems of a fragmented movement, and build new initiatives against unemployment that go beyond the ranks of the unemployed themselves. ★

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Another blow to the Labour left

European MP Ken Coates is the latest victim of the purges within Britain's Labour Party. We asked him about his expulsion, his parliamentary work, & the prospects for rebuilding the Labour left

There's been a lot of confusion in the British media. Did you leave, or were you expelled?

Well, that's simple. I've been expelled three times – from the European Parliamentary Labour Party, from the Socialist Group of EuroMPs, and from the Labour Party. There was no hearing, and I was not asked even one question. I was informed after this that there was no right of appeal.

It was only after this that I decided to sit with the GUE (*Gauche Unifie Europeenne*–European United Left) bloc as an independent Labour EuroMP. I chose to sit with the GUE because it consists of socialists, and because I am following the socialist whip (voting guidance) in exile, and from where I now sit I can see when the whips put their thumbs up or down.

I have an amicable relationship with the socialist group, the GUE, and the Greens – we have all been working together in the Full Employment Convention. We established an inter-group structure on employment a year earlier, to prepare for the Convention last May. I have no problems relating to any group on the European left.

• What do you think lies behind the moves of Labour leader Tony Blair and the Labour bureaucracy to change the electoral system for Euro-MPs? Were they simply motivated by a wish to get rid of supposed "trouble-makers"?

Oh, there's clearly more behind it. It would be very vain to think that they needed this mighty steam-hammer merely to get rid of a couple of nuts. The fact is, any system of proportional system [which Britain must introduce before the next elections to the European Parliament] would purge the European Labour Party – it would halve the numbers, assuming that the voting figures remain more-or-less the same as last time. So there would be about 30 Labour EuroMPs, rather than the current 62.

What Blair and the leadership wanted to do was not only to get rid of the critics, but also to make the Labour group in the European Parliament more obedient. There is some evidence that they are pursuing this goal by changing the calibre of Labour EuroMPs. They would like a strong business element, and many business people would follow Blair's restrictive view of the social dimension of the EU.

The move towards feminisation of the list also goes with a Blairite shift. Of course, if we had a different Labour Party, then different women would be able to come forward.

At the same time, there is no regional party structure to match the electoral regions coming into existence. Several years ago, I proposed that the Labour

establish functional regional parties, as part of the move towards regional government. If my advice had been followed then, the Labour Party would now have a regional structure following the proposed European electoral regions.

The new EuroMPs will represent regions, and be appointed by the party; they will not be answerable to any constituents. My region will have six members for three million voters, who will simply vote "Labour", "Conservative", "Liberal", or whatever.

• What response have you had to your expulsion?

The response has been remarkable. I have had an enthusiastic fan mail, with hundreds of letters of support. Over 400 members of my constituency have replied to the questionnaire I sent out; 87% of them oppose the changes to the electoral system, and 78% are against welfare cuts. The rest favour reforms to the welfare system, some of which I would agree with. Reform has got a bad name now, and become synonymous with 'cuts'. But I would support reforms to make welfare services more answerable to their users, and more accountable to their workers.

• What role have you been able to play as an EuroMP? If you were to be re-elected as an independent, how would this effect your work?

The issue is not about re-electing me, but opposing the incubus of New Labour. I have worked hard as an EuroMP; I rep-

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resent a large coalfield, which has seen mass unemployment, minimal job opportunities and widespread reliance on the welfare system. My book "Community Under Attack" discusses many of these problems, which have kept me very busy.

• Will you form a new party, link up with existing formations, or campaign to be re-admitted to the Labour Party?

No, none of these. I have written to all members of the Labour Party National Executive Committee pointing out that it is a bit vindictive to expel me from the European Socialist Group, and asking them to confirm that there is no objection to my continued membership of that group as an Independent Labour EuroMP. At one time, there were three different Italian Socialist parties in the group. But my continued membership depends on the decision of the Labour Party leadership.

But I am not appealing for reinstatement to the Labour Party, because I have no right of appeal. I expect this right to be reinstated when we get rid of Mr Blair.

Nor do I want to establish a new party. Rather, I favour a network bringing people who have stayed in the Labour Party and want to fight against the cuts, and of those who have left because they oppose the cuts. In my region, I have had correspondence from dozens of people, many in the Labour Party. I want to try to bring these people together, to see how we can organise.

We need a wide network around a few simple demands: for defence of the welfare state and redistribution of wealth; for full employment, and against the current state of permanent mass unemployment; against undemocratic changes to the electoral system and abolition of constituencies. Members must be elected by the electors, not appointed by the party leaders.

• These attacks on welfare are linked to the drive towards a European single currency and the attempt to cut government spending across Europe.

It's partly linked to the single currency, but I think you are mistaken to see this as central. The convergence criteria are being fudged. Britain in fact easily meets all of them, and is not participating for other reasons, mainly pressure from media baron Rupert Murdoch.

Maastricht is the wrong target. Belgium and Italy will be admitted to the single currency, even though they fail by a long way to meet the criteria. It is true that the bankers are setting the agenda, but that doesn't mean that governments can just do as they want. For instance, there are massive battles going on across Europe over a shorter working week.

This is not to say that we disagree over the effects of Maastricht; much of the discussion on this was fuelled by my report some years ago to the European Parliament on the results of its application. But what will be a hundred times worse than



Maastricht will be Agenda 2000, which governs the expansion of the EU to the east.

The GDP of the eastern European states is under half that of western Europe. Most of them are under 35%. This will mean a huge export of unemployment from east to west, undermining all of the welfare provision. It will lead to the wrenching apart of the capacity of these systems.

I am for an expansion of the EU to the east, but this must be properly funded, to protect the social gains of the post-war years.

• What about Blair's agenda as President of the EU for Europe-wide legislation enforcing job 'flexibility' - ie weakening of workers' rights and lowering of wages?

We should not presume the battle is over merely because this is what Blair has said. Many European ministers did not agree with the Thatcherite agenda of the Tories, and do not agree with it now that Blair is pushing it. He wants to prevent a 'social Europe' and to bring about the unravelling of the welfare state., but he will have a hard fight.

Part of the problem of the left in Britain is its failure to understand Christian Democracy. These parties should not be equated to wet Toryism; they are sociologically different. They were part of the resistance to Nazism, they are mass popular parties, some with their own trade unions and co-operatives. They are far removed from Conservatism, leave alone Thatcherism. If we fail to understand this, we will not realise the difficulties in the way of Blair's Thatcherite agenda.

• What advice would you give to activists, particularly to those in the Labour Party.

Organise. Fight to defend the welfare state. We must win the battle over

disability benefits. The proposed education reforms are unsustainable, we must campaign to restore grants and abolish fees. There must be a major allocation of resources to the health service.

Britain devotes a smaller proportion of its resources to welfare services than any EU state except Greece, Ireland and Portugal. Activists can and should persuade MPs to vote against these cuts.

But MPs will pay as much attention whether or not these activists are members of the Labour Party. So those on the British left who say "stay in the Labour Party and fight" have to explain how we can do so.

Otherwise, people will stay at home and dig their gardens. Actually, of course, you can oppose the cuts from inside or outside the Labour Party, provided you work out what you can actually do.

It is true that Labour Party members still have a distinctive role in this struggle, but it is becoming more difficult than ever before. The changes in party structure mean that it will no longer suffice to win an argument and take a motion to conference; instead, it will be sent to a policy forum for a possible decision in three years - by which time we will have lost the welfare state.

There is a mass exodus taking place from the Labour Party - 10% of my members of the party in my constituency have left. And these are not the 'Blair levy', but Old Labour, single mums, people who are losing welfare benefit.

The opposition, after much effort, was proud that it rightly persuaded 47 Labour MPs to vote against the cuts in lone parent benefit. But single mums in my constituency said to me "What? Only 47? Only 10% of them? That's not what we voted Labour for".

So we must network, bringing those in the Labour Party and those outside in order to oppose this agenda. The trade unions too must join this opposition. And no-one should write them off - when they move, they can move surprisingly fast. ★

Waiting 26 years for British justice

On January 29, British Prime Minister Tony Blair told the British parliament there would be a new inquiry into one of the most tragic events of Ireland's "Troubles" – Bloody Sunday.

F. Stuart Ross

Later that evening, the families of the victims of the massacre gathered in Derry's Guild Hall for a press conference. "For 26 years we have been campaigning to establish truth and justice in respect of the events of Bloody Sunday," said John Kelly, brother of one of the 14 dead. "We hope that the historic potential of today's developments will be fulfilled and we can finally heal the wounds left by Bloody Sunday."

Bernadette Devlin McAliskey, the veteran civil rights campaigner and former MP, also gave cautious welcome to the Prime Minister's announcement. McAliskey had taken part in the ill-fated anti-internment march twenty six years ago. She was on the speaker's platform when soldiers from Britain's elite Parachute Regiment opened fire on unarmed civilians.

"I am pleased," said McAliskey, "that the British government has finally afforded at least a measure of justice to the families

of the men who were killed that day."

She was quick to add, however, that she didn't want to wait 26 years for justice for her daughter. Roisin McAliskey has been imprisoned in England without formal charges for over a year now. She spent six months in London's Holloway Prison, awaiting extradition to Germany in connection with an IRA mortar attack on a British Army barracks.

Roisin's German lawyer, Elke Nill, believes the impetus for the extradition came from the RUC (Northern Irish police) and not from German federal police. Not surprisingly, the RUC have ignored the extensive evidence confirming Roisin's presence in Ireland on the dates when they allege she was spotted in Germany.

Human rights groups around the world argued that the British government's treatment of Roisin amounted to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. In May 1997, a High Court Judge released Roisin from prison on a limited form of bail. Three days later — under armed guard in a London hospital — Roisin gave birth to a baby girl.

She is now in a mother-and-baby unit at London's Maudsley psychiatric hospital. She is recovering from the trauma of her interrogation, detention and imprisonment and is being treated for post-traumatic stress disorder. Hospital psychiatrists have already certified that extraditing the young woman could cause her permanent emotional and

psychological damage.

On 2 January, a British magistrate ordered that Roisin McAliskey be extradited to Germany. Now that the formal order to extradite has been issued, Roisin's fate lies in the hands of Jack Straw, the British Home Secretary.

Straw can order McAliskey's extradition at any time. If sent to Germany, Roisin is likely to spend the next two years in prison before even coming to trial. She will also be separated from her child.

In the interests of justice, the Home Secretary can also deny the extradition. Back in November of last year he was sent a complete file on Roisin's detailing the lack of any case against her. It is within his power to release the young Irish woman.

A decision one way or another was expected in the last week of January, but it never came. Roisin's mother has already expressed concerns that, in the wake of Tony Blair's Bloody Sunday announcement, the British government would not now move to release her daughter.

"We had expected to get the good or bad news by the end of January," she said. "I expect they'll drag their feet now until those who are upset by the Bloody Sunday move settle down."

Sadly, she is probably right. In the end, the Home Secretary's decision will be a political decision based upon progress, or the lack of it, in the "peace process". ★

the other Europe

The Elf mafia

Prime Minister Leonel Jospin must regret his modest attempts to 'modernise' France's foreign aid programme. By imposing parliamentary control on funds previously administered by the president, he has opened the floodgates of investigation and protest against the dirty underside of French policy in its former colonies.

Five Green MPs have demanded a parliamentary enquiry into the country's third largest company, Elf Aquitaine. Privatised in 1994, the oil company is the centrepiece of a web of corruption linking business and political elites in France and her former colonies in Africa. These countries also receive half France's "aid."

A coalition of radical groups in France and Africa has launched a campaign to "stop Elf making the laws in Africa" and "for a different policy" towards Africa.

Contact: Campagne Elf, c/o Cedetim, 21-ter Rue Voltaire, 75001 Paris

Conscientious objection

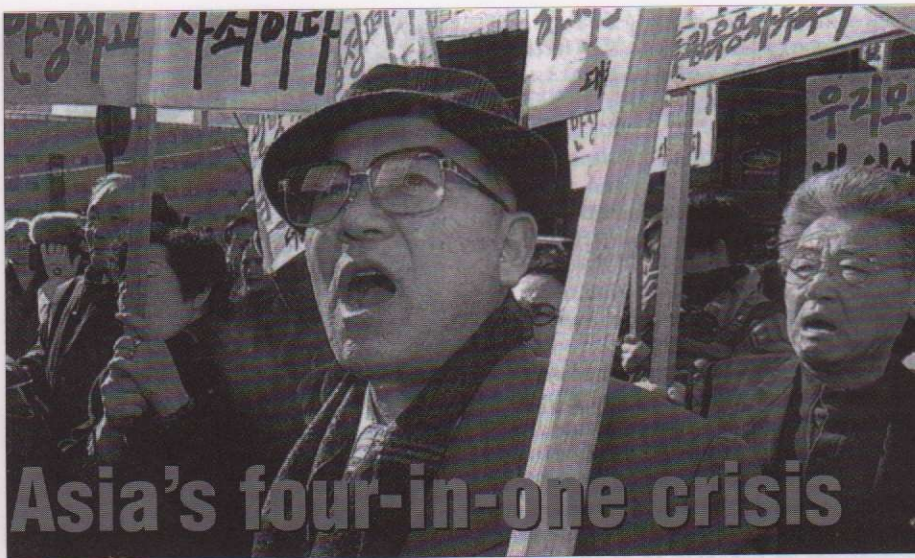
Ville Vuorjoki, vice-chairman of the Communist Youth of Finland and a city councillor in Rovaniemi, has been sentenced to 77 days in prison after refusing to continue his civil service after 240 days (the time that armed conscripts serve).

There are 13 conscientious objectors in Finnish prisons, but the number will probably increase when the armed conscription time is shortened to six months later this year. This will increase the discrimination between military service and the alternative, civil service, which lasts 13 months.

Contact: The Conscientious Objectors' League, Rauhanasema, Veturitori, 00530 Helsinki, Finland, Tel +358-9-140427 Fax +358-9-147297 E-mail: <akry@freenet.hut.fi> Web: www.kaappeli.fi/~akl

Dalej!

The Polish group *Nurt Lewicy Rewolucyjnej* (NLR—Revolutionary Left Current) has been recognised as a sympathising organisation of the Fourth International. The Warsaw-based group, which publishes the newspaper *Dalej!* (*Forwards!*) is a regular participant in the summer camp of European youth organisations identified with the Fourth International.



Asia's four-in-one crisis

Different Asian economies face very different structural problems, as **Maxime Durand** explains

One of the most striking phenomena of this decade is the Japanese model's running out of steam. With a growth rate of roughly 4% until 1991, Japan was the best performer of the G7. But, since 1992 Japan has been dragging along at about 1% a year, and is doing less well on average than the European Union.

For a while it was possible to think that this was a cyclical downturn, and 1996 seemed to signal a new takeoff, but slow growth is back on the agenda. The main external reason is the slowdown in exports, which amounted to 9.3% of GDP in 1996, i.e. less than the 10.2% in 1986. But the crisis of growth also results from an incapacity to make up for this through an additional increase of internal demand.

The limit here is profitability, and the novelty of the current cycle is a particularly noteworthy fall in enterprises' margins. At the same time, the rate of return on capital – a good indicator of the effects of rise in organic composition on the rate of profit – is going down regularly by two points a year. The endemic financial crisis has neutralised the effects of counter-cyclical fiscal policy, which is now having to be abandoned.

The second crisis is the crisis of the "Tigers" (Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia) which exploded in July 1997, first in the form of a speculative attack on their currencies, then as a stock market crisis.

This crisis is the crisis of the neoliberal model of openness to exports. It is characteristic of dependent countries that have inserted themselves only in a rickety way in the international division of labour. They export more but imports rise even faster.

This uneven development finally cracked because of a trade deficit that got out of hand. This is the same scenario that Mexico went through in 1994, and that countries like Brazil, Poland and Argen-

tina are in danger of going through. The outcome is a severe purging and an injection of capital under IMF control. What happens next depends on the dynamism of the main clients.

South Korea's export crisis

The third crisis is the South Korean crisis, which has to do with a specific model that in many ways differed from the IMF model. South Korea stood out notably because of the high degree of state intervention in industrial policy.

What we are reading about South Korea in the newspapers is mostly false. The mass media invoke, corruption, the weight of monopolies, and debt, as if these were the explanation of the crisis.

Korea has in fact made a prodigious breakthrough on the world market: its exports rose from \$17 billion in 1980 to \$130bn in 1997 (France's rose from \$110bn to \$269bn in the same period). Since the early 1990s Korea has had a dizzying growth rate led by exports, and the degree of openness of its economy made a true leap forward, from 33% in 1992 to 47% in 1997. To talk of protectionism or a bureaucratic economy in these conditions is ridiculous.

The most remarkable point, and one that distinguishes Korea from the Tigers, is that there has not been any drag on the imports side, at least as far as volume goes.

What threw everything out of balance as early as 1996 – i.e. before the crisis broke out in Thailand in July 1997 – was a terrible fall in export prices in dollars (15% in 1996, about 12% in 1997).

During these two years the volume of exports increased by 37%, which is enormous, but this brought in only 5% of

additional revenue in dollars, while import prices continued to skyrocket.

This draining away of a quarter of export revenues is out of proportion to the debt payments, which only constitute 6% of exports.

A loss of revenues on this scale made a big dent in the balance of payments and caused a crisis at the treasury, which echoed the difficulties of neighbouring countries albeit in a different context.

The IMF showed its true colours, by demanding, among the preconditions for its bailout plan, dismantling of the big conglomerates (*chaebols*) and their opening to foreign investment. The goal is to break a development model that is too statist for the IMF and to discourage those in other countries who might have been tempted to imitate it.

Without falling into conspiracy theories, it is thus no exaggeration to speak of a success for imperialism in Korea.

China next?

The last facet of the Asian economic crisis is the looming crisis in China. There is a dual transmission mechanism here. The falling prices resulting from devaluation of the region's currencies hurt the competitiveness of Chinese exports.

In addition, the stock exchange collapses threaten to spread to China – through Hong Kong – and to interfere with China's unparalleled economic dynamism.

In general, these four crises reinforce one another, because of the trade relations and investment flows that bind these countries together in a tight network, with the Chinese diaspora acting as relay.

The complex structuring of a whole region, until now presented as the motor of global growth, has been deeply destabilised by mechanisms reminiscent of capitalist anarchy and inter-imperialist struggles.

The reaffirmed US supremacy, particularly on the level of technological domination, has in a certain way as its counterpart a blockage of the intensive Japanese growth based on innovation and then articulated in a hierarchical way throughout the zone.

But this destabilisation is pregnant with a boomerang effect. The slowdown of Asian growth will in fact tend to cut back one of the main sources of financing for the long cycle of growth in the US, which is showing a tendency towards deepening trade deficits.

Even if it does not degenerate into a generalised financial crash, this crisis has already put in question the unstable equilibrium of the world economy. ★

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

World Bank/IMF/WTO: The Free Market Fiasco

Eric Toussaint and Peter Drucker (Eds.)

◆ €6/\$8.75/45FF. Cheque payable to P. Rousset, IIRE, Postbus 53290, 1007 Amsterdam, Netherlands.



Economic meltdown

Capitalist governments have no solution to end the economic crisis in South East Asia. **Sonny Melencio** and **Reihana Mohideen** prepared this report for use by the Philippine group *Sankalas*.

The economic upheaval in 1997 can be transformed into a political upheaval in 1998. This can happen if the people in general, the different sectors and the various political groups, unite to carry out a fierce campaign against the perpetrators of the economic crisis—the big foreign banks, the multinational corporations, and the local governments which collude with them in the name of the mighty dollar. They, and not the people, should be made to pay for the crisis of their capitalist system.

What is the nature of the crisis?

The government and the monetary authorities have been blaming currency speculation for the crash. But behind the currency crisis is the unrestricted outward flow of foreign capital in the form of portfolio investments (around \$12 billion out of South Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippines in 1997) which put pressure on local currencies leading to the crash.

Portfolio investments are short-term investment in the form of stocks, shares, bonds and treasury bills that bring high yields to the investor.

This is pooled capital coming from vast amounts of personal savings, pension funds, government funds, corporate savings, and other funds deposited in banks and investment houses. This capital is usually managed by fund managers experienced in spotting investment opportunities combining high yields with a

quick turnaround time.

Portfolio investments differ from foreign direct investments (FDI) which are long-term capital investments used for industrial expansion. Portfolio investments are pure speculative capital.

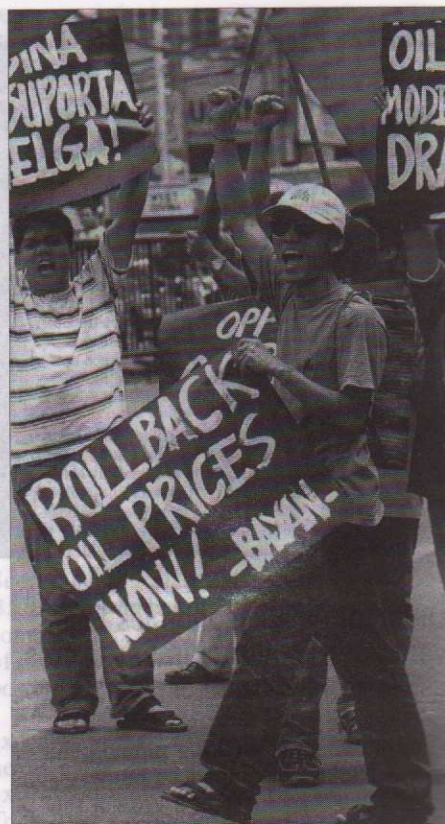
Almost 80% of total capital that entered Southeast Asia in the 1990s took the form of portfolio investments. Fifty percent of this came from the United States. The bulk of this capital (in the form of treasury bonds and shares) is denominated in dollars.

Why did portfolio investments flow into Southeast Asia in particular?

This capital has been on the constant lookout for profitable investment. In the early 1990s, according to an Asian Development Bank report, “the declining returns in the stock markets of industrial countries and the low real interest rates compelled investors to seek higher returns on their capital elsewhere.” They recognised Southeast Asian economies as ready markets for their operation.

Governments in Southeast Asia have evolved a three-prong strategy to attract portfolio capital. These are financial liberalisation, high interest rates and a “fixed” exchange rate system. These strategies originated from the structural adjustment plans designed by the International Monetary Fund

The liberalisation of financial markets is a security measure for foreign investors for the free inflow and outflow of their capital. It includes the elimination of restrictions in foreign exchange and use of foreign currency; the opening up of the banking sector to foreign banks; and the opening up of the money market, the stock exchange and even the insurance industry to foreign participation. The Philippines now has one of the most liberalised finan-



cial markets in the region as it opened up the banking sector to foreign banks in 1995. It is estimated that 20 banks and financial institutions in the country now have foreign shareholders.

The maintenance of high interest rates is designed to attract foreign capital through assurance of higher profits. Investors can borrow money at 5-6% interest rates in the U.S. and reinvest it in Southeast Asia, where average interest rates have been 12-15%. In the Philippines the high interest rate is a policy pursued by the central bank!

Fixing the exchange rate between the local currency and the dollar is a guarantee for investors against risks stemming from fluctuations in the value of the highly elastic local currency. Fixing the rate was not a formal policy; it was done through what is called a “dirty float”, i.e., allowing the local currency to float within a narrow band (eg between 25.25 and 25.75 pesos to the dollar). Movement outside of this band would be countered by the central bank selling or buying dollars to keep the exchange rate within the band.

What has been the impact of portfolio investments?

Portfolio investments financed the expansion of speculative activity. Most of it was channelled into various short-term investments, especially property and real estate development that commands quick profits in Asian countries.

Thirty to fifty per cent of Thailand's GDP growth, for instance, came from activities related to real estate speculation. By 1995, there was already a real estate glut in the country, with vacant properties

Nationalise the banks! Create jobs!

The Philippino organisation *Sankalas* has responded to the crisis with this set of immediate and transitional demands:

- * An immediate debt moratorium on public and private debts. The government should not use its resources — the people's money — to bail out ailing companies. Instead, it should use the debt repayment money to support displaced workers and to create employment.

- * Rejection of the IMF rescue package.
- * Immediate lowering of interest rates for industrial loans.

- * A halt to trade liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation of the economy;

- * Ailing private enterprises should open their books to the public, so we know the real score, as branches of foreign banks and multinational corporations usually report capital transfer as corporate debts.

- * Nationalise the finance and banking industry. State control of these industries is the only way to stop speculative activity and to direct investment in to productive economic activity.

A campaign on these demands should aim to build a broad anti-imperialist people's movement that challenges the entire neo-liberal policies of the governments of the region. ★ [SM/RM]

estimated at some \$20 billion. The financial crisis in Thailand was signalled by two major finance companies, with high exposure on real estate loans, defaulting on their interest payments to the banks.

The entry of portfolio investments explains the high growth rates in the region. But massive borrowings or private debts fuelled these growth rates. The increasing growth rates in Southeast Asia were propped up by an ever-increasing pile of debts.

Compounding the problem is the fact that most of the debts are short-term or due for payment before the end of the year. The short-term debt of the Philippines accounts for 19% of the total foreign debt of \$46 billion.

What form does the flight of portfolio investment take?

Massive pullout of portfolio investments took the form of extensive selling by the investment houses of their bonds and stocks to convert the local currency into dollars.

It was estimated that around \$24 billion of "hot money" from portfolio inflows left Bangkok in 1996. It brought down the value of share prices by about 65%. The rush to convert the baht into dollar led to the local currency's devaluation.

Foreign equity inflows from the Philippine banks during the first quarter of 1997 fell by 97% compared to 1996. Foreign investors started to be bothered by the ongoing property crisis, rising private debts and the falling stock markets and began to demand dollars for their pesos, so that they could begin to move out of the Philippine market.

Who are the speculators?

Finance speculators geared up their activity when there was already an outward movement of foreign capital. The speculation was based on the expected devaluation of the local currency. These speculators 'earn' their money by the timely buying and selling of the dollar and the local currency.

The speculators are mostly big international banks that have vast amounts of money capital for trading. In the case of the Philippines, the July 11 currency crash was brought about by foreign exchange speculation of the six "universal banks" and investment houses: Citibank, JP Morgan, Solomon Brothers, Merrill Lynch, ING Barrings, and Morgan Stanley.

What is the extent of the crisis?

The crash is leading to escalating inflation and massive unemployment in the region. Half a million workers lost their jobs in Thailand, two millions were thrown out of the factories in Indonesia, hundreds of thousands of workers will be laid-off in the Philippines in the next few months.

But even more puzzling is the persistence of higher interest rates in the region, which discourage further local investment.

This translates into a full economic meltdown: a halt to industrial expansion and closure of more and more local enterprises.

Maintaining high interest rates (doubling from 15% to 30% in the Philippines) constitutes a foolish attempt on the part of Asian governments to keep speculative capital from leaving.

Can the crisis be solved by the IMF?

The IMF bailout only means additional debts for Southeast Asian economies. The bail-out is ridden with conditionalities which only give an opportunity to advanced capitalist countries, the US in particular, to enter the economies of Southeast Asia, and for big foreign banks to take over the local financial sector.

In the Philippines, the \$3 billion IMF fund is the 24th structural adjustment programme to be managed by the agency. Part of the loan conditionalities is the passage of the oil deregulation bill that will allow the three foreign oil monopolies in the country (Shell, Caltex, Petron) to increase their petrol prices without limit.

The IMF is also using the bail-out to ensure that the external loans contracted from international banks be repaid in full – with the government assuming responsibility

for the private sector's foreign loans if need be. The IMF's role in Asia is increasingly seen as chief debt collector for international banks.

While favouring international banks and multinational corporations, the IMF bailout and its conditionalities can only aggravate the Southeast Asian crisis. The IMF conditionalities will be a big burden to the people, will exterminate local industries and will cause an even deeper economic mess.

What is the real cause of the crisis?

The crisis of the Southeast Asian economies is related to the overall economic crisis of overproduction that is endemic to the long wave of capitalist economic decline which started in the early 1970s.

The economic slowdown of the Japanese economy is crucial to understanding the Southeast Asian crisis.

In the 1980s, Japanese foreign direct investments (FDI) played a major role in the partial industrialisation of Asia. In 1985-1990, \$15 billion worth of Japan's FDI flowed into Southeast Asia.

This investment strategy has not only targeted Southeast Asia as an export platform for third countries. It also

Citizens' Action Party

Around 300 delegates representing some 10,900 members launched *Akbayan* (Citizen's Action Party) on January 17. The Philippines left is gearing up for national elections in May.

Marxist academic and national executive member of BISIG (Union for Socialist Ideas and Action) Francisco Nemenzo gave the opening keynote address. He described *Akbayan* as "a party built around a program, a party that stands on definite principles, a party oriented towards a distinct vision".

Referring to the undemocratic and sectarian Stalinist and Maoist heritage that has plagued the Philippines left, Nemenzo said: "Many of us, including myself, have had unpleasant experiences in underground parties that insist on a uniformity of views... We who came to *Akbayan* from such a suffocating framework, value inner party democracy. We regard differences of opinions within the party and the ensuing debates as healthy and necessary... although as a party we shall ultimately stand united behind our program and resolutions of the national council."

Outlining *Akbayan's* approach to the economic crisis plaguing the country, Nemenzo said: "We do not retreat from a radical solution if the problem is radically bad... To take a radical stance in the midst of a grave crisis is more responsible than the stance of [President Fidel] Ramos and his technocrats who tell us that "our economic fundamentals are sound", even while the peso is tum-

bling down and thousands are losing their jobs. A radical departure from neoliberalism makes more sense than their proposal to hasten liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation."

Akbayan describes itself as a party of political and electoral reform. Its objectives include: to engage in elections at every level possible; to run government, particularly at the local executive level; and "to bring the concerns and issues of marginalised sectors to the agenda of the government and the general public with the end view of making government more accessible, genuinely accountable and truly responsive to the people".

Akbayan's chairperson is economist Walden Bello. Its secretary general is Etta Rosales, a leader of the anti-Stalinist tendency Siglaya, which broke away from the old Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP). Its president is Ronald Llamas from BISIG, a left movement that developed outside the influence of the Stalinist forces.

The party's national executive includes Joel Rocamora from the Institute for Popular Democracy; Ric Reyes from Siglaya; Benjie de Vera from Mindanao; feminist activist Anna Maria Nemenzo; and Pamela Celares, representing the recently split faction of the Manila Rizal regional committee of the CPP, aligned with the Revolutionary Workers Party.

The Sanlakas progressive democratic front and the BMP militant workers' centre did not participate in the conference. [MRo/GLW] ★

★ Philippines

recognises the potential for growing, prosperous, middle-class consumer markets

In the early part of the 1990s Japan started to pull out its FDI from the region. In 1990-93, Japan's investment in Thailand dropped by over 50%. Japanese investments also contracted in Malaysia.

The pull out is related to Japan's deep recession: dubbed "the never ending recession" by many economists.

Japan's growth rate fell dramatically from 3.0% in 1996 down to 1.9% in 1997. Most economists expect Japan to show zero growth or even a contraction in 1998.

Unemployment is predicted to reach 5% or worse-giving Japan its first jobless crisis since the second world war.

Japan's budget deficit is now more than 5% of GDP, which means that it will be difficult to use government funds to shore up collapsing businesses.

While the Japanese government points the blame to the currency crash in Southeast Asia, the truth is that there has been a major economic problem due to sluggish domestic demands and accumulating inventories which could not be sold in the market.

Blame the imperialists

The fundamental cause of the crisis is the overproduction in the advanced capitalist countries. Actual or potential overproduction of commodities is burdening most industries throughout the world – a trend since the 1970s.

The new capital steadily formed every year no longer finds investment opportunities to secure at least the average rate of profit.

This average rate of profit itself is depressed compared to the long wave of capitalist expansion that occurred from the 1940s to the 1960s.

The nature of overproduction in the capitalist countries takes the form of overproduction of capital. The fact that this capital is not being productively invested feeds the long depressive wave, which feeds the over-accumulation of capital and the growing transformation of this capital into speculative activities.

And this speculative activity is not only carried out by professional speculators like George Soros – Malaysian Premier Mahathir's favorite "whipping boy" – but by big banks and corporations themselves.

Speculators' profits have to be subtracted from the total amount of surplus value that is currently produced world-wide.

This means that the amount of surplus value-of real capital-that is the basis for growth and expansion of the capitalist system continues to decline. A big chunk of it is now being channelled to speculative activities.

Thus the world is awash with "speculative", "illusory" and "fictitious" capital, and yet there is an increasing shortage of real capital.

This is the nature of the crisis that started to erupt in Southeast Asia in the second half of 1997. ★

Rebuilding Palestine's

Nassar Ibrahim, editor of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) newspaper *Al Hadaf*, comments on the Palestinian left today

Your organisation played a major role in the Palestinian resistance movement in the 1970s and 80s. Why do we hear so little about the PFLP nowadays?

The Palestinian left is in a very difficult situation right now. On the one hand, we were strongly affected by the global crisis on the left after 1989. The collapse of the Soviet Union had a very negative effect on us, because for a long time we wrongly depended on a foreign model of revolution which was not right for the Palestinian situation. We are now paying the price for that uncritical approach.

But there are also domestic political reasons for our crisis. The central focus of our politics was always the struggle of the Palestinian people for national liberation and against the occupation policies of Israel. We treated the Palestinian people as a unit, thereby failing to pay attention to the contradictions which exist within Palestinian society. The social question hardly played a role in our thinking. For the past few years, however, we have been trying to correct such mistakes and mark out our own revolutionary path. We are also in a dialogue with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), who are also affected by the crisis, with the aim of creating a long-term unity in order to strengthen the weight of the Palestinian left.

Haven't the Oslo Agreement and the creation of the Palestinian Authority caught your organisation by surprise and made the crisis even deeper?

I think the Oslo Agreement is only very little to blame for the crisis on the left. Of course we have to orient ourselves to this new situation. The crisis is more affected by our relationship to the new Palestinian autonomy officials. There are two tendencies within the Palestinian left concerning this issue. One faction is for taking part in the Palestinian Authority, with the aim of changing it from the inside. That is the position of the Communist Party of Palestine, which was present with delegates during the peace negotiations. The other faction strictly rejects participation in the Palestinian Authority. The PFLP and the DFLP are part of this tendency. We rejected participation in the peace process from the beginning, because

to us it was clear that the global balance of power was not in our favour. Peace talks at this time can only have negative results for us.

Is your organisation really united behind such a position?

Of course we have a variety of opinions within the PFLP. But we think that's positive. Parties which refuse to allow differing opinions become stagnant. The important thing is to stay unified, despite having different opinions. We have adopted a new approach to democratic centralism. We have struck a balance so that the democracy does not end in chaos and the centralism does not become authoritarian.

How does this balance look with respect to the question of the autonomy authorities? Some PFLP members work with the Palestinian Authority.

Members of our organisation are not banned from working with this authority. PFLP members work in civil, health, and cultural associations. We were active in those areas even before the Oslo Agreement was signed. These associations only became part of the Palestinian Authority afterwards. Our members will stay active within them. But PFLP members are prohibited from taking part in the political offices, forces of repression, or negotiating committees of the Palestinian Authority.

In the past few months, Arafat has been waving the issue of a national dialogue with all Palestinian groups like a fist in the face of the Israeli government. Is the PFLP being pressured to take part in such a process?

We have always stated that we support a dialogue between different Palestinian forces. But we don't want a dialogue just for the sake of talking, nor do we want to take part in a process which is just a front for the Palestinian Authority's policies. There have been pseudo-conferences under the motto of "National Dialogue" before, but the Palestinian Authority has never been willing to change its course. Because the differences among Palestinian groups with respect to the Oslo Agreement are so vast, there is no basis right now for a dialogue.

Do you have any dialogue with the Israeli left?

The Israeli left is very weak. With the few forces that are willing, we do have contacts at all levels and we organise joint protests and informational meetings. We hope that the leftist forces in Israel will gain in importance. The PFLP has no problems with the citizens of Israel. We

radical left

want to live together with them in equality.

Do leftist organisations like the PFLP see any danger in the rise of Islamic groups like Hamas?

In many parts of the world, religious forces have gained in strength since the decline of the left. In Palestine, the Islamists have decades of tradition and they can't be compared to Islamic groups in Iran or Algeria. At the moment, the Palestinian people are in a phase of national liberation, and for us as leftists, the main issue is the Israeli occupation. On this issue, we are united with the Islamic groups, in so far as they are also fighting against the occupation. But in almost all other areas, we have large differences with the Islamists, especially in social questions, the status of women in the society, and so on.

You say that one mistake of the Palestinian left in the past was to focus the struggle on the Israeli occupation while forgetting the social question. But your organisation still considers the Israeli occupation to be its most important issue. How have your politics changed?

The main contradiction in the society, the Israeli occupation, became clearer during the *Intifada* and continues to this day. The Oslo Agreement did not change this. On the contrary: the situation of the Palestinian people has become worse. So for us, the struggle against Israeli occupation has taken on an even greater significance. But we are just as determined to struggle within Palestinian society itself. We work against the policies of the bourgeoisie, assembled in the Palestinian Authority. We are seeking to activate the social work of women, children, youths, and neighbourhood committees. Another important issue is freedom for the 3,500 Palestinian prisoners still being held by Israel, and the return of Palestinian refugees in exile.

Has the human rights situation changed at all since the signing of the Oslo Agreement and Arafat coming to power?

Unfortunately, not much has changed. Despite the Oslo Agreement, the occupation continues. The land and the people, except for a few cities, are still controlled by Israel, and they continue to suffer. So human rights violations continue. Some examples: the comprehensive blockades by Israel, which prevent Palestinians from going to work. That results in great financial and psychological strain for people. Then there are the arbitrary arrests

at Israeli checkpoints in Palestinian areas, usually without reason. Houses belonging to Palestinian families are destroyed because they supposedly had no building permits. But at the same time, Israel continues to build settlements on Palestinian land. And the torture of Palestinian prisoners is still allowed under Israeli law.

What is the situation of political prisoners in Palestine?

The number of Palestinian and Arab political prisoners in Israel is about 3,500. People can be held without charge for 6 months. This time period can be extended, so it's possible for people to be held for more than 6 years without being convicted of anything. 150 political prisoners are under the age of 18. The prisoners are dispersed between 12 different prisons, some of which are just tent camps in the desert. The conditions for prisoners are very hard, especially as far as their health is concerned, which is why 500 or so are very ill. Visits are only occasionally allowed.



At the present time, we have launched a campaign for Mohammad Raja Nerat, alias Abou Rafea. He was born in 1929 and has been in prison for more than 25 years. Although he is very ill, he has no chance for release, because he is serving a life sentence, which for Palestinians means they will die in prison. Recently he sent a very personal letter to Palestinian and international organisations. He knows that he doesn't have long to live, but in his letter, he asks people not to forget him. We feel his case is exemplary of the situation of political prisoners in Palestine. ★

Interviewed by Peter Nowak for *Sozialistische Zeitung* #1/1998 <www.berlinet.de/trend/soz/soz019804.htm>. Translated by ATS.

Refugee attitude survey

Surveys of refugee attitudes are regularly conducted, usually sponsored by international organizations, apparently hoping to discover that Palestinian refugees, after 50 years of exile, have "finally come to their senses", and are now ready to bury their dream of return to Palestine in exchange for improvements of living conditions.

A recent survey, undertaken at the request of the Union of Youth Activity Centers, gives the refugees their own, scientifically founded, data to work with.

Asked about positive changes in the West Bank refugee camps since the take-over by the Palestinian Authority (1995/6), refugees mentioned:

Improvement of public services	66%
No changes	30%
More personal security	3%
No answer	1%

Asked about negative developments in the same period, refugees mentioned:

No opinion	49%
Decreasing level of services	22%
Population growth/unemployment	21%
Increased crime, negative behavior	16%

A just solution of the refugee problem is perceived by refugees as meaning:

Return	75%
Compensation	16%
Return and compensation	6%
No opinion/no answer	4%

Asked whether they are satisfied by the way the refugee issue is being handled politically, refugees answered:

No, not satisfied	83%
Yes, satisfied	5%
Other answers/no answer	12%

The following reasons were given for the lack of satisfaction with the way the refugee issue is being handled in the peace process:

No immediate progress or perspective of future progress	59%
No definite results until now	32%
No answer	9%

Asked what they expect from the peace talks, refugees answered:

Nothing on the refugee issue	59%
Improvement and restitution of rights	20%
No opinion	9%
Things will get worse	6%
No answer	7%

Asked about their most likely reaction should their expectations not be met, refugees responded:

Opposition and condemnation	44%
Indifference	24%
Acceptance	24%
No answer	7%

The findings are representative of the refugee population living in the 19 West Bank refugee camps recognized by UNRWA and in five refugee communities not officially recognized. Source: Project for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights, BADIL Alternative Information Center-Bethlehem PO Box 728, tel/fax. (2) 747346; email: badil@baraka.org



General strike shows underlying left weakness

In December 700,000 Israeli workers participated in a four-day general strike called by the *Histadrut* [trade union federation]. Sergio Yani reports from Jerusalem.

The strike included the hospitals (which operated on a reduced schedule), government offices, the Electric Company (which ceased making repairs), the banks, the telephone monopoly Bezek, the aircraft industry, the military industries, the gasoline stations, the post office, administrative workers in the General Sick Fund, the universities – and many others. The strike included the sea and airports, which made it almost impossible for people or goods to enter or exit Israel during the strike. On the last day, there were work stoppages in the public transportation system within the country.

When the strike ended, the leaders of the *Histadrut* were able to announce with satisfaction that a large part of their demands had been met: Finance Minister Yaakov Ne'eman agreed to abide by the pension agreements signed by the *Histadrut* and the previous government, which was intended to stabilise the situation of the pension funds. Before the strike, he had refused to recognise the validity of these agreements.

An intense dispute has emerged

concerning the basis on which the amount of a worker's pension is to be calculated. In Israel it is quite common for workers to receive indirect wage supplements, in the form of various benefits (such as for clothing and travel). Thus, it is often the case that an employee's direct salary will be quite low, whereas the other elements that compose his earnings amount to more.

The *Histadrut* is seeking to include some new elements in total salary for the purpose of calculating workers' pensions, that in the past were not included in the agreement signed by the *Histadrut* and the Finance Ministry. The meeting of this demand was one of the strike's major achievements. As well as a series of other pension-related matters, the Finance Ministry agreed to negotiate with the *Histadrut* on renewing the wage agreements in the public sector and the inclusion of the *Histadrut* in discussions on the future of child benefits.

Struggle not over

However, it must be emphasised only a memorandum of agreement [and not a comprehensive agreement] was signed. Now the sides will commence negotiations on the details. But the Finance Ministry obtained the agreement of the *Histadrut* not to declare a full or partial strike with regard to issues which were included in the memorandum of agreement. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that in the future the Finance Ministry will try to introduce

changes that will detract from the achievements of this strike.

For example, on December 21, the Finance Ministry announced that it is not prepared to include all the new salary components in the calculation of pension rights, but only some of them. Similarly, the matter of the amount of compensation due to a worker who transfers from one pension fund to another is likely to be a matter of dispute.

Nevertheless, owing to the strength amassed by the *Histadrut* as a result of the strike, it will not be easy for the Finance Ministry to reintroduce all its original pension reforms. In any event, one thing is clear: the plan to destroy the pension funds has been stopped in its tracks.

Most important of all, the agreement between the Finance Ministry and the *Histadrut* only brought a temporary social peace. A number of serious employer-employee disputes remain unresolved, unemployment is growing, and workers are being dismissed from enterprises due to privatisation and the relocation of factories (especially, although not exclusively, in the textile industry) to Egypt and Jordan.

Privatising Israel

The threat to the workers' pension rights is only a part of the plan to privatise the Israeli economy, which was crystallised by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (the IMF), as part of these institutions' global policies of neo-liberalism.¹

The attack on the pension funds, like the cut-backs in all social services, to the point of their total destruction, as happened in Britain under Margaret Thatcher² are among the means used by the World Bank and the IMF to liberate capital from the shackles of the state and from societal pressures on the state to concern itself with the welfare of its citizens, and implement the full rule of the free market in every realm.

According to the French economist, Maxime Durand: "Social security pensions were a way of separating the accumulation of funds for old age from individual savings and organising a kind of social solidarity between those who would could work and those who could not. It was society as a whole (and not an insurance company) that guaranteed that those who paid their social security deduction today would in the future [receive a] retirement pension, following certain rules which were not individual..."³

The Israeli Finance Minister, who is committed to the neo-liberal programme of destroying the pension funds, was confronted with unexpectedly strong resistance by the *Histadrut*, similar to the response of trade unions throughout the world to the global onslaught. However, in comparison to other places, the workers' struggle waged by the *Histadrut* was, to a certain extent, easier: the government made major concessions after five days of general strike.

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The Gulf War and the New World Order

André Gunder Frank and Salah Jaber [72 pages A4]

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The Histadrut's new policy

The latest confrontation between the Histadrut and the Finance Ministry was the first labour conflict in Israel which spun out of the control of both the Histadrut bureaucracy and the Finance Ministry. Up till now, confrontations always took place in a closed framework agreed-upon in advance by the Histadrut and the ruling system.

This balance between the ruling institutions and the Histadrut ceased to be complete in 1977, when an electoral upheaval brought the Likud to power for the first time since 1948. Up till then, the Labour Party had led both the government and the Histadrut (even before the establishment of the state, ever since the establishment of the Histadrut in 1920, Mapa'i - the predecessor of the Labour Party - had been the dominant force in both the general trade union and the institutions of the state-in-the-making).

However, with the rise of the Likud to power, this balance began to disintegrate, since the Likud viewed both the Labour Party and the Histadrut as enemies which had to be destroyed in order to solidify the hold on power handed it acquired as a result of the elections, as well as because of its ideological hostility to the welfare state. Nevertheless, throughout the entire period of Likud government, the Histadrut proved itself to be a model of "national responsibility, and continued its pacifying role with regard to everything connected to workers' interests.

More - and less - than a trade union

For most of its history, the Histadrut was "more" than a trade union, it was also the second largest employer in the country. Thus, it was never a trade union in the West European sense. The Trade Union Department was but one of many of the Histadrut's wings and sections, including companies - such as Solel Boneh construction company, the HaPoel network of sports teams, Kupat Holim (the Sick Fund), the Kibbutz movement, Bank Ha-Poalim, Tnuva (marketing of agricultural produce), and others.

The Trade Union Department was by no means in a preferred or privileged role compared to the Histadrut's capitalist and quasi-capitalist enterprises. The role of the Histadrut was to balance between capital and labour in order to promote Zionist aims (before 1948) or the interests of the Zionist state, after its establishment. It fulfilled this role as one among other Zionist institutions.

The liberalisation of the economy, and the crises which rocked the economy in the last thirty years, deprived the Histadrut of its property assets one by one, starting in the 1980's and continuing on through the 1990's.

However, in a paradoxical fashion, these liberalising steps empowered the Trade Union Department of the Histadrut, for a very simple reason: as opposed to Kupat Holim, the industrial enterprises and the banks, the TUD could not be

privatised (no one would buy it). Thus, if the Histadrut, or it least its leaders, wanted to stay alive, they had to take its trade union function more seriously...

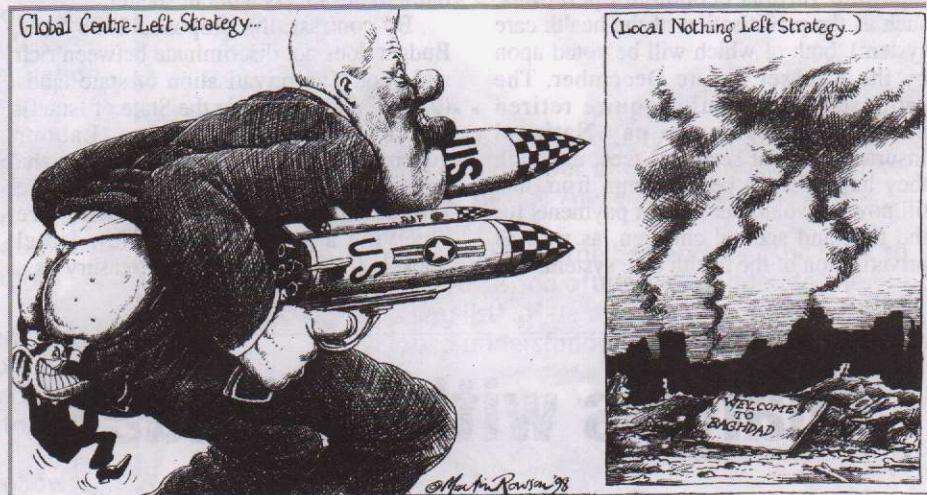
The recent general strike showed that the days when the Histadrut served as a mediator between the state and the workers, with a tendency to favour the interests of the state, are over. Today it acts as a party to the dispute which forces the government to take account of the positions of the workers it represents.

On the other hand, the Histadrut is still a bureaucratic organisation whose first concern is its own institutional interests, and which lacks an alternative social-economic programme to the government's neo-liberalism.

In practice, one can say that it is demanding slower and more "humane" implementation of the government's plan, but not its cancellation.

From conservatism to fascism?

In the context of the extortionist and partisan opportunism which characterises political culture in Israel, Yaakov Ne'eman is thought of as a professional figure, a first-class jurist whose ethical record is spotless. It is true that he is not a member of any political party, but he is a hard-line right-winger in more than just the sphere of economics: he was one of the founders of Gush Emunim (the settlement movement of the national-religious right-wing), and on the question of settlements



No more war against Iraq!

One country in the world has produced more weapons of mass destruction than any other. This same country is the only one which has ever used weapons of mass destruction against another people - at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

It is the most transparent hypocrisy for the government of the United States to claim that it has some moral obligation to act as world policeman - as it did during the Gulf war and is again today - under the cover of keeping Saddam Hussein from developing weapons of mass destruction.

Whatever such weapons - or capability to develop them - the criminal Iraqi regime may have, are only the result of the aid Baghdad received from the U.S. and European powers when Saddam was seen as an ally in the region against the Iranian revolution and the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism.

Today the U.S., backed by others, is threatening to launch military strikes against Iraq again. Washington claims that its target is Hussein's failure to comply with U.N. resolutions. But the Clinton administration knows full well that it cannot force compliance through bombs and embargoes.

Working people in Iraq and worldwide have no interest in defending Saddam Hussein, who has committed the worst kind of butchery against his own country's population and denies the right of self-determination for the Kurds.

But no one should have any illusions that Washington can be the liberator of Iraq. And this is the furthest thing from the minds of the Clinton administration. Indeed, as long as the embargo and threat of military retaliation remain it will be that much more difficult for any significant internal Iraqi opposition to develop.

The main victim of the Gulf war and of the present imperialist campaign is the civilian population of Iraq. Already half a million children have died as a direct result of the blockade—for want of basic food and medicine. How many more victims must there be before the world says "enough?"

We say: No more war against the people of Iraq! End the embargo now!

Fourth International
International Executive Committee
21 February 1998

he is thought of as more extreme than most of the leaders the National-Religious Party who spearheaded the settlement drive in the territories which were occupied by Israel in 1967.

"Ne'eman is the most determined enemy of the working-class ever to amass power in Israel, a man who seeks to eradicate finally all the achievements of the working-class since the Histadrut was founded in 1920 ... He is not afraid to incite against the workers as part of a system of divide-and-rule and to bend public opinion to his purposes." (Haim Baram, writing in *Kol Ha'ir*, 17-5-97).

Ne'eman's political positions are expressed in his proposed 1198 State Budget and his proposed Arrangements in the Economy Law (which is designed to facilitate various economic operations, such as the privatisation of the health care system), both of which will be voted upon by the Knesset in late December. The proposed laws would require retired people on pensions to pay National Insurance [social security] fees, although they have always been exempt from this till now; it would cut benefit payments for the first and second children, as well as privatisation of the health care system.

The health care system is a major target of government attack today. Ne'eman's bill proposes major structural changes in the National/State Health Insurance Law, which would allow the sick funds to collect additional fees from their members, the turning of the government hospitals into quasi-private corporations, and the privatisation of the geriatric hospitals. These changes would mean the destruction of the basket of health services and the abandonment of the poorest 60% of the population to severe illness and poor medical treatment. Two health care systems are being created - one for the rich and one for the poor. Poor, elderly persons suffering from severe illness but who can't afford the fees of the geriatric hospitals - will be thrown out into the streets without shelter.

By contrast, the proposed 1998 State Budget does not discriminate between rich and poor. The privatisation of state lands (93% of all land within the State of Israel), which began under the Labour government - will continue, including the special benefits being given to the kibbutzim and moshavim, who are receiving a gift worth 907 New Israel Shekels (NIS) from the state treasury as a

result of land privatisation. The proposed budget would also channel 300 million NIS into subsidies and benefits for the settlements, as well as promising a 10% increase in real terms to the Religious Affairs Ministry budget (53% of which goes to assist yeshiva students).

Indeed, the recent strike also revealed some worrying signs [about the "New Right" in Israel]. During the recent strike, the walls of Jerusalem were plastered with posters an ad hoc right-wing-group, Mateh, calling for the breaking of the strike, the purpose of which was "bring down against the nationalist government. "Up till now, the Israeli Right has been characterised by nationalism on the political level, and populism or conservatism on the social level. The traditional Right in Israel was able to link the nationalist ideology of the "whole land of Israel" and at least giving the appearance of social concern for the people of Israel. Now Maamatz has adopted a new approach which makes a very explicit connection between radical nationalism and opposition to workers' organisations. The correct name for such an approach is: fascism.

The silent left

The right to strike is not guaranteed by law in Israel. The state has the right to issue orders forcing workers who wish to work to remain on the job, and can even petition the courts to have a strike declared illegal. During the recent strike, the government not only used these possibilities, but Tel Aviv mayor Ronnie Milo [(who is known as a Likud "dove" on political matters, but is quite definitely social hawk)], even hired thugs to beat striking garbage workers. Like Prime Minister Rabin faced with Palestinian youth, Milo ordered the breaking of bones. If the pictures of Milo's thugs had been broadcast from the occupied territories, the Israeli Left would have organised protests. But in this case, it was silent. ★

Notes

- 1 See: "Privatisation: Eight Lessons of Experience (2)," *World Bank Policy Bulletin*, Volume 3, No. 4 (August-October, 1992).
- 2 Maxime Durand, "The Neoliberal Assault on the Public Sector," *International Viewpoint*, January 1998.
- 3 Most of the economics commentators in the press supported Ne'eman; and the Labour Party leader, Ehud Barak, refrained from expressing any support for the Histadrut.

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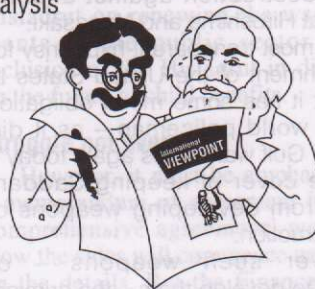
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New questions in feminism...

For this special dossier for International Women's Day we present a series of contributions that deal with questions which, although widely discussed in the women's movement are less so in the Marxist movement.

Starting from its analysis of the society as the relationship between classes, notably the relations of exploitation in the productive process, traditional Marxism includes women from the point of view of their role in the productive process and their role in the family as the unit of reproduction of the labour force.

The women's movement has extended its study of women's social and political situation to deal with aspects that do not enter so readily in this framework.

Women thus have sought, seek and will seek to define their identity as women, in a broader way than that of the "woman worker", to which they feel, with greater or lesser reason, traditional Marxism confines them.

Next month, Lidia Cirillo will present the discussion on women's identity as a social subject as it has been posed in Italy and urges Marxism to respond to the challenge to deal with this debate in these terms.

In the meantime, we present the following contributions – these are questions which, unfortunately, we are not used discussing, and we will return to them in later issues of International Viewpoint.

Pornography...

The left has not paid sufficient attention to the debate in the women's movement around pornography.

Finding our way between the need to defend women's right to live without feeling the victim of aggression from sexually explicit and violent images and defending the right to free speech has given rise to wide-ranging debate.

The questions under discussion range from the definition of pornography itself, whether or not we can make a distinction between it and "erotica" to strategies for combating the degradation of women.

We present three points of view drawn from material previously published in the US magazine *Against the Current*.

Sex...

The question of sexuality has figured in the thinking of a number of eminent socialist thinkers in the past, such as Alexandra Kollontai and Wilhem Reich.

Today, however, the demand for "the right to self-defined" is too often today added to the "shopping list" of demands without a more developed understanding of the real issues.

compiled and introduced
by Penny Duggan

Violence...

Since the 1970s, practical and psychological aid to women victims of domestic and sexual violence has been a major activity of women's and feminist associations. Estela Ratamoso tells us about the activity of the Luna Nueva association in Montevideo, Uruguay, and the ways it helps women.

Solidarity...

In our final article in this issue Terry Conway from Britain describes the way in which women, as the wives, mothers and women of the communities, in a number of important industrial disputes in Britain, have created a new identity and role for themselves as a central force within the solidarity movement.

The new orthodoxy

Women and sex

Beginning a discussion about sexuality isn't easy. How do we define sex? Has it always been defined in the same terms? What place does or should it have in our culture?

These are difficult questions mostly because sex and sexual images, by and large, are still taboo subjects for women. Sexual information and images are still, in many ways, hidden. Sex is still, in most cultures, a "forbidden" impulse. It is a denied aspect of our being as women.

Even among socialist women a discussion about sex often becomes a discussion about sexual violence, rape and sexual abuse. These are important issues, but they are not the only issues. It is almost as if we shared the traditional notion that for women sexual pleasure should be a very secondary concern.

Nancy Herzig

The post-war economic boom in the developed world created the conditions which made a renewed interest in sexual freedom more feasible. It permitted larger sectors of the population to live outside of traditional family arrangements and closed community structures. The expansion of waged-labour in urban contexts opened a wider space for individuals to live alone or within non-traditional family structures or co-habitation arrangements. In so far as many traditionally domestic products or activities became commodities or services bought in the market, the traditional household ceased to be a key economic unit in society.

This prepared the ground for a new wave of feminism, of sexual activism and experimentation and for the weakening of the traditional family as the only source of emotional, affective, sexual relationships and affinities. The wave of feminism of the 1960s and early 1970s was partly a product of these changes. So was the consolidation and construction of gay and lesbian communities in the post-war era.

Of course, these changes had a varied effect in different social strata. White men



generally had better access to higher education than blacks or women. Then, as now, they had more access to better-paying jobs and more job stability. Thus it has been easier (though never easy) for urban male white gays to create an autonomous niche for themselves within existing society than for lesbians, or gay people of colour to do the same.

The post-war economic boom that extended wage labour, improved wages, brought women into work outside the home and attracted or pushed millions into the growing cities, also produced revolutionary advances in reproductive technology. During the 1950s and 1960s, it became far easier to separate sex and sexual pleasure from reproduction.

Youth culture

The expansion of mass universities laid the ground for the rise of an alternative youth culture in the 1960s. This soon began to challenge traditional notions of sex and gender. Men let their hair grow longer, women started cutting theirs shorter.

Two of the most visible cultural figures of the epoch, Elvis Presley in the 1950s and the Beatles in the 60's, stirred controversy (and captivated an audience which included many young adolescent women) thanks to their unprecedented sexual aggressiveness or their failure to respect established gender rules regarding outward appearance.

The right wing was scandalised: not only were the kids protesting against war and militarism, which was bad enough, but one could not even tell the boys from the girls!

Some of the challenges to traditional culture which flourished in that atmosphere, may – in retrospect – seem trivial, absurd or extravagant. Nevertheless, they helped to break old cultural moulds and to

open up a new epoch. The sexual revolution even gave rise to a new vocabulary. The very concept of "sexism," modelled on the term racism, is a well known and lasting example. Other examples of the new language invented by the movement to formulate its demands and to explain the changes it was effecting in society include "right to choose," "sexual preference" and "sexual orientation," "women's liberation" (derived from the term *national liberation*), "sexual harassment," and "reproductive rights."

Health demands

The struggles for abortion rights, access to birth control and gay rights directly challenged the traditional notion that linked legitimate sex with reproduction, marriage and the family. New perspectives on sex and sexuality promoted a re-valorisation of sexual pleasure in general, and of the right of women to explore their sexuality – often hidden or denied in traditional culture. When the women's movement advanced the demand for women's sexual health and information, including the emphasis it put on women's orgasms, it did so with the fundamental idea that women are sexual beings, and thus have right to sexual pleasure as much as men do. It was in this context that many in the women's movement dared to challenge the dominant Freudian orthodoxy regarding "vaginal" orgasm, an ideology which openly equated clitoral orgasm and sexual aggressiveness in women with arrested development and emotional immaturity.

Feminists, as well as gay and lesbian activists, also questioned the theories and practices of many "experts" in medicine and psychology. And countered many areas of traditional advice with their own views, based on their own experiences and research. In 1971 the Boston Women's

Collective published the first edition of the immensely popular *Our Bodies, Our Selves*, a health manual written by women, for women. Also in 1971 Shere Hite published the results of her pioneering research on women's sexuality. Her results challenged the traditional idea that women were not interested in sex, or that their tastes and preferences were more passive or less physical than men's. The emphasis on women's orgasms was very much part of a wider struggle for the right of women to define their own sexuality, of the struggle of women for their sexual autonomy and liberation.

A new mood

As a result of all this, structures that had been accepted as natural, normal, unchangeable and pre-ordained began to be seen as cultural, conventional, historical and above all, changeable. One of the main – and most valuable – ideas which emerged from this challenge to the traditional link between sex, marriage and reproduction was the revolutionary notion that there is not one normal, legitimate or correct form of sexual enjoyment. Women's sexual liberation was not about imposing a sexual orthodoxy, but rather a struggle to give women full access to a plurality of sexual options and possibilities.

While the feminist, gay and lesbian movements helped to change dominant attitudes, the ruling economic and market forces in the developed world wasted little time in adapting and taking advantage of the rapid changes in people's attitudes regarding sexuality. What emerged was a complex dialectic between changing social attitudes – at least in part promoted by the new women's, youth, gay and lesbian movements – and capital's interest in tapping the many new and promising opportunities opened up by a wider public interest and openness toward sexual matters: sexual images in film and print became more daring, sexual toys and products made their appearance, and information about sex and sexuality became easier to obtain.

Perhaps the most controversial change, along with the publication and popularisation of sex manuals and the liberalisation (especially in the US) of obscenity laws, was the wider circulation of sexually explicit materials. Beginning in the late 1970s – with the founding of Women Against Pornography – the attitude toward such materials would generate a long and bitter debate among feminists that would last through the 1980's and 90's. This is ironic. While feminism was both a cause and a product of the rapidly changing world of the 60s, the need to respond to many of those complex and contradictory changes in the area of sexuality was to sharply divide the feminist movement during the following decades.

Divisions within feminism

The mid-1970s saw the rise in much of the developed world, and particularly in

the US, of a Right-wing backlash directed against the gains of the feminist, gay and lesbian movements. Extremely conservative, well-financed and strongly militant religious organisations developed a wide-ranging political agenda which highlighted sexual and reproductive issues (abortion, pornography, contraception, sex education, sex among young people, gays and lesbians).

This backlash has not deprived women of all their recent gains. But this should not lead us to underestimate the strength of this right-wing offensive. It is impossible to trace the evolution of the complex debates that this backlash has provoked among feminists during the last two decades. But one important shift is the growing challenge to the early assumption that sexual freedom meant a step forward for women.

More, and better sex

The initial impulse of the rise of feminism in the 60s was away from any sexual orthodoxy and toward a defence of self-determination in the sexual sphere: women wanted more, better, and more varied sex. Many of these views began to be questioned as the 70s wore on. The challenge came from several distinct, although sometimes mutually reinforcing angles.

Some tendencies within feminism began to doubt that the new sexual "freedoms" were freedoms at all, or steps forward for women. The freer circulation of pornography, and the ease with which men now left their wives to pursue interests: were these really great advances for women? Needless to say, it was not hard for these tendencies to arrive at conclusions not too different from the views of many right wing traditionalists who had all along argued that sexual liberation would hurt women while giving men more freedom to do as they please. In the 1980s we witnessed the bizarre alliance of radical feminists like Andrea Dworkin with right wing fundamentalists like Senator Jesse Helms in a common front against pornography.

During the 1970s and 80s some tendencies within feminism embraced the notion of a specific "feminist", "liberated" or "women's" sexuality. The rise of two currents of thought played a key role in this area: radical lesbian-feminism in the 1970s and difference or cultural feminism in the 1980s. Both tendencies shared a regrettable willingness to classify and extol certain sexualities as "liberating" while condemning others as "oppressive".

Radical lesbian perspectives

The emergence of a radical-lesbian tendency became quite visible in the late 1960s when the leadership of the National Organization for Women (NOW), the largest women's organisation in the US, carried out a purge against openly lesbian-feminists in its ranks. NOW's homophobic leadership – deeply concerned at the time with building a mainstream organisation and maintaining a "respectable" image for the US public – expelled lesbian feminists

and openly refused to embrace the demands of the gay/lesbian community. This open display of homophobia within the women's movement helped crystallise a militantly political lesbian tendency. Lesbianism, for this current, was not only a legitimate sexual option for women: it became the prototype, the program and the practice of a liberated sexual practice freed from sexism.¹

Radical political lesbianism argued that a close look at women's lives in the present and the past revealed how women – in spite of the restrictions imposed by patriarchal culture – had persistently sought to build truly fulfilling emotive and sexual bonds with other women. A key aspect of the patriarchy was precisely its age-old struggle to separate women from each other. The term lesbianism was thus expanded to include not only certain sexual preferences, but almost any emotional or physical bond between women which was judged to run against patriarchal rules. This tendency logically conclu-



ded that building and strengthening those repressed but persistent social and sexual bonds between women was the key task of a feminist culture and movement.

Through its critique of "compulsory heterosexuality", political lesbianism highlighted as never before the fact that dominant sexual and gender definitions are historically constructed. Women should question what they have been taught about sex. And not assume that what "comes naturally" is indeed natural.

Nevertheless, the radical lesbian feminists' belief in a trans-historical lesbian impulse tended to undermine this important contribution. There was another problem: what about heterosexual or bisexual women, women who enjoyed sexual relations with men and even lived with them? Were they betraying themselves – were they collaborating – by sleeping with the enemy? If lesbianism is liberating, is heterosexuality necessarily coercive, enslaving or degrading? This was indeed the conclusion of many militants within this current. And this is the problem with any position that takes up the defence of a particular sexual practice or practices as liberating for women: it ends up discounting

and disregarding the views and preferences of the many women which are bound to disagree with any particular definition of what sex should be like.

Cultural, difference & identity feminism

A diverse range of currents born in the 1970s and 1980s share the notion that there is a specific feminine culture, sexuality or nature.² According to these activists, women are more nurturing and more sensitive, than men. They value intimacy and reciprocity, tenderness and commitment, love and understanding far more than men. Their sexual desire is more diffuse, less aggressive, and less obsessed with the relentless phallic drive toward orgasm.

Men's sexuality, on the other hand is not only irresponsible, but potentially lethal to women: it objectifies women, shirks long lasting commitments, and tends to separate sex from any emotion. The more extreme radical feminists (see Dworkin's book *Intercourse*) conclude that male sexuality is always, by its very nature, violent, egotistical and misogynist, and that all sexual encounters between men and women are indeed rape.

It is surprising how this allegedly radical perspective ends up resurrecting the traditional stereotypes about women which the earlier sex liberationists had rejected as limiting and oppressive to women. Such as the old myths that women are more spiritual, and less interested in orgasms than men are.

Sex and danger

This type of analysis often argues that sex is fundamentally dangerous for women. And the most consistent defenders of this line have concluded that until sexism is laid to rest celibacy is the freest option for women! Freedom through sexual renunciation: one could hardly imagine a sharper reversal of the earlier demand for more, freer, more varied sex for all women. It is not difficult to see why traditional, right-wing religious organisations do not feel threatened by this type of feminism and have even adopted some of its arguments, in their attempts to censor pornography, for example.

No-one denies that sex can be dangerous. Rape is indeed a tragically common event, heterosexual relations in all cultures are usually quite unequal, and men are often irresponsible toward women and their feelings. But, as distasteful as it may be, a consensual sexual act, even one marked by some degree of sexism, is not the same thing as rape or forced sex. Little is to be gained in the struggle to better understand our experiences as women by erasing this difference.

In other words, a "radical" return to the traditional domestic values of an alleged women's culture is not the answer.

Difference feminism tends to consider not only men, but the many women that disagree with it as hopelessly misguided, and in need of a Big Sister to protect them from themselves. Faced with the objection that many women seem to consent to

sexual relations with men, difference feminists have often argued that since women have been shaped by a deeply sexist culture they cannot truly consent to anything. Their apparently consensual choices are in fact the product of sexist manipulation. Since most women cannot really choose, to limit some of their alleged "choices" (censoring pornography, for example, which some women do like) is not an act of repression, but a legitimate attempt to protect them from the sexist culture they have internalised. The authoritarian dangers of this perspective are quite evident. Not surprisingly, difference feminists have tended to be quite intolerant and dismissive of other currents.

Of course, the results of the sexual revolution have been highly uneven as far as women are concerned. We live within a fundamentally sexist culture, and all of us have, to one degree or another, internalised its values and categories. Most societies have traditionally segregated some areas of social activity as women's spheres, thus tending to create some typically (although never static) male and female personality traits. Radical, difference or cultural feminists have not invented the problems which they discuss. But they have tended to approach them in rather unilateral ways. And their attempt to define some sexual practices or attitudes as more feminist or liberating than others has proven to be a dangerous dead end.



Sexual autonomy, social equality and cultural diversity

One cannot embrace a project of women's self-emancipation, while presenting oneself as the visionary vanguard or minority which has somehow discovered what "correct", free, "feminist" sexuality should or will be like.

On the contrary, in the struggle for a freer sexuality we should oppose all attempts to impose a "correct" sexual line, whether they come from the religious right-wing or from "feminists". In recent years, religious fundamentalists and conservative "feminists" in a number of countries have sought to legislate sexual codes of conduct which often include new

restrictions on young or unmarried people or the censorship of sexually explicit materials. This unholy alliance of feminism and conservatism is best exemplified by the anti-porn crusade in the USA.

We should reject both the complacent "post-feminist" perspective which advises us to jettison our anti-sexist agenda, and the authoritarian materialism of those feminists who feel they are authorised to impose their views about sex on the rest of us. We need an approach which is critical and at the same time democratic, participatory and tolerant of the diversity of our sexual desires. A new, freer, and richer sexuality can only emerge to the extent that people, and women in particular, are guaranteed the possibility of freely and consensually exploring their desires, interests, preferences and fantasies; of learning from their own and other women's experiences; of arguing, debating, criticising.

Several basic principles follow from this perspective of self-emancipation. First of all, nobody should be forced to engage in any sexual act, relationship or practice against their will. Likewise, nobody should be denied the right to their sexual orientation or preference or to consensually engage in certain sexual practices because some other person or group finds it offensive or objectionable. What we need is an "ethics of relationships" and not a "morality of acts": as a movement we should worry more about how something is done (consensually, by mutual agreement, in terms of equality, etc.) than about what is done.³

Women's ability to make freer individual choices in matters relating to their sexuality does not only depend on the absence of censorship or repressive legislation (as liberal feminists tend to think). It also depends on the effective presence of certain very concrete, material and social conditions.

The emphasis on the fact that economic well-being is not enough to end sexism has led some to forget that it nevertheless remains a key element in the struggle for women's liberation.

Guaranteed income, stable employment, reliable and good quality child care, housing, health services, and reproductive and abortion rights all extend the material conditions that enable self-determination for women. They enhance women's personal autonomy, which allows them a wider set of sexual choices, and permit them to refuse unwanted sexual and/or emotional relationships or encounters. ★

Notes

1. A key text in the evolution of this tendency is Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience" in *Powers of Desire* (Monthly Review, 1983).
2. Important critiques of this tendency are Alice Echols, "The New Feminist of Yin and Yang" in *Powers of Desire* and Raquel Osbourne, *La construcción sexual de la realidad* (Catedra, 1993).
3. This distinction comes from Jeffrey Weeks, *Invented Moralities* (Columbia University, 1995).

Pornography: ban it or read it?

Some activists see pornography as be a central aspect of the oppression of women and one of the most widespread and effective mechanisms through which sexism is enforced and reproduced in our cultures. Most – not all – defenders of this perspective have supported some form of censorship as a means of “protecting” women or women’s rights from pornography. This has certainly been the case of writers Catherine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin, the most influential feminist critics of pornography.

Other activists say the porn issue is a divisive and distracting question that, according to them, has only succeeded in diverting the energies of feminism into sterile infighting, and reduced time and energy spent on other significant questions that affect women. Whatever their views regarding pornography, these activists argue that feminists should not be concentrating their efforts in the porn-censorship issue. Most – not all – of those holding such views also reject censorship as an appropriate response to sexually explicit materials which women may find objectionable.

A third current of feminist activists say that the debate on pornography is important, because it poses important questions regarding pleasure, sexual preference and self-determination, sexual roles, sexuality and its place within our cultures. They say these should be among the central concerns of feminism. Some of these feminists not only oppose censorship, but defend much “pornography” from its feminist critics.

We reprint two viewpoints from a long-running debate in the US magazine *Against The Current*.

Puertorican activists **Nancy Herzig** and **Rafael Bernabe** defend porn, arguing that no-one, not even feminists, can determine an ideal sexual behaviour. Writer Dianna Russell argues that there is an urgent need to picket, protest and educate about the link between

pornography and violence against women. And Cathy Crosson criticises the “MacDworkin” school of anti-pornography activism.

Lack of space prevents us from reprinting all positions in this long and complex debate.

The right to decide

Nancy Herzig & Rafael Bernabe

Before we add to the already long list of misunderstandings, let’s at least make clear what the debate is *not* about.

The debate is not about the use of violence against women or the coercion of women into participating in the production of pornography. All feminists that have participated in the *ATC* debate¹ oppose such forms coercion. We all consider that such coercion or violence against women is unacceptable, and should be illegal. In spite of our deep differences, we share this – not insignificant – common goal.

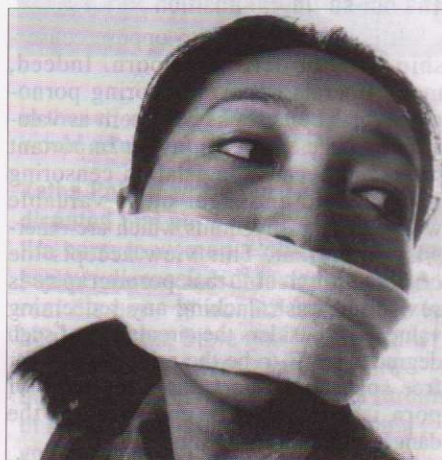
So what is the real question? For some feminists, pornography is *itself* a form of coercion and violence against women and it must therefore be opposed *as such*, and, if necessary, made illegal or censored. Others reject this equation. They argue that, while feminists must certainly oppose violence and coercion in this activity as in any other social sphere, they should not campaign for censorship. Or even against pornography as such. While they oppose any kind of forced participation of women in pornography, and seek to change the conditions which may push women into the porn industry against their will, these activists reject the notion that the participation of women in the production of pornography is *always* the result of coercion or violence.

But a freer, richer, sexuality cannot evolve through legislation by experts, even feminist, socialist experts.¹ Nor does a new freer sexuality exist already, in the mind or programme of some feminist or socialist vanguard. It can only be created to the extent that men and women are guaranteed the right to consensually explore – to construct and reconstruct, define and redefine – their sexualities. Nobody can claim to know what the results of this process will be.

Part of this process is defending the right of all, and certainly of women, to denounce and criticise anything they find offensive or degrading. But each specific criticism will surely encounter some divergent views or appreciation. It is completely unrealistic to think, for example, that

women do or will agree on what is degrading or sexist in sexual representations. What some women find degrading, others may find very exciting and liberating. In other words, one cannot censor degrading or sexist images without imposing someone’s or some group’s specific and particular notion of what type of sexual representation, activity, position or practice is degrading and which ones are not – what type of sex is right and which is wrong.

This is the problem with the recurrent attempt to separate “pornography” (sexist, degrading, etc.) from “erotica” (non-sexist, etc.). There has been and there will be little agreement on the criteria for differentiating them, and even less on how to classify specific works.



Big sister knows best...?

Pro-censorship feminists insist that the fact that many women enjoy and defend pornography cannot be a valid argument against censorship. These women, they claim, have evidently internalised their subordination. This is, they argue, the very function and effect of pornography: it makes the degradation of women seem normal, even to many women. For the anti-porn feminists, women’s use of pornography is an argument *for* censorship, not against it! There is a deep problem with this reasoning: it dismisses what women have to say about themselves. It denies them the agency and the ability to choose for themselves. It wishes to impose – through censorship – what somebody else (the anti-porn feminists) have decided is best for them.

As socialists, we should reject this substitutionist perspective. The principle of self-determination and of consensuality is the key to a freer sexuality. Nobody should be forced to engage in any sexual activity against their will, but neither should any adult be penalised for consensually engaging in sexual practices others

★ new questions in feminism

may find objectionable.

Of course, anti-censorship liberals and libertarians will share this view. But as socialists we should go further. The right of women to choose what kind of sex they want to have does not just depend on the absence of censorship and other restrictions, like sodomy laws. It also requires the presence of certain material conditions, like guaranteed income, housing, health, daytime child care and employment. In the absence of such conditions, many women will be coerced or pushed into unwanted sexual relationships, encounters and practices.

This is the weak spot of liberal feminist critics such as (Pally, McElroy, Tisdale, and, to a lesser extent, Strossen. They oppose censorship as part of a *laissez-faire* perspective, which – in the guise of rejecting “victimhood” – often revives the myth of the “self-made man,” or woman. Instead, we must oppose censorship while struggling for all the social guarantees women need to flourish as free individuals.

The not-so-liberal position

It is quite possible to oppose censorship without defending porn. Indeed, many liberals oppose censoring pornography not because they see porn as valuable or access to porn as an important right, but because legislation censoring porn would endanger other valuable works, or limit freedoms which are otherwise important. This view accepts the critics' arguments that pornography is sexist and trash, lacking any redeeming value, but considers the circulation of such degraded stuff to be the price we pay for free speech. In short, the circulation of porn is a lesser evil, compared to the dangers implicit in censorship.

This view is quite tempting, since it accepts many of the allegations of the anti-porn feminists, while still opposing censorship. But it is still a problematic perspective. After all, what is it that makes pornography different from other types of representation? Why is it singled out for such harsh treatment? Why does it occupy such a low rung in our cultural hierarchies? Is it because it is often sexist?

Hardly, since so are most of the culturally prestigious representations within our culture, from literary works to soap operas. Is it because women or men may be harassed, exploited in the process of producing it? But – while conditions vary from country to country – this is equally true of most activities under capitalism, from the office to the sweatshop floor. Or because porn commodifies aspects of human culture? But surely capitalism does that with all our needs and passions.

Don't censor, criticise!

Pornography is sexual. It is a representation which seeks to sexually excite us. That, not the sexism it shares with the rest of our sexist culture, is what makes it different. That is why the right hates it. And it is precisely porn's sexual characteristic which makes it a legitimate aspect of our culture. If sex and sexual pleasure are valuable aspects of our humanity, then porn's intended effect – sexual arousal – is at least as legitimate and valuable as the effects – laughter, tears, tension, relaxation, indignation, aesthetic enjoyment – generated by non-sexual film, photography and writing.

We criticise what we find objectionable in all of those other forms of representation, but we do not wish to abolish them. Unless sexual excitement is evil, our attitude to porn should not be any different. Similarly, the fact that capital commodifies leisure does not lead us to support attempts to extend the working day, but rather to defend our free time from the encroachments of capital, while seeking to transform it. If capital, for its own reasons, in some cases has extended the public space for the circulation of (commodified) sexual representations, it should not be our objective to close that space, but to defend it against the censors, while struggling to free it from its subordination (in terms of the products, the conditions of their production, etc.) to the needs of capital and the imperatives of the market.

It is of course true that representations which seek to sexually excite have a bad name. But it should be our objective to defy that. The low regard in which they are held is not due to the sexism, which

we must criticise, but to the precarious legitimacy of sexuality itself. It is with fear, shame and guilt that we (above all, women) are still taught to relate to things sexual. Sexuality is still the realm of dirty, sinful, immoral, shameful impulses. After all, according to our obscenity laws (in Puerto Rico and the US), “artistic, religious and literary value” can save a work (no matter how offensive to the public) from being banned as obscene. Not so with sexual value. The law does not recognise such a thing. Sexually exciting content is, by itself, considered worthless, a second-class citizen, a sort of undocumented alien that can only naturalise itself and become part of our culture by marrying some “higher” value.

This is another problem with the porn/erotica distinction, beyond the futility of the exercise. Why should we even try to segregate sexually explicit materials that we consider sexist as a special category (porn), if we don't do the same with sexist non-sexual dramas, comedies, etc. even when we criticise their sexism? To do so is to again single out certain representations not because they are sexist, but because they are sexual. In other words, in debating right-wing censors we have found it impossible to introduce the porn/erotica distinction without dragging anti-sex prejudices into our struggle against sexism. Defending pornography helps us fight those prejudices, while struggling against sexism. ★

Notes

The authors present their views in more detail in “Puerto Rico: ¿zona libre de sexo?” *Nómada*, 2 Oct. 1995. Other useful reading includes: Lynne Segal, “False Promises: Anti-Pornography Feminism,” *Socialist Register*, 1993; Raquel Osborne, *La construcción sexual de la realidad* (Catedra, 1993); F.M. Christensen, “Invitación a la violencia: la evidencia,” *Debate feminista*, March 1994; Marcia Pally, *Sex and Sensibility* (Ecco, 1994); articles by Snitow, Califia, Hunter, Willis, Duggan, Vance in *Caught Looking* (Long River, 1995); Sallie Tisdale, *Talk Dirty to Me* (Doubleday, 1994); Pat Califia, *Public Sex* (Cleiss, 1994); Lynn Hunt, ed., *The Invention of Pornography* (Zone, 1993); John D'Emilio, *Making Trouble* (Routledge, 1992); Wendy McElroy, *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography* (St. Martin's, 1995). There is still much to learn from Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Beacon, orig. 1955) particularly Part II, “Beyond the Reality Principle.”



Caribbean conservatives

Pornography is not only attacked by some feminists. It is also opposed by conservative and religious forces: the worst enemies of women's rights.

In the US colony of Puerto Rico, the question of censorship and pornography was brought centre-stage not by anti-porn feminists, but through a crusade of influential Church and right-wing groups against the “three horsemen of immorality” – abortion, gays and pornography.

Under the flag of moral regeneration, the colonial government has – among other things – introduced prayer in public

schools, turned campaigns against AIDS into campaigns against sex, tried to close down abortion clinics, and harassed gay/lesbian clubs.

Conservative groups have opposed university courses on gay literature. And the Police “Vice Squad,” has tried to close down the only store on the island which sells sexually explicit materials.

The Fourth Internationalist group *Taller de Formación Política* has emphasised the need to oppose censorship on the island. They have also defended pornography, for the reasons set out by the authors above. [NH/RB] ★

Interview with Diana Russell Violence, pornography and women-hating

Civil rights attorney Ann E. Menasche, a member of The US group Solidarity, spoke to Dianna Russell, author of numerous books on the subject of violence against women: rape (including wife rape), incest, femicide (the misogynist murder of women), and pornography.

In *Against Pornography*, you attempt to establish a link between pornography and violence against women. How do you define pornography?

As material that combines sex and/or the exposure of genitals with abuse or degradation in a manner that appears to endorse, condone or encourage such behaviour. I conceptualise pornography as both a form of hate speech and as discrimination against women.

Can you give some examples of what you consider pornographic?

The magazine *Hustler* [widely available in N.America and Europe] has published the following:

- A cartoon showing a jackhammer inserted into a woman's vagina with a caption referring to this as "a cure for frigidity."
- A cartoon of a woman being ground up in a meat grinder.
- Photos and descriptions of a woman being gang raped on a pool table, described as an erotic turn-on for the woman.
- A cartoon of a husband dumping his wife in a garbage can with her naked buttocks sticking out from the can.
- A cartoon of a father with a tongue in his daughter's ear and his hands in her pants, again as an erotic turn-on.
- A cartoon of a boss having sex with his secretary while beckoning his colleagues to come into the room to have sex with her also, with the caption referring to this as her "Christmas bonus."
- And even pictures of dead, decapitated women with amputated bodies, as well as severed nipples and clitorises.

In each of these examples, *Hustler* editor Larry Flynt jokes about rape, battery, sexual harassment, incest, torture, mutilation and death, and presents this violence as sexy.

How do you feel about erotica?

I define erotica as sexually suggestive or arousing material that is free of sexism,

racism, and homophobia, and respectful of all human beings and animals portrayed.

I find nothing degrading about explicit portrayals of sex *per se*, though erotica can of course be much broader than that. Even the peeling of an orange can be filmed to make it erotic.

How do you respond to people who say it is impossible to obtain a consensus: that "one person's erotica is another person's pornography?"

There is no consensus on the definitions of many phenomena. Rape is one example. Legal definitions of rape vary considerably in different states. Similarly, millions of court cases have revolved around arguments as to whether a killing constitutes murder or manslaughter. Lack of consensus should not automatically mean that pornography cannot be subject to opprobrium or legal restraint, or that we cannot examine its effects.

You state in *Against Pornography* that pornography is one of multiple causes of men raping women, other causes being male sex role socialisation, sexual abuse in childhood and peer pressure. Could you give a few of examples of the research that supports the view that pornography plays a role in causing sexual violence?

First, there is the experiment by Malamuth in which he shows that being exposed to some typical violent pornography will change those men who weren't force-oriented to begin with into having rape fantasies that they didn't previously have.¹

Second, there is the research that shows that pornography undermines the inhibitions of those who already have some desire to rape. For example, the work of Zillmann and Bryant shows that repeated exposure to pornography for a four-week period increased men's trivialisation of rape, increased their callousness towards women, made them more likely to say that rape was the responsibility of the victim and that it was not a serious offence, and increased their estimate of the likelihood that they would rape a woman if they could get away with it.²

Perhaps most important of all is James Check's work making comparisons between the effect on men viewing violent pornography, degrading pornography and erotica in an experimental situation.

Check found that the violent material had the most negative effect, the degrading material had the next most negative effects, and the other sexual material had no negative effects at all. The negative effects he documented included an increase



in the self-reported likelihood that the men would actually act out a rape.³

Katha Pollitt, writing in *The Nation* disputed that pornography caused real life harm to women. Pollitt wrote, "any serious discussion of texts that cause real life harm to women would have to begin with the Bible and the Koran: It isn't porn that drives zealots to fire-bomb abortion clinics or slit the throats of Algerian schoolgirls." How would you respond to that?

Nonsense! None of us are claiming that pornography is the single cause of violence in the world. Also, Pollitt's not even using sexual violence as examples. If Pollitt had looked at my book, *Against Pornography*, and studied the examples of pornography and the research reviewed there, I don't think she could continue to take such a position.

How do you respond to the charge that the approach to fighting pornography advocated by feminists like Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon amounts to censorship that would dangerously restrict free speech?

Dworkin and MacKinnon do not advocate banning or censorship of pornography. What they advocate is that anyone who has been victimised by pornography and can prove it in a court of law should be able to do so. That's not censorship, that's accountability.

It seems that if you make any proposal against pornography, people equate it with censorship. One of MacKinnon and Dworkin's major contributions in this area is to try to recast the debate about porno-



graphy – they maintain that this is not primarily a debate about freedom of speech. It's an issue of discrimination against women.

Discrimination based on sex, race, or sexual orientation is not acceptable and, in some instances, it's illegal. Take sexual harassment, for example. There's a law against sexual harassment, that it constitutes discrimination against women and some men.

Catherine MacKinnon is largely responsible for developing this analysis. She conceptualised sexual harassment in this way. Most people don't protest that the laws against sexual harassment constitute an attack on free speech, that men in the workplace should be able to say whatever they like to women, to proposition them and talk about their breasts, and ask them about their genitals and whatever, as an exercise of their freedom of speech.

It is recognised that such behaviour, even though it involves speech, is not acceptable, that it's discrimination and it's abuse of power and it makes a hostile environment against women. Even the display of pornography in the workplace is considered to contribute to a hostile environment and is therefore against the law.

We are making a similar argument, that pornography outside the workplace also makes for a hostile environment, a dangerous environment because it promotes rape and other forms of sexual violence.⁴

Given that this controversy exists, do you think it is helpful to discuss what one thinks about pornography separately from one's position on what should be done about it?

Yes, I think it's imperative! I try to insist that people not start discussing what to do about it before they've discussed if it is damaging or not. If it's not damaging, you don't have to do anything about it.

There are people who take the position that pornography is extremely damaging,

but the law isn't the way to handle it. Nikki Craft is one feminist and dedicated activist who takes this stance.

How can someone opposed to censorship but disagreeing with the Dworkin-MacKinnon approach still organise against pornography?

In my book *Making Violence Sexy*, I have a whole section at the end about feminist actions against pornography, none of which constitute censorship or requires the passage of any laws. You can do educational campaigns like the recent campaign against Milos Forman's movie, *The People vs. Larry Flynt*.

We organised press conferences and picket-lines. We were not advocating censorship. We were not even advocating boycotting the movie, although boycotts do not constitute censorship either. Somehow, whenever we express our own First Amendment rights to protest pornography, we're called censors – which is absurd.

I think education is important because half the people who say pornography is fine don't have a clue what they're really talking about. Again and again, we find if you show people what's in pornography, they are shocked, particularly women.

What was the objective of your campaign against the Larry Flynt movie?

Our objective was to educate people about the lies that are told in the movie, to point out the violent and women-hating content of *Hustler* magazine that was completely omitted from the film, and to point out what Larry Flynt is really like, so Milos Forman and Oliver Stone's efforts to turn him into a hero will be undermined.

Flynt himself has said that the film is a massive free advertising campaign for *Hustler* magazine. Since the movie, the circulation of *Hustler* has gone up, in spite of the fact that the movie has not done so well at the box office. I believe it only made about \$20 million, whereas it cost about \$60m. to make. It was expected to be a great success, but this was before feminists began protesting.

Who else has spoken against the movie?

Gloria Steine, and Flynt's own daughter, Tonya, were major actors in the protests. Feminists in New York and in other U.S. cities as well as in other countries also protested the movie.

In Sweden, feminists took a more militant boycott approach and actually did try and stop men from going to the movie. They were very effective and got a lot of news coverage. Women in England also protested the movie when it opened there.

How can we create a world where women are not kept in our places by violence and the threat of violence?

We need to increase the level of consciousness about male violence against

women. We've made some progress in the United States in many areas. For example, sexual harassment is now recognised, it wasn't recognised before. I hope femicide will also become recognised.

The old way of men blaming women for the violence has been challenged by feminists. However, we haven't yet seen a decline in the violence itself.

I often think we would be more effective if women as a gender were more militant in our response. I'm not talking about on an individual level—although I favour that too. But we must join together in organisations to act more militantly, even if those organisations are small four-women ones.

As with pornography, those who are the victims of it, the targets—as Black people are with racist material—really have to be the mobilisers. I think direct action and civil disobedience would be extremely effective for women to use.

We are just a handful of people trying to educate a nation, meanwhile, pornography is a multibillion dollar industry mis-educating people. Though many women have been arrested for peace and civil rights work, very few women appear to be willing to get arrested for feminist causes.

People talk about a war between the sexes, but it's more like a massacre, because women often don't fight back. And we can't all fight our separate battles in our own homes.

Organising together is really the secret; organisation is the answer to making change. As Andrea Dworkin has said, women have been very good at "endurance" but not at "resistance". We must change this. ★

Dianna Russell received the C. Wright Mills Award for outstanding social science research for her book, *The Secret Trauma: Incest in the Lives of Girls and Women* (NY: Basic Books, 1986). She edited an anthology on pornography: *Making Violence Sexy: Feminist Views on Pornography* (NY: Teachers College Press, 1993.) Russell's most recent book is *Against Pornography: the Evidence of Harm* (Berkeley: Russell Publications, 1993). This book can be ordered directly from Russell Publications, 2018 Shattuck Avenue, #118, Berkeley, CA 94704; Cost: \$12.95 plus \$3 postage & handling inside the US, \$8 abroad; Californians add \$1.00 sales tax).

Notes

1. Malamuth, Neil (1981). "Rape fantasies as a function of exposure to violent sexual stimuli," *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 10, 33-47.
2. Zillman, Dolf & Bryant, Jennings (1984). "Effects of massive exposure to pornography." In Neil Malamuth & Edward Donnerstein (eds.), *Pornography and Sexual Aggression* (New York: Academic Press) 115-138.
3. Check, James & Guloiien, Ted (1989). "Reported proclivity for coercive sex following repeated exposure to sexually violent pornography, non-violent dehumanizing pornography & erotic." In Dolf, Zillman and Jennings, Bryant (eds.), *Pornography: Recent Research Interpretations and Policy Consideration* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum) 159-184.
4. Russell is correct that First Amendment issues are complex, often involving the balancing of other rights, and that freedom of speech cannot and should not be held to be absolute. In my view, however, the Dworkin-MacKinnon ordinance, at least its cause of action against trafficking in pornography (which is essentially a cause of action for group defamation that any woman may enforce) gives too much power to the courts to determine and suppress (through injunctions or large damage awards) depictions of sexuality that the courts deem unacceptable. It is easy to imagine a scenario of a right-wing woman going to court claiming that non-violent lesbian erotica, or health education books like *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, are "degrading" and "hurt" women. [AM]

The sex censors

Cathy Crosson reviews *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights*, by Nadine Strossen (Scribner, 1995), US\$22.

For the past decade and a half, US feminism has been mired in its divisive "sex wars" over the pornography issue. In reporting that essentially sterile but politically important debate, the mainstream media have often advanced the censorship agenda of Catharine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin as "the" feminist position. For reasons that are hardly enigmatic, the anti-porn crusaders have become darling ideologues: they espouse a deeply conservative analysis of gender politics, and they pose authoritarian "solutions" to the problems women face. The gender-hatred and anti-sexuality pervading their work have repelled many who therefore misguidedly reject feminism entirely; the censorial climate they have fostered has caused untold harm. "MacDworkinism" has proved eminently useful to the powers-that-be, destructive and discrediting to feminism.

It is of course doubtful that this position has ever really predominated among feminists. Underplayed in the press, groups like the Feminist Anti-Censorship Taskforce and Feminists for Free Expression have always posed a strong counterpoint. And there has recently emerged a highly visible renaissance of careful feminist thinking about pornography and censorship.

Nadine Strossen's *Defending Pornography*, a lucid and entertaining polemic which by all rights should leave no one floundering in the swamp of censorship politics, argues compellingly that the Mac-Dworkinite road to censorship is a disastrous one, particularly for women. *Defending Pornography* performs two essential tasks – it brilliantly exposes MacDworkinism as the reactionary doctrine it is, and articulates the reasons why feminists and socialists should pay close attention to these issues.

Herstory repeats itself

The one shortcoming of this otherwise comprehensive treatment of the pornography debate is its failure to explain the historical and political context, to which Strossen alludes only in passing. In the late 1970s and early '80s, feminism along with other progressive movements hit a wall. Having previously held out great promises of reform, capitalism was no longer willing or able to accommodate women's demands for progress toward equality. Defeat followed defeat: federal funds for abortion were axed; the ERA died on the vine; women who had made it into good jobs fast discovered the glass

ceilings and the "mommy track;" those who didn't became statistics in studies decrying the "feminisation of poverty."

The hopeful women activists of the '60s and early '70s began to retreat, perhaps finding professional niches in women's studies programs or abused women's shelters, but constantly facing conservatising pressures to limit their demands. In the resulting vacuum of despair, MacDworkinism surfaced, with its retrograde analysis of women's oppression and its purportedly "radical" prescriptions for change. Indeed, one of the worst effects of the anti-sex brigade is that it has successfully sold itself as "radical." In fact, as Strossen concludes, "the pro-censorship feminist philosophy is a carbon copy of the right-wing view of sexuality and gender roles."

Strossen observes cogently that the very familiarity of MacDworkinism's underlying assumptions, with their roots in religious and other conservative ideologies, subliminally enhances what film critic Marcia Pally in her book *Sex and Sensibili* calls "the great soothing appeal of censorship." MacDworkinism evokes not only the Anti-Sex League of Orwell's prescient *1984*, but also Puritanism and, of greatest historical relevance, the conservative wing of Victorian feminism.

Victorian values

The current tempest over pornography mirrors a similar schism in the "first wave" of feminism. The "Redstockings" included such trailblazing pro-sex feminists as Victoria Woodhull, the early Margaret Sanger, and Emma Goldman, who defied, resisted, and on a good day aspired to overthrow the state. The "Bluestockings," in contrast, variously sought succour from a state they presumed to be beneficent, and in a bolder mood, aspired to become its agents. Their politics were elitist and centred on the right to vote, for which they often appealed on anti-immigrant grounds.

The reforms they sought through the existing state predominantly took the form of protective morals legislation. "Bluestockings" campaigned for essentially repressive anti-vice measures regarding prostitution, alcohol, and the like, helping to create a climate of opinion that facilitated passage of the Comstock laws, criminalising both "obscenity" and the distribution of contraceptives and information about abortion-laws which were then used to haul Redstocking sisters Sanger and Goldman off to jail. (Today the pro-censorship climate MacDworkinism has nurtured has helped to reincarnate the Comstock laws in the Communications Decency Act, criminalising Internet discussions of abortion and other such "indecency.")

In the most striking aspect of this historical parallel, the Bluestockings cut their political teeth in the Temperance movement, locating in "demon rum" a male vice they deemed a central factor in women's oppression. Drink was the ruin of the lower classes, the bane of women whose husbands beat them and drank up the family's wages. Precisely as MacDworkinism sees pornography as a central institution of women's oppression, the Bluestockings seized upon this "male vice" of alcoholism. Just why was it that working class men drank, after twelve-hour days in the mines and factories? Such questions were too threatening, so instead the elite reformers blamed the oppressed.

The "second wave" of feminism, from the late 1960s to the present, has replicated this ideological division almost exactly. It came in like a lioness of radical opposition to gender and other hierarchies, took on a vital popular character in the living rooms where we brainstormed liberation in "consciousness raising" sessions, demonstrated endlessly and militantly for abortion rights, and spawned a radical autonomous women's health movement.

The pro-sex faction was prominent if not predominant, with feminist writers meditating on the importance of sexual liberation under titles such as *The Myth of the Vaginal Orgasm* that today sound oddly anachronistic. (And even if one were not afraid of seeming hopelessly dated, MacKinnon's sexual harassment hydra has made it dangerous to discuss such matters in university classrooms.)

Under the sway of contemporary Bluestockings, mainstream feminism has become a non-threatening lamb. Rather than asking the hard questions, and challenging the structural causes of sexism in the gender division of labour and profoundly hierarchical social relations, the MacDworkinites again locate women's oppression in a noxious male vice, and offer us the panacea of repression. Once pornography is defined as "the problem," the solution is easy: repression through the authority of the state. Of course, that solution is most convivial to those who would preserve the existing social order.

MacDworkinism and its discontents

Catharine MacKinnon began her career as a legal theorist of sexual harassment in the workplace. That theory started off helpfully enough, identifying sexual demands at work as a form of gender discrimination. Unfortunately, MacKinnon was quick to capitalise on the responsive chord she had struck as a crusader against male sexual aggression and as champion of women-as-victims. She was soon running amok with sidekick Dworkin, who writes prolific non-fiction and tendentious novels which are themselves grotesquely pornographic in their rabid anti-sexuality.

One valuable contribution of *Defending Pornography* is Strossen's compendium of MacDworkin's repellent views in their own words, which reveal not only a deep-seated anti-sexuality but also the

gender-hatred that closely follows. In her recent book *Only Words*, for example, MacKinnon compares men to attack dogs, arguing that exposing men to pornography is "like saying 'kill' to a trained guard dog." Dworkin exudes hatred of men at every turn: "every woman's son is her potential betrayer and also the inevitable rapist or exploiter of another woman."

Sex is death

Heterosexual intercourse, Dworkin maintains, is "a bitter personal death. It means remaining the victim, forever annihilating all self-respect." Her book "Pornography", maintains that "fucking is inherently sadistic," and decries the "pornography of pregnancy": "Pregnancy is the confirmation that the woman has been fucked... punishment for her participation in sex."

MacKinnon postures as the "good cop" of the two, the more respectable, well-dressed law professor, but she too consistently equates consensual intercourse with rape. "Compare victim's reports of rape with women's reports of sex," she admonishes. "They look a lot alike... [T]he major distinction between intercourse (normal) and rape (abnormal) is that the normal happens so often that one cannot get anyone to see anything wrong with it."

Poor Andrea and Catharine, frustrated to madness by women's opacity on this count, heap scorn on the benighted women who actually believe they enjoy sex with men. According to Dworkin, such women are "collaborators, more base in their collaboration than other collaborators have ever been, experiencing pleasure in their own inferiority." MacKinnon likewise compares feminists who oppose censorship with "house niggers who sided with the masters." She insists that women who believe they exercise sexual agency are manifesting "false consciousness"—they are merely denying the "unspeakable humiliation" of having been "cajoled, pressured, tricked, blackmailed, or outright forced into sex."

Apparently deeming it imprudent to agitate for the criminalisation of sex itself, Dworkin and MacKinnon have concentrated their efforts on censoring pornography, which they expressly define as the central institution of women's oppression. Their activism has consisted largely of sponsoring their infamous anti-porn ordinances, which have been roundly defeated, primarily because of feminist opposition.

Guess who gets censored most?

In a smoke-screen of verbiage, they have tried to suggest that they advocate censoring only materials that "subordinate" or "degrade" women. But because they view sex itself as inherently degrading to women, they essentially mean all sexual materials, even feminist erotica. MacKinnon has explicitly stated that she would suppress all materials suggesting that women "desire to be fucked," a criterion that as Strossen points out unques-

tionably mandates the censorship of many feminist novels and other frequent targets of right-wing censorship campaigns, such as *The Joy of Sex* and *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

Unhappily, MacDworkinism has not entirely failed to implement its program. In 1991, MacKinnon and her Canadian followers entered a censorship case to urge the Canadian Supreme Court to adopt their expansive, amorphous definition of "obscenity" as sexual material "degrading to women."

The results of the ensuing decision in "Butler v. The Queen" were swift: obscenity raids immediately and exclusively targeted gay and lesbian bookstores across Canada, seizing materials like the radical lesbian journals *On Our Backs* and *Bad Attitude*. Customs officials launched a censorship spree, and eventually seized Dworkin's own books *Pornography* and *Woman Hating*, along with works by Marguerite Duras, Langston Hughes, Oscar Wilde, and numerous other acclaimed authors.

This outcome was entirely predictable, if not intended. Confronted with the practical effects of her doctrine in Canada, MacKinnon responded, "Big surprise." Dworkin actually applauded the criminal conviction of the Glad Day Bookstore, because "Lesbian porn is an expression of self-hatred." As Strossen reports in chilling detail, it is hardly surprising that MacDworkin would endorse such censorship; they themselves have often acted directly to suppress pro-sex feminist works.

When pressed to define her "political programme," MacKinnon responds that it consists simply of "stopping rape." Other than censoring pornography, she has little to offer by way of analysis of the preconditions for doing so, or for women's freedom and equality more generally. She pays lip service to abortion rights, but in the same breath criticises the availability of abortion as "facilitating women's heterosexual availability" and "freeing male aggression" by removing one of the few "legitimised reasons women had for refusing sex."

[...]

The other issues

The preoccupation with pornography has also diverted feminist activism and public discourse from the real causes of violence and inequality. Strossen emphasises that blaming pornographic images diverts attention from the actual perpetrators of violence. That may be true, but more importantly, the censorship strategy has diverted the women's movement from constructive struggles for reproductive freedom, welfare rights, etc.

The pornography debacle has driven deep wedges among feminists, and has weakened the women's movement by alienating many women who cannot relate to a perceived ethos of anti-sexuality, gender antagonism, and victimhood. To the extent that it has convinced women to

conceive of themselves as victims, to live in constant dread of male violence and aggression, rather than thinking of ourselves as the agents of our own liberation, it has been profoundly disempowering.

Finally, the politics of censorship works all this harm without achieving any positive good, because it is empirically false that sexual materials cause violence and sexism in any important sense. No reputable scientific evidence supports such a causal link. The cross-cultural evidence against the notion that pornography causes violence and discrimination is particularly compelling.

Reality is complicated

Strossen cites numerous studies indicating that if anything, censorship of sexual expression correlates negatively with gender equality. Saudi Arabia strictly bans pornography, and China, where death sentences are imposed for trafficking in pornography and women are subjected to forced abortions, is hardly a model of women's liberation. On the other hand, the cultures most tolerant of erotic materials—such as Denmark and Sweden—have achieved greater gender equality than any of the more sexually repressive societies in the West.

Naturally, pornography reflects the larger culture, and some of it projects images that are troubling in their often very sexist and racist overtones. Other pornographic materials, especially gay and lesbian erotica, are consciously iconoclastic and subversive (and of course these are the materials the state will target for censorship).

As Noam Chomsky has pointed out, whatever "harm" some pornography may be charged with, its effects (on women in particular) are surely insignificant compared with the effects of the continual barrage of sexist, racist, imperialist propaganda that spews forth from the mainstream, non-sexual media.

In large part, our response to the problems MacDworkinism poses for feminism should be to participate in and build the currents of feminism that work in more constructive directions. But many women are influenced by these ideas put to them as "the" feminist position, and we need to be able to articulate to them why MacDworkinism is reactionary. (In my experience, MacDworkinism tends to have a loose grip among young feminists, who often abandon those views quickly when confronted with the historical record and the other logical and normative arguments, especially these feminist arguments, against censorship.)

[...]

Meanwhile, Strossen's clear-sighted analysis provides a welcome arsenal of arguments in favour of a more democratic, liberatory feminism. ★

* Cathy Crosson is a member of the Bloomington chapter of Solidarity and teaches law at Indiana University.

A tradition in the making

The organised support of women relatives of strikers has been a key element in Britain's longest and most determined strikes.

Terry Conway

Conservative media have typically tried to use the conservative pressure of women isolated in the home or taking responsibility for the 'family budget' to pressurise 'their' men not to strike or to stop striking. The development of women's support groups, primarily composed of women who are relatives of those on strike, poses an important challenge to the way the ruling class tries to attack militant action by workers.

This article looks at the role of women during the 1984 Miner's strike, the Liverpool Dock's Strike of 1995-1998 and the current strike at the Magnet furniture factory in Darlington, a dispute that started in 1996.

The 1984/5 Miners Strike

The Miner's strike of 1984 was a turning point in British politics. Since her election as Prime Minister in 1979, Margaret Thatcher had wasted little time in attacking working people in every way she could. The massive programme of pit closures was critical for her government. The strike was to be the central issue of British politics. The stakes were understood by the majority of members of the National Union of Miners (NUM) who saw that what was at stake was the loss of the thousands upon thousands of jobs and the devastation of entire communities in the many areas where the pit was the centre of local life.

The formation of women's support groups happened soon after the start of the strike on March 9 1984. Women were angry at the way the media depicted them as being opposed to the action - supposedly victims of the irresponsible behaviour of the National Union of Mine Workers (NUM) in taking strike action.

The press played on the fact that support for the strike was weak in the Nottinghamshire area, and managed to identify women there who were urging their husbands to go to work. With this ammunition they ran headlines on this issue on the third day of the dispute - implying that all women wanted the strike called off.

This so enraged a group of five women in Barnsley, Yorkshire, that they wrote a letter to the local paper. "We realise that miners and their families will endure hardships during the strike and that no-one relishes the prospect of mounting bills. However those same sacrifices were made by our forefathers who gave their lives to

the industry and struggled to protect jobs and improve conditions. Let us take their example and stand firmly together to ensure the future of our community. We wish to object to the assumption made in some sections of the press that all miner's wives oppose the decision to strike."

The letter was printed in the paper by a sympathetic reporter - with an invitation for those who agreed with its views to get in touch. Within two weeks the group had mushroomed to two dozen, within a few more weeks hundreds of women had made contact.

Similar patterns were being played out across the different coal fields. As well as writing to the press, the groups were kept busy. Many set up emergency advice centres to help miners' wives and children claim benefits if they were not working, as the strikers themselves were not eligible. Then there was fund-raising, organising meetings and demonstrations, speaking at meetings - and of course picketing.

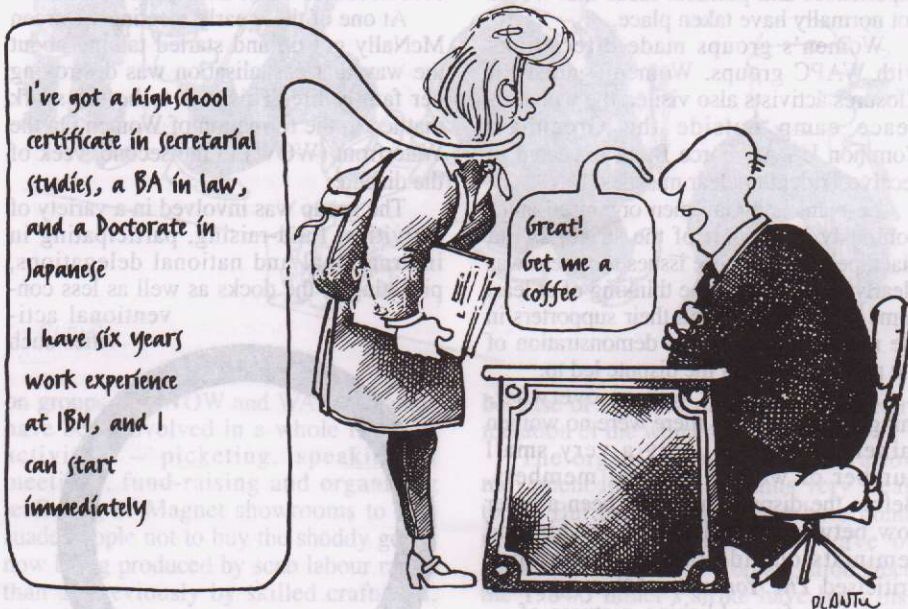
One of the focal points for many was the organisation of a village soup kitchen. The need for such activity was highly practical - the desperate shortage of funds to sustain a long fight. In many areas there was overwhelming support for the strike not only from trade unionists but from

being part of a large group catering for hundreds of meals a day was very different from providing a meal in the isolation of your own kitchen for 'your' man. And you didn't have to worry how you were going to pay for the ingredients! Women were able to talk to each other and to the men much more freely than before the dispute. Roles began to change in other ways too. Christine from Hoyland explains: "I've seen older men, not usually bothered with children, actually nurse youngsters while their parents eat their meal in peace."

Picketing

At the beginning of the strike, women in most areas didn't consider becoming involved in picketing. But as they gained in confidence, through the other support group activities, they decided to try. One Barnsley woman explained: "At first we were a little nervous at the prospect of standing face to face with thousands of police, and we were unsure of the response we would receive from the men. However... we were welcomed at every pit we visited and quite soon we were joined by women from all over."

Two months into the strike, the bitterness generated by scabs was reaching



local shopkeepers and some factory owners who understood that without the industry their own livelihoods were threatened - and who may have had relatives on strike.

The kitchens became a hive of activity not only for cooking and eating but for discussing how the strike could be furthered. While it was assumed that the cooking was women's responsibility,

fever pitch. Because the police and the scabs had responded a little more tolerantly to the presence of women on the picket line, the idea of a women's mass picket was born.

The miners were certainly enthusiastic to see their unexpected visitors. "You can do things we can't, they won't 'get' you, because you're women," they said. How wrong they were. That day fourteen

women were arrested at two Nottinghamshire pits, including Anne Scargill, wife of Arthur Scargill, General Secretary of the NUM.

One of the enduring images of the strike was the image of a young woman being brutally batoned by a heavily armoured policeman on horseback at the 'Battle of Orgreave', one of the bitterest battles between the strikers and their supporters and the police.

These different activities had a profound impact on the women involved. Some women in the more isolated coal fields might never have left their village before the strike, but during it they travelled to meetings in different parts of the country and spoken in front of audiences of strangers. A large proportion of the women involved were not involved in paid work and had taken total responsibility for the home and children. Now they were travelling to meetings or pickets and the men had to take their share of responsibility at home. The effect of these changes was varied – some relationships changed for the better, and others buckled under the strain.

Contacts with the women's movement

One of the unusual features of the dispute was the development of twinning – the linking of a particular pit with either a local area support group or a particular trade union branch. Thousands of activists, mainly from the large cities, travelled to mining areas, often on a regular basis. Many became firm friends with people in these areas and there was an exchange of experiences and political ideas that would not normally have taken place.

Women's groups made direct links with WAPC groups. Women against Pit Closures activists also visited the women's peace camp outside the Greenham Common US Air Force Base, expected to receive Trident nuclear missiles.

Lesbians and Gay men organised autonomously in support of the strike, as did black people. On these issues too there was clearly movement in the thinking of at least some of the strikers and their supporters in the mining areas – a real demonstration of the political ferment the dispute led to.

The NUM itself was an overwhelmingly male union – there were no women miners in Britain, only a very small number of women clerical members. Before the dispute there had been a bitter row between the NUM leadership and feminists outside the union who had criticised *The Yorkshire Miner*, a union newspaper, for publishing pictures of scantily clad women. Arthur Scargill and his 'comrades' in the leadership of the Yorkshire NUM dismissed this criticism out of hand.

But by the end of the strike, the "Page three girl" had disappeared – and 'Women against Pit Closures' (WAPC) had been accepted into associate membership of the NUM. The involvement of women at the centre of the

dispute had other ramifications too. It certainly made it harder for the Thatcherite press to attack the strike as being led by macho men.

The Liverpool Dockers Strike

The defeat of the Miners strike in 1985 had profound effects. It strengthening the Thatcher regime and weakening worker's confidence to take action to defend their rights or their jobs. However when the situation began to shift it was to become clear that at least some of the lessons of the miners' strike had been taken to heart elsewhere.

In September 1995 500 men were sacked by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) for refusing to cross a picket line of sacked colleagues at the nearby Torside port. Both these disputes had been engineered by the employers, who wanted to return to casual labour hiring procedures.

Since 1989, when the Tories had abolished the national dock labour scheme, there had been mass sackings in most of the other great ports of England. Liverpool was the last bastion of a once great industry with a proud tradition of union organisation – it had to be smashed.

Some women had been attending the mass meetings from the beginning of the dispute, obviously anxious to know what was going on. This fact is presented in most histories of the strike without comment – but it is certainly unusual in most British strikes for 'outsiders' to be present at mass meetings. This demonstrates the relatively high political and democratic consciousness of the Liverpool dockers.

At one of these early meetings, Doreen McNally got up and started talking about the way that casualisation was destroying her family life. This was to be the spark that led to the formation of Women On the Waterfront (WOW) in the second week of the dispute.

The group was involved in a variety of activities; fund-raising, participating in international and national delegations, picketing at the docks as well as less conventional activities such

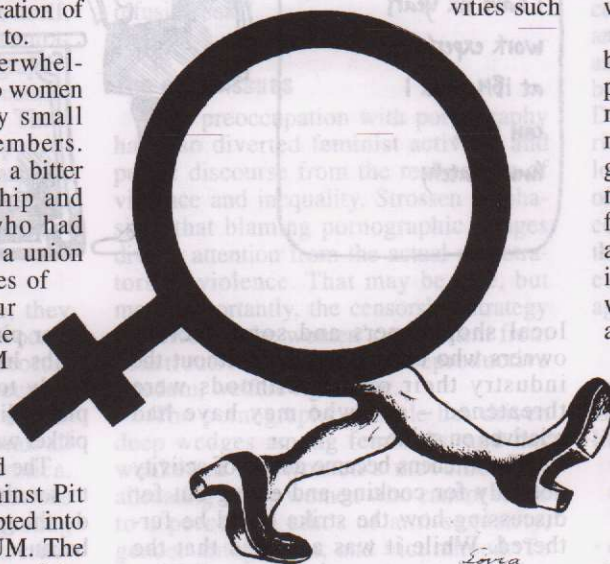
as taking actions outside the homes of scabs and senior members of the MDHC.

The dockers themselves, at a theoretical level at least, were supportive of the move to set up a women's support group. "I already knew about the tremendous role that women had played in the Miner's strike and other struggles in this country," says Jimmy Nolan, Secretary of the Shop Stewards Committee. "The women... have made a tremendous contribution to our struggle."

The first WOW meeting was attended by sixty women, who heard two women from Women Against Pit Closures talk about their experiences during the miners' strike. They set up a committee and held weekly meetings as well as running their own office. Their meetings were attended by a steward who kept them informed of what was going on while a number of them attended the dockers' mass meetings which had a standing item of a report back from WOW. Women's activity was seen as an integral part of the strike.

Probably a higher percentage of women involved in WOW had paid jobs than the women involved in the Miners strike. Doreen McNally, often WOW spokeswoman, is a nurse. She explains her own history: 'My father was badly injured on the docks and I think that was part of the reason I went into nursing. At that time there was no union for nurses only the Royal College of Nurses (a professional body, hostile to strikes and unions) which you could join when you qualified. My father had always been a strong trade unionist and believed everyone should be in a union so he contacted someone in NUPE (the National Union of Public Employees, now part of UNISON) and we arranged a meeting with some colleagues. I was one of the first nurses in Liverpool to join a real union.' Nevertheless for all those involved there was a massive change in their horizons, their self confidence. Joan says: 'if anyone had told me that I would be addressing meetings all over the country I would have said "not me" but you have so much anger at what they have done that you don't think about it. You want to tell people the truth'.

Sue explains what the strike has meant both for her and her relationship with her partner "The dispute has changed me dramatically... Before I was content being a mother and a housewife but now I want to go out into the world, I think I've found myself again and when the dispute finishes I want to stay politically active and get a job. There has also been changes in Colin's and my relationship. Before we were very traditional – he went to work and earned the money and I took charge of the house and the housekeeping. Now this has changed. Colin is much more involved at home – he has to be because I'm away so much. He takes the budget, cooks meal and looks after the house. Now we share our roles and are both very supportive of each others union, political and outside activities."



Not just at the weekends

Individual dockers reacted differently. Billy admits: "Personally at first I wasn't too keen on the idea of there being an active women's group... but that soon changed... the women have been vitally important to us... Prior to the dispute I suppose I would be what you would call an old fashioned male chauvinist. I always thought that the place for women was in the home, looking after the kids, which is a hard enough job..." Another striker, Keith, comments; "I'd never been in the kitchen before... I can use a tin opener now! I make the beds and vacuum-clean the carpets during the week, not just at the weekends."

The parallels with many of the comments made and situations described by those involved in the miners' strike are clear. But there are important differences. Some are clearly a function of the differences between the two disputes. The dockers dispute is much smaller and more isolated than the miner's strike was. The general level of confrontation between workers, employers and the state has been less intense and there has been much less generalised support from a range of groups in society. The dispute is confined to one geographical area - the Port of Liverpool where the miners' strike had a much wider spread.

The financial situation has also been very different. In Liverpool the men were sacked so were eligible for benefits much more easily than the striking miners. In the miners' strike the whole union was taking action and financial resources were hugely stretched - whereas the Liverpool dockers comprised a tiny proportion of the TGWU, which did give some financial support, though not official backing.

Much of the focus of the dockers' Shop Stewards throughout the dispute has been on international solidarity - resulting in some dramatically successful days of action in ports across the globe. But there was little focus on fighting for action within the TGWU. All of these features set partial limits on the development of WOW.

There were other differences too. The British women's movement in general was much weaker in 1995 than in 1984. There were fewer direct links therefore between WOW and women's groups than during the time of WAPC. This impacted on the level of political discussion that women involved in the dock's dispute had access to.

And while women's activity was integrated into the Liverpool dispute, in some ways their profile was not as high during the miner's strike. So for example on the second anniversary demonstration, Doreen McNally from WOW was the only woman on a platform of over 20 speakers - and spoke last.

Only time will tell the extent to which the lives of the women involved in the dock strike have been irrevocably altered by the dispute. Although WOW was capable of mobilising significant numbers of women for its activities such as family

pickets, the activists who regularly attend the meetings and are involved in delegation work represent a minority of the dockers' wives, partners and families. It is only within these, the most involved, that we could expect to see the substantial changes in confidence, attitudes and lives that occurred during and after the miners' strike. Though, of course, the experience and consciousness of women involved in solidarity movements is as complex and varied as that of the strikers themselves.

Despite this unevenness, the involvement of women in the Liverpool dock strike suggests that something significant has changed in British politics.

The Magnet strike

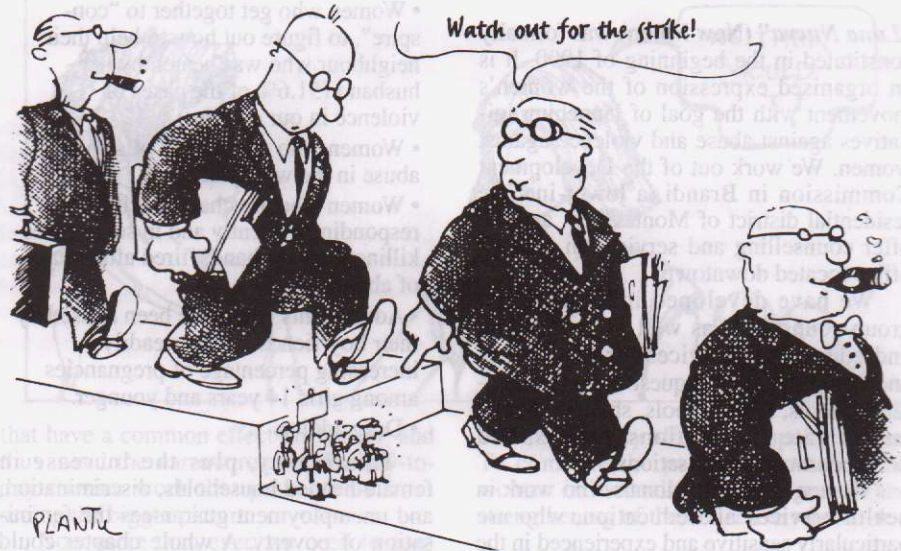
Our final example of a women's support group relates to the current strike at the Magnet furniture factory in Darlington, in the North East of England. 340 workers were sacked in September 1996 for going on strike for a modest pay rise. The strikers, mostly men, belong to a range of different unions which have formally supported the dispute but done nothing effective to help win it.

According to Ian Crammond, Secretary of the strike committee, a women's support group was quickly set up, based

port Group explains some of the things that have motivated her and others to get involved: "I have three children of my own in their 20's and I'm extremely lucky they are all working. What Magnet have done - I'm terrified the same thing could be done to them... When you take men's jobs away their whole self esteem and self worth collapses. The motivation goes out of your family life; you loose your security; and the knock on effects for the whole town is less money, less prospects and more poverty. There's enough poverty in Darlington already - we don't need any more... We're not going to take much more of this..."

Like in the other disputes we have looked at, the involvement of women in the dispute at Magnet has often been a morale booster for the strikers, with the women's determination and sense of humour raising confidence when spirits have been low. In some families, the women have become more involved than the men - with big implications for the division of labour in the family.

The Magnet dispute continues. Whether the formation of the women's support group in the end contributes to the winning of the strike remains to be tested out. If it is not, it certainly won't be



on groups like WOW and WAPC. Women have been involved in a whole range of activities - picketing, speaking at meetings, fund-raising and organising leafleting of Magnet showrooms to persuade people not to buy the shoddy goods now being produced by scab labour rather than as previously by skilled craftsmen. Like the Liverpool women a favourite occupation has been high profile actions against leading shareholders - in this case Bersfords, the parent company of Magnet. While there is a caravan provided by one of the unions which provides food for the regular pickets - and is staffed by men, this is not sufficient on mass picket days. Then the women's support group produces additional hot food - to the great delight of everyone standing freezing by the gates.

Lynne Fawcett from the Women's Sup-

because of any lack of courage and determination of the women involved.

The organised women's liberation movement in Britain remains very weak today. But many women who have come into contact with this new wave of working class women's organisation since the 1984/5 miner's strike have been inspired by it. The lie has been given to the idea that many of the ideas of feminism - for socialisation of the roles of the family and for equal participation in political life for women - are of no relevance to working class women. The chance for the bosses and for governments to use women as ammunition against strikes in male dominated industries has been seriously weakened. Examining this legacy is a fitting way to mark International Women's Day 1998. ★

This violent world

Violence against women assumes new dimensions when placed in the context of the current economic and social crisis.

The crisis of unemployment and poverty besieges all Latin American countries where the governments brutally apply programmes of "structural adjustment" imposed by international financial organisations.

In this context, women's organisations have seen an increased need to defend women's political, social, economic, and gender rights while at the same time denouncing violence, both domestic and institutional.

Estela Retamoso*

"Luna Nueva" (New Moon) was formally constituted in the beginning of 1990. It is an organised expression of the women's movement with the goal of launching initiatives against abuse and violence against women. We work out of the Development Commission in Brandi, a lower-income residential district of Montevideo, and we offer counselling and services in another office located downtown.

We have developed individual and group counselling as well as counselling and educational services for institutions and companies that request them (elementary schools, high schools, shelters, public and private corporations, unions, and neighbourhood organisations).

Women and professionals who work in health services and education, who are particularly sensitive and experienced in the issues, participate in the workshops and courses we offer. Also participating are women who have been victimised and want to affect change as community activists.

On a theoretical level, we look at violence from different analytical positions, the study of specific situations and possible solutions to characteristic cases, legal aspects, syndromes, and profiles of victims and abusers. On a practical level we use the Rolando Toro System "Biodance" approach to connect with our feelings, self-esteem and self-image, self-defence techniques, desires, dreams, our endogenous humour, and our immunity.

These aspects of our work strengthen the women who seek our services, because they speak to the most intimate of the intimate, to those aspects of their identity that make them vulnerable and possible victims, their capacity to respond, resi-

lience (the ability to survive a crisis situation), the creativity often needed to find a solution, which often depends on attending to these specific questions. We integrate reason into human emotion.

Our goal is to strengthen the place of women by tackling those concerns that are particular to women, like chaos and uncertainty, the search for solutions to complex situations, and continually weaving the fabric of solidarity, of assistance, of "invisible" services between women. These are all old struggles that we as women should confront with new elements.

- Women who obtain food for themselves and families of men who have been arrested for robbery, and illegal activities aimed at survival, since they feel insecure when their men are detained.
- Women who take turns taking care of each others' children, since as women heads-of-household (of which the number is constantly increasing in all social strata) they go to work in turns.
- Women who get together to "conspire", to figure out how to help their neighbour who was beaten by her husband (51.6% of the cases of violence in our country).
- Women who are victims of sexual abuse in the workplace.
- Women who are charged with responding violently and in some cases killing their husbands, tired after years of abuse.
- Adolescents who have been abused by their boyfriends, or the steadily increasing percentage of pregnancies among girls 14 years and younger.
- Drug addicts

This reality, plus the increase in female-headed households, discrimination, and unemployment guarantees the feminisation of poverty. A whole chapter could be devoted to the sexual abuse and mistreatment of children.

Self-help and self-organisation.

From the beginning, one of the principle tasks was and continues to be promoting self-help and forming groups of women to address local and social initiatives against this unjust reality. By this we mean personal self-help in terms of the search for concrete and practical solutions to domestic situations and also the possibility of assisting organisationally. Also the elaboration of physical, verbal, and group responses and self-defence techniques used when faced with violence.

This is the reason we participate in the neighbourhood and social movements rather than only in groups specifically for abused women. It is in these movements that women from different social and even

global situations meet. By doing this, we reflect on our social experience of gender and organise around it, acting on a more general level, as a way to extend the effects of our work and generate other levels of consciousness.

Women, primary targets of violence.

We understand that violence has taken on different guises that adjust to the historic and political situation. Even today, the institutional responses are merely words, not backed up by effective and concrete measures, not even the application of existing legislation.

Violence in relationships, the impact of violence on women's health, sexual abuse against children, domestic violence, violence in the street and in our neighbourhoods, violent rapes, sexual harassment in the workplace... these are all part of a monster so well known to women everywhere.

The massive violence in Latin American countries is used as a form of education, to prepare us for the future. Again, women are an easy target. Paradoxically, these forms of daily violence are what facilitate the future use of violence against women during war. This is what is now occurring in Chiapas, where paramilitary and army massacres mainly target women, most of them pregnant.

Prioritising the collective without disregarding the personal

Our organisation offers collective assistance, and does not attempt to offer personal proposals. We feel assistance should be based on the self-organisation of women, for their domestic and social demands.

Precisely at a time when the women's movement has been weakened, the participation of women in general as well as neighbourhood struggles has been constant, although dispersed. Many movements aimed at survival and self-organisation, as well as neighbourhood struggles and land occupations are co-ordinated by women.

It is also important to note that there has been important progress in the union movement, with new women's caucuses with policies specifically geared to women workers.

The establishment of a tripartite commission in the Labour Ministry (with the aim of bringing labour legislation in line with international agreements, especially those established by the ILO), takes into account the demands formulated by the Women's Commission of the PIT-CNT labour confederation with respect to equal opportunity and against discrimination in the areas of retirement and salaries.

Gender and general struggles.

We are convinced that the headway women have made has been related to and has functioned in conjunction with popular struggles as a whole and that it is necessary to continue to articulate our specific demands within this social activism, without losing our own roles and spaces we have fought to win. Particularly since when an anti-popular social or economic policy is imposed, it is we, as women, who are always in the eye of the storm. Violence then invariably becomes a very effective method of the accompanying repression – because each act of violence sets an example.

The state has played a key role in dismantling the women's movement: assimilating (and distorting) proposals, using economic support measures to its advantage, playing pork-barrel favouritism and co-opting feminist activists who wound up capitulating when faced with the economic crisis and the lack of credibility of alternatives to neoliberal solutions.

The feminist agenda has been reduced to only a few official "acts", with hardly any autonomous proposals. In some neighbourhoods, some isolated activities of organisations like *Luna Nueva* remain. The co-ordination and organisation that characterised past periods has been lost and weakened. Academic scholarship, theoretical discussions, and participation in international conferences has weakened the combative nature of feminist activism engaged with and a part of the popular sectors.

Globalising our demands

In the face of capitalist globalisation and regional integration, it is necessary to integrate the social movements too. To create a common analysis of our demands, of our struggles and resistance, and to share the multicoloured nature of our social, political, and gender experiences. Bringing these experience to bear upon our social activism is essential. It depends on the elaboration of alternative proposals

that have a common effect on society, and thus avoid the narrow road of the day-to-day routine work that prevents us from seeing the bigger picture.

Now more than ever, we need to consolidate the social networks that will allow us to emerge from our isolation, combine our specific demands with those basic demands that have long been unsatisfied

and that directly affect the popular sectors. To combine the personal growth of all women individually with the growth and strengthening of the collective whole. ★

*Estela Retamoso is an organiser, sexologist & educator, specialising in domestic and sexual violence. She is the General Co-ordinator of *Luna Nueva* and a member of the Women's Commission of the Socialist Worker's Party (Uruguayan section of the 4th International)



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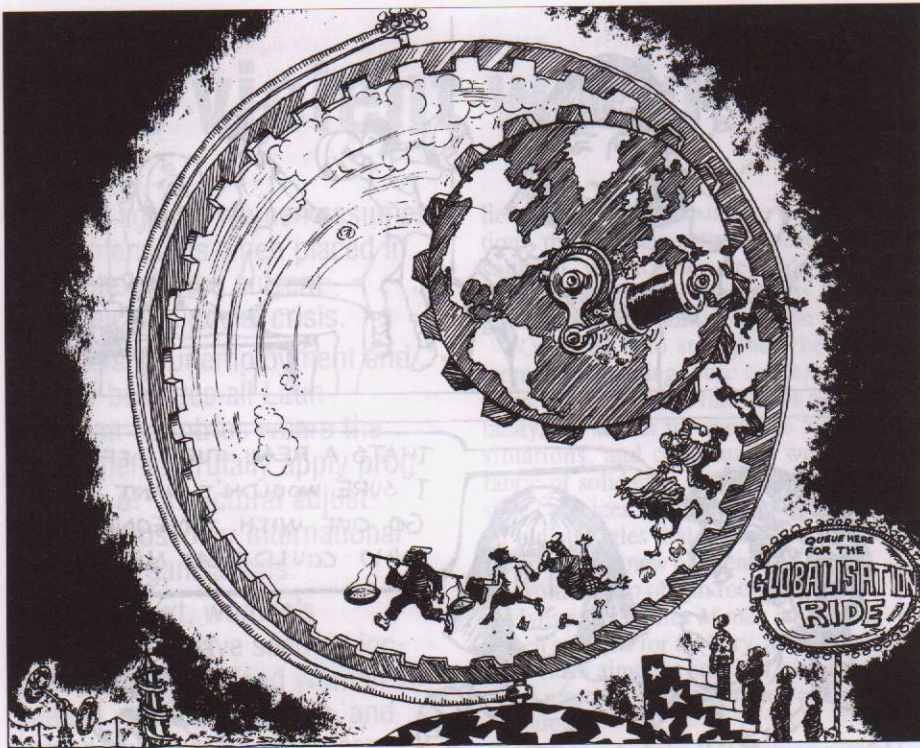


Disney Haiti Justice Campaign

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Against the Buenos Aires Consensus

Last December a group of left and left-of-centre Latin American intellectuals, including Mexican writer Jorge Castañeda, published a document with the grand title "Consensus of Buenos Aires."

"This is the end of neoliberalism, of the Consensus of Washington," claims Castañeda. Full of pretentious phrases like this, the Consensus text lacks concrete suggestions for dealing with unemployment, the indigenous question, dependency on international financial organisations and the United States, globalisation, or the foreign debt.

The document's real intention is clear: updating the programmatic vision of those on the Latin American left who claim a "vocation to govern."

Ernesto Herrera

Talking about Mexico City, writer Juan Villoro has said that "the only well distributed element is panic." He could be describing the dramatic social and economic situation of all Latin America.

"Latin American societies have been unequal from ancient times and divided in countless respects," writes the Consensus text. "In some countries -a minority- poverty decreases although injustice persists. In others -the majority- the number of inhabitants condemned to an ungrateful, unacceptable, indignant existence is on the rise. At the same time, the already abysmal divide separating the poor from the rich broadens, as well as the gap between the city and the countryside, between black and brown people and whites and Creoles, between women and men and between children and the rest of society.

Employment remains stagnant and incomes have been pushed downward, while expenditures in education, health, housing, children, and the future do not compensate for a decades-long decline. Our incipient democracies are constantly threatened by attempted coups, by lean economic results, by the understandable apathy of people overwhelmed by the tasks of daily survival, and by persistent displacement of the roots of whole populations.

The inconclusive formation of our national identities is today aggravated by a merciless process of globalisation, somewhat fictitious and exaggerated by the media, but always destructive of the fragile sovereignties built only in the last century and a half. All of this is what we should revise, improve and reform. In a word, change."

Harsh realities

Careful language and good intentions combine, in a text that almost anyone could sign. But the diagnosis is too lukewarm. Almost 200 million Latin Americans (46% of the population) live in economic misery; 80 million people "live" with less than two dollars daily; up to 20% of the economically active population unemployed, and 50% is under-employed.

Expenditures in housing, health, and education have been reduced in all the countries by the efforts and grace of the international financial organisations which the document does not even mention. Infant mortality, the marginalisation of millions of youth, the exploitation of child labour, prostitution as a strategy of survival, the diseases of poverty (such as cholera) reproduce, without a solution in sight, in the framework of a savagely deregulated capitalism.

The scenario is much more frightening than is portrayed by those left parties with pretensions and possibilities of governing.

Look at Brazil, the largest country in Latin America. There are 15.8 million adolescents (15 to 19 years) of whom one million are illiterate (*Diario Folha de Sao Paulo*, 6/10/97). An estimated 0.83% of landowners control 43% of cultivable land, while 23 million small peasants and agricultural workers live below the poverty line. And while Brazil is one of the world's principal food exporters (in 1996, its crops fed 300 million people world-wide) 32 million Brazilians go hungry every day.

Could anything be revised, improved, reformed, or changed in that country without a radical, anti-capitalist agrarian reform, such as the one the MST (Movement of the Landless) demands? Is it not a "citizen right" of first order that the peasant possess the land he works? And therefore, is it legitimate that he occupy estates and expel the landowners?

And consider the immoral foreign debt crisis. Between 1983 and 1991 Latin America's net capital transfers to the countries of the First World and their bankers were more than 200 billion US dollars — a transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich. Even worse, between 1982 and 1996, Latin America paid \$739bn. servicing its debt, which continues to grow. The proposes a public investment of 30% of GDP "to generate solid social balances." Can that be done while continuing to service the foreign debt, which in some cases equals more than 30% of export earnings?

Compared to the document from the grouping, the declaration of the Catholic Bishop's Synod seems like an ultra-leftist proclamation: "reduction or cancellation of the debt" to reduce "the burden on the poor" and "to prevent the marginalisation of entire regions and countries of the global economy." (*Diario Pagina/12*, Buenos Aires, 12/12/97)

The grouping speaks of a "feasible scaffolding" for building "countries in which there is more justice and solidarity,

which are more free and conscious, in peace with themselves and inserted in a financial, ecological, commercial, and legal framework that is less aggressive and polarising." Without "the prevailing market fundamentalism," but without returning "to populist nationalism or to the semi-autarchic strategy of import substitution."

In a word, it proposes an intermediate road that avoids the following dilemma: "if the proposed reforms are too removed from the status quo, the objection is that they are attractive but utopian. If transformations limited to the current situation are outlined, the complaint is that they are viable but insignificant." Then, "what matters is the direction, and its effects on people's understanding of their own interests, identities, and problems."

This is not just the 'soft' left's ritual eclecticism, but a total underestimation of social reality. People do understand their interests, identities and problems. From Chiapas to Buenos Aires, Latin America's social struggles proliferate; different cultures merge in a multicoloured quilt and combined organisational forms. The tactics and strategies of confrontation of sectors of the working class are combined with land occupations, movements for cultural autonomy, for Indian rights, for women's demands, the rights of youth, students, the unemployed, senior citizens, and workers in the informal economy.

These are radical and plural movements, which feed popular resistance, and represent an uncompromising opposition to the prevailing neoliberalism. They are the decisive factor for the accumulation of popular forces, though they are not inscribed in political projects that have the seizure of power as their horizon. These social movements develop as potential "counter-powers" from below and in them, as James Petras adds, "each member is an organiser." ("America Latina: el regreso de la izquierda." *Cuadernos del Sur* #25, Argentina, October 1997). It is wrong, even untruthful to speak of the "apathy" of the population.

Financial disaster

According to the IMF, during 1996 foreign investment in Latin America exceeded \$77.7bn., and inflation was a historically low 12.9%. The 1997 IMF annual meeting in Hong Kong repeated the claim that "facilitating the channelling of saving-flows toward more productive uses, capital movements increase investment, growth, and prosperity."

Brilliant prophecy. Unfortunately, a few months later, the stock markets of the "Asian dragons" collapsed. The same "specialists" began to speak of a "world depression," and a "threat to the world."

During the Asian crisis, billions of dollars in currency reserves from the central banks of Southeast Asia were confiscated by private speculators. The effects soon arrived on local markets across Latin America.

The earthquake has thus far cost Latin

America \$13-14bn., according to U.S. financial experts. In Chile, Colombia, Mexico, and Costa Rica, some economists believe the increase in interest rates will be 14% above the already reached ceiling. In Argentina, the losses are already in the neighbourhood of \$3bn.

But the principal Latin American victim of the Asian crisis is Brazil. Losses already exceed \$8.3bn.

"The oscillations of international capital movements determine the macroeconomic measures necessary to avoid devaluation. This caused domestic interest rates to double, a measure that affects consumers twice as hard. Interest rates on consumer loans reached more than 100% per year, an absurd level, if one considers that yearly inflation does not reach 7%." (Carlos Castilho, "Las bolsas como termómetro político." *Tercer Mundo Económico* #103, Montevideo, November 1997)

Other measures taken by the government of social-democrat Fernando Henrique Cardoso include increase in gasoline and utility rates, and thousands of layoffs in industry, commerce, and the public sector. The argument is the same as always: new hardships to reduce the fiscal deficit and to maintain macroeconomic stability. These renewed hardships are imposed "in the name of something that has no face, no name, no homeland, something whose origins—and destination—nobody knows." (C. Castilho.)

Sixty years ago, John Maynard Keynes—the theoretical economist who inspired the creation of the World Bank and the IMF at the end of World War II—argued in his *General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money*, that "speculators can do no harm, as they are practically bubbles in the constant flow of time."

Now, the bubble has become a speculative hurricane with no end in sight: the Canadian radical economist Michel Chossudovsky argues that "The purchase and sale of currencies represents, on a world scale, more than a billion dollars daily, of which only 15% correspond to real goods traded or real capital flows." (El costo de la especulación. *Revista del Sur* #73, Montevideo, November 1997)

The proposes to follow the policies taken by Chile, Brazil, and Malaysia to "control" speculative capital. In the face of the current crisis, this serious discussion of "different entry and exit taxes" and "incentives to promote direct foreign investment as opposed to portfolio investment," as effective methods for "increasing the (relative) margin of autonomy of national states" seems like a joke.

Nevertheless, to give the proposal a (somewhat) serious tone, the authors of the document propose, without much conviction, the introduction "on an international scale of regulation or taxation proposals such as the Tobin tax proposed by deceased French president François Mitterrand) on speculative capital movements." This refers to James Tobin, the ex-IMF official, who proposed a tax rate of 2-5% on capital transactions, so as to discourage short term speculative flows.

No alternative to counter-reforms

Broad circles of the Latin American left and centre-left, have theorised the possibility of a "transition" from the previous national-developmental or military-authoritarian model, toward the "new market democracies." Certain theoreticians of the "renewal" left go a bit further, and advance the idea of "transformism" (which some attribute to

The Buenos Aires Consensus

The Consensus group was launched in 1996 on the initiative of the Mexican Jorge Castañeda and the Brazilian Roberto Mangabeira Unger. Previous meetings were held in Mexico, Chile and Costa Rica.

Of the major forces of the left, only the Broad Front of Uruguay, the Nicaraguan FSLN, the Colombian guerrilla organisations, the Cuban Communist Party, and the Zapatistas have not participated in these continental gatherings.

The summit, led by the Mexican PRD and the Chilean Socialist Party (SP), includes the majority of the left and centre-left politicians who, based on the electoral victories of the Alliance (FREPASO-Radical Civic Union) in Argentina and Cardenas in Mexico, agree on an "anti-neoliberal" response.

This "parallel São Paulo Forum" has been attended by, among others, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, Manuel Camacho Solis, Andres Lopez Obrador,

and Adolfo Aguilar Zinser (Mexico), Ricardo Lagos and Carlos Ominami (Chile), Carlos "Chacho" Alvarez, Gracila Fernandez Meijide, and Dante Caputo (Argentina), Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, Leonel Brizola, Marco Aurelio Garcia, Tarso Genro, Ciro Gomes, and Vicentinho (Brazil), Sergio Ramirez (Nicaragua) and Facundo Guardado (El Salvador).

These are all top leaders, ex-office holders, current officeholders or those with aspirations to soon be so. They share "vocation to govern" or "culture of government."

Their model is the "Conciliation for Democracy" agreement between the Socialist Party and the Christian Democracy that governs post-dictatorial Chile, combining privatising neoliberalism with a mixed hybrid of social assistance and social policies as recommended by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank. [EH] ★

Gramsci) which combines elements of a radical break with continuity.

The case of Chile is the most emblematic. To justify continuity through other means (since the radical break does not exist), they assign a "foundational" character to the capitalist neoliberal reorganisation introduced by the Pinochet regime.

With the return of civilian governments, the mechanisms of political and social consensus were modified (even though military tutelage was maintained). "Civil society" can express itself pluralis-



Transformation and regroupment

The collapse of Stalinism and the continuing capitalist crisis 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 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, taking account of the recomposition of the workers' movement which is underway as a result of the double failure of social democracy and Stalinism.

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.

In all the countries where such possibilities exist, the organisations of the Fourth International are ready to be part of 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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tically and give democratic substance to the new contract between state and society.

However, in a framework of "irreversible" globalisation, the neoliberal logic governs, in naked fashion. The macroeconomic principle is not touched.

In this context, the structural adjustment policies and commercial opening to guarantee "competitiveness" are not negotiable, regardless of the government's coloration. Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) President Enrique Iglesias has been explicit in this respect: "I believe the reforms are here to stay, and form part of a similar but not uniform process. Countries will be able to put an accent on some aspect or other, to adapt the reforms to their own realities - consider the reform of the pension systems in Uruguay or Chile, for example - but the direction is the same. It is not easy to decree one day that one is not ready to follow the rules of the game and to abandon the race, or to decide to reverse course." (*Semanario Busqueda*, Montevideo, 2/10/97)

The message is unambiguous: the privatisation of the state, and the counter-reforms in education and social security are irreversible. Future governments of the left or centre-left will not be able to think of breaking with "the rules of the game."

The grouping wants to avoid any uncertainty on the left. "Privatisation is a political and economic resort of a contingent character, not a predisposition or ideological dogma..."

We should use privatisations to fragment property ownership and increase competition, avoiding the substitution of public monopolies by private monopolies or oligopolies." This is all within the context of a "national strategy of development."

In the realm of social security, the document states that "the reform of the social security system offers a special opportunity to organise and increase private savings." It proposes a mixed public and private system, that redistributes "part of the accounts of the richest to those of the poorest," (as if the administering firms were philanthropic institutions and not a mechanism for capital accumulation).

The World Bank, the major proponent of privatising social security, doesn't see it that way. According to the Third World Institute, "the World Bank and other defenders of cutting pensions have begun to use a new argument: that senior citizens are less impoverished than children and thus merit less support from public funds. Pensions should be reduced, they say, so programmes to support children can increase."

This argument has begun to gain a certain respectability and analyses of this type have appeared in serious and socially responsible publications. The millionaire Peter G. Peterson, defender of pension cuts, has made child welfare and 'generational social justice' a part of his arsenal of attacks on social security and pensions. (Suzanne S. Paul and James A. Paul, *Assault on pensions: Neither savings nor efficiency nor welfare. The World Bank's social security policies for the South*, Third World Institute, Montevideo, 1995).

The old against the young

Educational "reforms" point toward competitive, flexible, and above all, cheap labour whose "common thread is lowering the global costs of education and knowledge." (Marita Silvera, "The Education Policies of the World Bank and their Rationale." *Correspondencia* #25, PST publication, Montevideo, August 1997)

In summary, the includes not a word on the true nature of the movement toward liberalisation and privatisation, nor the slightest denunciation of this process of pillaging and gutting social necessities. Competitiveness, government efficiency, business productivity, technological modernisation, market regulation, and a call for the "democratisation of globalisation" along with administrative and governmental transparency to combat galloping corruption are the slogans.

But can these succeed without breaking with the market and the individualist logic of capitalism? The proposal of the , which Castañeda claims can "end neoliberalism," can be reduced to this and little more.

The powers-that-be don't even blink an eyelash at such demands. This is why they have reacted with such prudence to the electoral victories of the opposition in Argentina and Mexico.

Michael Shifter, a member of the Inter-American Dialogue in the US, analyses the victory of the Alliance in the Argentine provincial and legislative elections without mincing any words: "There is no reason for Washington -neither Clinton's Democratic administration nor the Republican congress- to do anything else than welcome this new political dynamic, especially in light of the Alliance's declared adherence to the basic elements of the predominant economic model." (*Clarín*, Buenos Aires, 11/2/97).

The "predominant economic model" obviously refers to the convertibility plan of former minister Domingo Cavallo, which has increased the misery of millions

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Populism in Latin America

Adolfo Gilly, Helena Hirata, Carlos M. Vilas and the PRT (Argentina) [40 pages]

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and the sale of a great part of the national patrimony.

The same could be said of the victory of Cardenas in Mexico. While recognising its democratic importance in the long-term process of defeating the PRI monopoly and the social dynamic it might generate (which will inevitably clash with the bureaucratised, institutionalised, and in many cases co-opted apparatus of the PRD), it is evident that the Cardenista administration in Mexico City is not scaring foreign investors or the US State Department.

Cardenas himself—who no longer emphasises his denunciation of NAFTA or the need for a democratic break (to the extent that this would be a “transition” toward democracy)—admits that his “room for manoeuvre is limited.” Much of what can be done, he argues, lies in “the fight against crime and corruption, for administrative reform, social assistance for women and children, and promoting culture.”

(“With the left... toward the centre,” Interview with A. Krivine, *Convergencia Socialista*, Mexico, September/October 1997)

The left’s electoral defeats of 1994 (El Salvador, Mexico, Brazil, and Uruguay) are already in the past. The left and centre-left, currently govern dozens of cities and a few capitals, and are preparing to take their electoral revenge on governing conservatives and liberals. But although the neoliberal project is in crisis, the correlation of forces is still unfavourable to progressive forces.

New alliances

Given this situation, the document argues that the democratic and popular alternative to neoliberalism has no other option than constructing a “centre-left alliance” to replace “the alliance between the centre and the right that, in so many countries, has supported the conservative economic reforms of recent years.”

The task of the centre should consist of “transforming the restlessness of the middle class and defending the generalisation of meritocracy in social life.”

And “showing the impossibility of realising the emancipatory impetus of the old liberal cause in our countries through a simple imitation of the political and economic instruments of the rich economies of the Atlantic North.”

The left, for its part, has the task of “confronting inequality and combating dualism through extending democracy; instead of reproducing the division of the corporatist left of the organised sectors and the populist left of the disorganised sectors, this proposal seeks to erase this division that is so pernicious for all.”

And the best way of doing this, it seems, is to denaturalise the identity of the left, integrating it into a project where the vision of confrontation with the system and launching an intransigent resistance in the context of a radical break with it is totally absent.

The left’s role would be reduced to developing a critique of contradictions and injustices or, in the best of cases, collaborating in managing a “culture of governance” that does not call into question the nature of power, the state or its many mechanisms of control and manipulation.

The idea of a real struggle over the correlation of forces in society to construct a truly alternative project with popular support is straight-jacketed by the institutional-electoral road, where all initiatives toward self-organisation are seen as an obstacle to “governability.”

Facundo Guardado, a leader of El Salvador’s FMLN and a participant in the grouping, has clearly stated the objectives of how and why to enter the government: “Taking the road of majority agreement, to govern El Salvador, move the country forward and put it on the road to progress requires agreement between all social, political, and business forces.” (*Página 12*, Buenos Aires, 7/12/97)

Lula and the majority current of the Workers Party propose a similar approach when they speak of a “front of oppositions” whose programme should also be negotiated with businessmen. Though businessmen are, of course, the primary beneficiaries of the status quo.

Lula goes even farther, and while demanding efficiency, dynamism, and competitiveness in a “globalised world,” accepts that it is possible to reconcile these neoliberal objectives with social welfare.

In Uruguay, Tabare Vazquez, leader of the leftist *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front) coalition, is confident there will be a “progressive government” in 2000, “It is necessary to be absolutely clear that it is not a question of touching up the most negative parts of the current neoliberal model or putting forward a programme for socialist revolution.

It is a question of advancing in the direction of a development model that allows us to make its fundamental components compatible, that is, growth, distribution of wealth with social justice, national and regional sovereignty, the full realisation of men and women, freedom and the broadest political participation, decentralisation of decision making, and respect for the environment, among other central aspects.” (Progressive-Broad Front Meeting, “Some ideas to carry out,” Montevideo, November 1997).

Vazquez insists on the need for a “social dialogue” between management and labour, refinancing the foreign debt, and an alliance with the political centre—in sum, choosing (or distinguishing?) between “the desirable country and the possible country.” He says nothing about the necessary country.

Solidarity and deprivatisation

Those of us outside the “realistic” left and centre-left, with their “vocation to govern,” have to put forward a most realistic (and necessary) programme of democratic, social, and economic reforms.

There is a difference between their reforms and ours. What the times obviously demand is working in the social movements and its struggles, promoting and strengthening the unity of revolutionary currents without giving in to the temptation of conducting politics in the minefield of institutionality. And all the time creating the conditions to change the correlation of forces.

This signifies assuming a radically different posture than what currently prevails.

First is rejecting the “globalisation” of the economy and the reinforcement of market mechanisms as irreversible processes. “Globalisation is not a steamroller that is destroying everything in its path,” writes Eric Toussaint, of the Committee to Cancel Third World Debt. “Forces of resistance are indeed present.

Globalisation is not a coherent economic system... Its contradictions are many—between imperialist powers, between corporations, social discord, crises of legitimacy of regimes, criminalisation of the behaviour of the major economic actors.” (Eric Toussaint, *Neoliberal Ideology and Politics in Perspective*, La Gauche, Brussels, 11/30/97).

This implies reviving the “national interest” that many consider dead. “And the theme of social interest, that is, the people’s interest, must be emphasised even more. These interests are not in harmony with those of the market. The opening of the economy must be changed. Some commercial liberalisation might be useful, but freedom of movement for capital is contrary to the national and social interest...”

Instead of increasing the foreign debt and financing it with new loans and a greater dependence on speculative capital, dependence on such financing must be reduced to create the possibility for a sovereign treatment of the debt... while creating the conditions for internal investment where foreign investment can eventually fulfil a complementary and secondary role.”

On the strictly domestic level, argues Brazilian left leader João Machado, “it is necessary to “deprivatise” the state, submitting it to popular control, reinforcing its role as provider of basic social services for the population, responsible for social solidarity. Social security and social rights should be expanded, not reduced.” (João Machado, *Their Reforms and Ours*, *Em Tempo*, Socialist Democracy Tendency of the PT, São Paulo, August, 1997)

“Public functions should be given a new value and not stigmatised as responsible for deficits created by these very politicians.”

The capacity for public investment should be restored, and instead of privatising public banks or socialising the losses of private banks, “it is necessary to again put the need to nationalise the financial system on the agenda.” ★

booknotes

Working class lives

In *A Millennium of Family Change*, Wally Secombe follows the changes in the nature of family life from the peasant families of the Middle Ages to the very different forms of working-class family structure and relationships that appeared with the proletarianisation during the early modern period.

Challenging standard demographic interpretations, he shows how these changes in the family form helped bring about an acceleration in rates of population growth in the years just preceding the Industrial Revolution. In the second volume, *Weathering the Storm*, he continues the analysis, exploring the changing forms of working-class family from the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the resulting sharp decline in levels of working-class fertility.

Though they are worth reading as examples of a reworked Marxist approach to historical sociology, these books also address central political problems for Marxist and feminist activists today.

Marxist or essentialist feminism?

From the late 70s on, a central political problem for Marxists has been the articulation of a historical materialist response to feminist identity politics. The working class has often been conceived of as salaried workers, and thus in their vast majority male. As a result, the mass and global women's movement of the 1970s was often either characterised as bourgeois or petite bourgeois in character or, more positively, as an important (but essentially unnecessary) ally, to the [male] working class revolutionary project.

Not surprisingly, most feminists rejected this second-class citizen status in the project of revolutionary transformation of society. Essentialism as the basis of identity politics became a central pole in the political spectrum of the 80s and 90s with alliances between Marxists/socialists and feminists a source of constant tension, both jockeying for the centre stage.

Secombe's books offers a different approach to this issue. He retains a strict Marxist-historical materialist methodology of analysing the mode of production as involving three "Departments": Department One being the production of the means of production and Department Two the production of the goods for human consumption. But he shifts the focus for the central role of Department Three from the traditional Marxist view as the place of consumption to that of the necessary production of labour power on a daily and generational basis organised through the family. The society as a whole must conti-



nally find new labour power – generally through the biological reproduction of workers [women of the labouring classes having children] and provide for their appropriate training into the types of labour necessary for that society. In doing so, the role of women and the family now take their proper place as central for all those revolutionaries adhering to a class analysis of society.

This also makes a gendered class analysis a necessity for the understanding of the differential distribution of the labour force across all three Departments. The slogan from the 1970s of "No socialist revolution without women's liberation, no women's liberation without socialist revolution" flows from this linked reality.

Modern capitalist family forms

Secombe analyses family reality, including the recognition of its oppressive nature, in a way that is familiar to many feminists. One insight is the importance of Inheritance as the key mechanism by which the means of daily and generational reproduction are passed from one generation to another within the working class. With the advent of capitalism, production is no longer in the home, having been consolidated into the factories, and thus the children of the workers no longer inherit the means of production from their parents. But they do continue to inherit the means of subsistence – the family home, household goods, etc. From the pots and pans, TVs and furniture for setting up the new home to the baby clothes passed on from relatives, and child care services provided by aunts and grandmothers, the family continues to subsidise the cost of the reproduction of labour power on a generational basis.

This intergenerational concern runs counter to the "snapshot" idealistic framework of most Marxist analysis. Rather than examine "the lone worker at some indefinite moment in his working life," Secombe focuses on the production of the labour force on a daily and generational basis. He insists on taking a life span view of the working class. By analysing

the necessity for workers to produce more than what is necessary for their own upkeep for most of their working lives, as they are supporting "unproductive" children during one phase and their decreasingly productive parents during another, one can better understand the options before the working class family. It is this life-span view that makes inheritance so very important

Fertility decline and reproductive rights

Those coming of age in 1998 may wonder why the right to abortion and contraception were at the centre of the 1970's women movement, and why this issue of reproductive rights continues to be at the centre of feminist political struggles. In *Weathering the Storm*, Secombe offers a detailed historical precedent for this.

Within the context of the newly developed family form in the working class of male breadwinner and women in the home, the explanation of the fertility decline in industrial countries was based on working-class women's struggle –with their husbands– to limit family size, due to the increasing cost of child-rearing and the decreasing contribution that children could make to the family economy. He argues that this change in the family form was the basis for the reintroduction of stronger patriarchal relations between the wife and husband.

Secombe offers a vivid portrait of this husband-wife struggle within the marriage to introduce contraception, drawing clear parallels between the married women's relative lack of economic power and their domestic-sexual subordination, including their different attitudes toward sexuality and contraception as well as the relative "cost" of children.

By doing so Secombe reinserts human agency into historical change and demonstrates the importance of the feminist and labour movements in changing attitudes in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Then and now

Secombe's work is an historical ac-

count of the changing family form with the transition to modern capitalism. As such, it is only suggestive about what impact the more rapid imposition of capitalism has had and will have on the multitude of family forms in the current period. What is clear is that reproductive issues will continue to be a central focus for women's struggles - both within the private family and with public policy. It is also clear that, however the form that family takes may change, the future of family is a concern for all workers.

This is a salutary lesson for all revolutionaries. These books deserve their attention and careful reading.

Reviewed by Susan Caldwell

A Millennium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe. 1992, Verso, ISBN 1-85984-052-3 and *Weathering the Storm: Working-Class Families from the Industrial Revolution to the Fertility Decline.* 1993. Verso, 286p bibl index ISBN 1-85984-064-7 hardback or ISBN 0-86091-333-3 paperback. *A Millennium of Family Change* has been published in Italian. The second volume should be published in Italian later this year.

The author is interested in feedback on his work and can be contacted at <seccombe@interlog.com>

For whom am I writing?

"It is relatively easy for the imperialist powers to win domestic public support for new bombings of Iraq," since "Arabs are dehumanised, they are seen as violent irrational terrorists always on the lookout for murder and bombing outrages. The only Arabs worth doing business with... are compliant leaders, businessmen, military people whose arms purchases (the highest per capita in the world) are keeping the American economy afloat. Beyond that there is no feeling at all, for instance, for the dreadful suffering of the Iraqi people whose identity and existence have simply been lost sight of in the present situation."

Edward Said
Al-Hayat and *Al-Ahram Weekly*

Egyptian writer and activist Nawal El Saadawi is one of the few Arab intellectuals to have penetrated through the smoke screens and prejudice of Western academia. This timely compilation of her non-fiction writing since the publication of her seminal book on Arab women, *The hidden face of Eve* (Zed, 1980) presents the full range of her extraordinary work.

She explores a range of topics, from women's oppression at the hands of recent interpretations of Islam to the role of women in African literature, from the sexual politics of development identity, to the subversive potential of creativity, to the fight against female genital mutilation.

Removed from her post as Egypt's

director of Public Health and imprisoned under Sadat for her political activities, she has been a constant thorn in the side of the class and patriarchal systems of the Arab world. And, during her four-year self-imposed exile at an American University, she experienced the marginalisation of third world and particularly Arab thinkers so eloquently described by Edward Said.

This volume also includes her outsiders' view of the British women's movement, with all its excruciating idiosyncrasies. At one point she quotes from this magazine, but we escape inclusion in her impassioned critique of the inconsistencies of Northern liberals and many radicals.

"When I, as an Arab woman, say what I think about what is happening in my region, I am made to disappear, or portrayed as an Arab terrorist thirsty for blood [but] if I say something with which my interviewer agrees, I am called a peacemaker or a post-modern thinker. Never am I allowed to be myself and yet an Arab woman." [JD]

The Nawal El Saadawi reader, Zed Books, 1997. ISBN 1 85649 514 0 (Pbk)

Selling sex

"Money can save our lives, never mind our honour."

Other books on the sex industry have asked why men buy sex, how much they buy, and how the sex economy is organised. *The traffic in women* explores the perceptions and experiences of the women involved. It is the result of extensive interviews by The Foundation for Women, a Thai non-governmental organisation, which has pioneered resistance to the sex trade and sex tourism.

The traffic in women tells us about women's experiences as migrant workers, prostitutes, and as second class citizens in a male-dominated society. The book doesn't deny the reality of violent exploitation, and poverty, but nor does it portray women as the powerless victims of these forces in a patriarchal society.

Trafficking is seen not as an isolated action, but as a process whereby women, subject to force and deception, are coerced into a position in which they believe they have no choice.

The authors also considers how women can be empowered to end this traffic. They report on the - mixed - results of their public information programme in Thai villages where young women are recruited, and the complicated dynamics of winning community support, without shaming the families and the women concerned.

NGO projects to provide alternative work for young women have met with little success. And, because remittances from daughters working as prostitutes are typically spent on house improvements and major consumer goods like refrigerators, few of the women who return to the village have enough capital to start a

business or change career.

"By the time the project was concluded in Na Thong, women were still leaving for work abroad, but... they were now applying to travel legally... The destination was more likely to be Taiwan than Japan. The women most immediately involved with the project gained confidence from working with others, and were more ready to contact agencies for assistance."

This book doesn't provide simple answers, but a large number of small suggestions for human rights activists, feminists, migrant counsellors and academics on how to raise awareness of the traffic in women, improve the chances of the women caught up in it, and eventually stop it. [JD]

Siriporn Skrobaneek, Nataya Boonpakdi & Chutima Jantakeero, *The traffic in women: human realities of the international sex trade*, Zed, 1997, £11.95/\$17.50. ISBN 1 85649 528 0 (Pbk)

Too many (poor) babies

Many feminists and environmentalists share the mainstream view that over-population is one of the root causes of global crisis. *Women, population and global crisis* provides a much-needed critique of common wisdom on population. It gives a historical overview of the population question, and places the population-poverty-environment-security debate within a broad theoretical perspective.

After criticising conventional ideologies of population control - from Malthusianism to the birth control movements in India and China, the author shows how population control acts as another dimension of our essentially hierarchical world order.

The author tries to synthesise elements of third world, feminist, socialist and ecological thinking in her critique of population control ideologies and policies. She shows how activists in the North and South can work to separate reproductive rights from population control, and seek "efforts that place human and planetary reproduction above economic production." [JD]

Askoka Bandarage, *Women, population and global crisis*, Zed, 1997, ISBN 1 85649 428 4 (Pbk)

To order the books and magazines mentioned in *International Viewpoint*, try your nearest progressive bookstore, or write to La Brèche, 9 rue de Tunis, 75011 Paris, France © (+33 1) 43676357 fax 43792961 (English, French and Spanish spoken). Where no price is given, we suggest you enclose US\$ 10 in any convertible currency to cover the postage costs of the publisher. To announce your publication in this free listing, send a sample copy to "Book reviews" c/o *International Viewpoint*, PECL, BP 85, 75522 Paris cedex 11, France.



New Socialist (Dec-January)

Che Guevara was no more on the side of the poor than Princess Dianna, according to the latest magazine from Canada's New Socialist Group.

Ernest Haberkern identifies Che Guevara as "the most outspoken defender" of the "disastrous choice" to use Cuba's guerrilla army as "the base of a new dictatorship." Indeed, Guevara was more important than Fidel Castro himself in this fossilisation of the revolution.

Curiously, Haberkern, Director of the Center for Socialist History in Berkeley, California, claims that this vision of Cuban history is "buried in hard-to-find, out-of-print books."

"From the beginning until his departure from Cuba Che was on the side of those who wanted to turn the regime into a police dictatorship as soon as possible. He was the harshest opponent of any concession to the material needs of the people..."

"Those Cubans who grieved for Che "were just as deceived as the tens of thousands of people who mourned Princess Diana or Mother Theresa in the mistaken belief that they were on the side of 'the poor.' Catholic saints have performed the same function for centuries. Icons providing consolation for 'the poor' lest 'the poor' decide to fight for themselves."

Other articles in this December-January issue focus on struggles by students and teachers in high schools and universities across English Canada, and the recent postal workers strike.

Against the Current #73

A dossier marking International Women's Day includes an interview with Tatau Godinho (Brazil) on The Status of Women; an interview with Edna Bonacich, who has been working with women artists and intellectuals in a group called Common Threads, which supports women garment workers in the Los Angeles area; an interview with Stephanie Coontz, author of The Family As It Really Is; an article by Johanna Brenner on Poverty & Oregon's Welfare Reform and interviews with three activists around poverty and Welfare reform.

Other contents include a 15 page study of the Asian economic crisis.

Against the Current #72

In an ambitious and impressive project to mark the 150 anniversary of the Communist Manifesto, a range of US Marxist thinkers responded to questions on specific aspects of the Manifesto, and its relevance for struggles today. Extracts will be printed in a future issue of International Viewpoint. Other articles deal with repression and ecological disaster in Indonesia, and, inevitably, the situation facing the Teamsters union.

Socialist Register 1998

Reflections on the meaning of the Communist Manifesto, Marxism, the class struggle and everything from Sheila Rowbotham, Sheila Cohen & Kim Moody, Peter Gowan, John Bellamy Foster, Peter Osborne, Paul Thomas, and Rob Beamish. Edited by Leo Panitch & Colin Leys

To order or subscribe contact: Monthly Review Press, 122 West 27th Street, New York, NY, 10001, USA or Merlin Press, 2 Rendlesham Mews, Rendlesham, Nr. Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 2SZ, Britain. Email: MerlinPres@aol.com

BIDOM#140

The January-February issue of the US magazine Bulletin In Defense of Marxism argues for outspoken defense of

Teamster leader Ron Carey, and criticises left writers who have "conceded unnecessary ground to the government's attacks." Paul Le Blanc and Frank Lovell discuss the Labor Party and the trade union movement, and Le Blanc reports on the divergent and sometimes surprising views expressed by Stalinists and Fourth Internationalists at the Paris conference to mark the 80th anniversary of the 1917 Russian revolution.

Single issues US\$3.00, subscription \$24 (Canada \$37, Europe \$54, Asia Pacific \$64) from BIDOM, PO Box 1317, New York, NY 10009, USA

Murros#10

[Articles marked * available in English on website]

Eighty years ago, the Finnish working class revolted, but lost in the civil war during which the country became independent from Russia. This month's editorial asks how different this situation is today.* Editor Juhani Lohikoski, argues that the working class struggle for the rights denied under the Czarist regime was largely self-defensive, and the People's Representative Committee did not take advantage of the initiative it gained during the first weeks of the war. This is why the Finnish bourgeoisie was able to crush the workers' revolution, he argues. Though without German military aid, this bourgeois victory would have been impossible.*

Other articles report on student strikes in Germany and

Sweden, unemployment in France and Finland, and the counter-demonstration outside the Presidential Palace on December 6th Independence Day.*

Subscription costs \$12/£8 for six issues, including selected English translations, posters and leaflets. Exchange with other magazine welcome.

Contact: PL 288, 00171 Helsinki, Finland. Tel: 358-9-278 2244. E-mail: mailto:komnuor@dlc.fi Internet: www.dlc.fi/~komnuor/murros.html

Bandera Roja

The February issue of this Puertorican magazine focuses on the campaign to stop the privatisation of the Mayaguez Health Centre. Other articles cover privatisation, ecology, public sector trade unionism, and struggles in Europe to reduce the working week.

www.bandera.org or contact <info@bandera.org>

European Marches News

The latest issue of the EuroMarch against Unemployment newsletter was published in mid-February. Available in English and French from 104 rue des Couronnes, Paris 75029 France. Cost £10/US\$15 for ten issues. E-mail <marches97@ras.eu.org>

Stop-IMF

Clips, essays, updates and urgent actions relating to the International Monetary Fund. Moderated by Friends of the Earth and Essential Action, this new list will focus on:

- the U.S. congressional battle over the request to allocate \$18 billion to expand the IMF
- NGO positions and campaign activities around capital account liberalization
- information about the IMF's attempt to expand its Articles of Agreement in order to control capital account liberalization programs and country specific positions on the issue

• IMF reform proposals or alternative strategies to decrease volatility of international capital flows.

To subscribe to stop-imf, send the message "subscribe stop-imf <your name>" to <listproc@essential.org>

Labour "broadcasting"

The Labour Channel is a joint effort by trade unions in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa to use the latest "push" technology to distribute labour news through the Internet.

Labour Channel webcasts are available through Microsoft Internet Explorer Active Channels, Netscape Netcaster, and PointCast Connections.

Among the trade unions now broadcasting on the Labour Channel are COSATU in South Africa, the TUC in Britain, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, based in Brussels, and many more. For details, visit the Labour Channel's home page:

www.solinet.org/LEE/labour_jump.html

Multiple manifestos

Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish, Danish, German, French, Catalan and Basque versions of the Communist Manifesto, plus the predictable photos and links.

easyweb.easynet.co.uk/~socappeal/150years



Warfies

The blatant government attacks on the Maritime Union of Australia have made headlines around the world. Recently, the union launched its own website, telling its own side of the story.

www.solinet.org/LEE/labour02.html

The little red website

All five volumes of The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung, a selection of other articles and Maoist links.

www.blythe.org/mlm

<mao_docs@blythe.org>

International Viewpoint

Between 31 December 1997 and 19 February our website had 1 401 visitors. Comments in the visitors books praise the range of articles by non Fourth International authors, the growing archive of past issues, our "Zapatista Alert!" page, and our links to other radical sites.

Visitors in January came from a record 55 countries, including our first visitors from Yemen and Fiji. Most visitors came from Sweden, followed by USA, Britain, Germany, Japan, Denmark, Norway, Brazil, Canada, Belgium, Finland, Ireland, Egypt, Australia, France, and Spain.

www.internationalen.se/sp/ivp.htm