

International VIEWPOINT

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Slaughter in the desert-- who profits?

Elections in
Nicaragua

Indian left
at crossroads

Peasant struggles
in Philippines



International Viewpoint

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Stop sectarian violence in the workers movement

For an end to Chukaku attacks on the JRCL

On January 9 four members of the Japan Revolutionary Communist League (JRCL), Japanese section of the Fourth International, were brutally attacked by commandos of the Chukaku (Core Faction), a left centrist organisation in the process of sectarian degeneration. Over the last ten years this group has specialised in violent attacks on other revolutionary groups. To this end it has even adopted a clandestine-type structure.

The January 9 attacks were carefully co-ordinated, simultaneously directed against two comrades in Tokyo and two other comrades of the JRCL in Osaka-Kobe. The next day a member of the youth organisation of the JRCL was viciously attacked by a similar group of Chukaku goons. The five Trotskyist militants — a printworker, a factory worker, a municipal employee, a JRCL fulltimer and a student — were all attacked by a group of five to six persons aiming to inflict serious physical damage. The militants who were attacked will now be hospitalised for a considerable period with broken legs and, in one case, a severe skull fracture. They could suffer serious effects from their injuries for the rest of their lives.

The Chukaku group, responsible for acts of violence worthy of the worst Stalinist and social-democratic practices, was one of the largest organisations of the Japanese revolutionary left that came out of the recomposition in the mid-1960s. A good number of the groups that appeared then were seriously damaged by the 'Uchi-geva' (internecine wars) that developed during the 1970s after the collapse of the huge youth mobilisations against imperialism. The Chukaku was active in all these violent confrontations.

One of the great political merits of the Japanese section of the Fourth International, which is also a product of the same wave of youth radicalisation, is that it always refused to get caught up in these *uchi-geva* and has held to its course of rejecting confrontations between organisations claiming to be for workers struggle and revolution. It is to the great honour of the Japanese Trotskyists that they have kept all their efforts for the struggle against the bourgeois state and its armed representatives patterned on the huge mobilisations of the 1970s.

The JRCL, a number of whose leaders and activists are from the militant Zengakuren student movement — led by the Communist Party during the latter half of the 1950s — took an active part in the mobilisations in support of the struggle of the Sanrizuka farmers against the construction of the new Tokyo international airport at Narita during the 1970s. Following the role played by the JRCL in the main actions of 26 March 1978, when a control tower of the new airport was occupied by demonstrators, almost 200 members of the organisation were arrested and imprisoned. Several members of the JRCL are still in prison and likely to be there for many years to come unless the pressure of an international solidarity campaign succeeds in winning their release. (1)

This is the organisation that the Chukaku has decided to attack physically. This intent was confirmed by an official statement that appeared in the Chukaku weekly newspaper *Zenshin* (Forward) on January 23, 1984. They explained that it was a question for them of 'stamping out the counter-revolutionary Fourth International', the JRCL being defined as 'the agent of Japanese imperialism and the airport authority'.

Above and beyond the revolting and unacceptable character of the terrorist methods used by the Chukaku, even beyond the counter-revolutionary actions aimed at the whole of the Fourth International through the bloody aggression aimed at the mili-



Occupation of the Narita airport control tower (DR)

tants of its Japanese section, the truth is that this group has plunged into an ever-increasing spiral of violence — reflected in its attacks on the JRCL — in order to try and cover up its deep political and organisational crisis.

1. In June 1981, the law court in Tokyo handed down very heavy sentences against 14 activists, 12 of whom were members of the JRCL, who had taken part in the occupation of the airport control tower at Narita.

The background to this crazy and violent sectarian orientation is the defeat suffered by the Chukaku in the debate on strategy for the struggle against the new airport at Narita. Traditionally, one of the fundamental rules for the solidarity of political groups within this movement has been absolute respect for the decisions of the Farmers Opposition League of Sanrizuka and Shibayama, whatever the point of view of the revolutionary organisations themselves. This principle very largely explains the combativity and the long duration of the Sanrizuka farmers struggle — which the Chukaku group is now challenging.

The central point in debate within the Farmers Opposition League was the proposal to organise a campaign to get a large number of people to become joint-owners of small plots of land in the area where the second airport runway is to be built. The Chukaku opposed this proposal in a particularly sectarian and ultimatic fashion. Stepping up their sectarian attacks against the Sanrizuka farmers, they described this as a 'campaign to sell the land to the airport authority for the second-phase project of the airport construction', and thus as a capitulation to the government. The third assembly of the Farmers Opposition League then decided to break all relations with the Chukaku, by a large majority (145 for, 25 against and 24 abstentions). A very small number of farmers from the League will follow the Chukaku in setting up a new minority league.

While the campaign for the sale of small plots is growing, some 1,000 people having undertaken to pay 10,000 yen (about 30 US dollars) for this, the Chukaku are continuing with threatening acts directed towards the farmers of Sanrizuka. They have tried to prevent certain public meetings, being particularly violently opposed to a meeting on September 15, 1983, called by the League on the site where the second airport runway is to be built. They made every effort on this occasion to intimidate people who came there voluntarily to buy a plot of land.

The attack at the beginning of January this year against the members of the JRCL is thus, for the Chukaku, in line with their conscious opposition to the independent activity of the Sanrizuka farmers. It is yet another step up of the violence that they try to justify by sectarian ultimatic and irresponsible 'political argumentation'. In fact, according to the Chukaku, the majority of the Farmers Opposition League as well as the JRCL are 'traitors' and 'counterrevolutionary agents' of imperialism and the Japanese government, 'undermining' the struggle against the airport from within. The farmers and the JRCL have turned against the struggle, the Chukaku say, under the pressure of the 'currently polarising political situation' sharpened progressively by the 'revolutionary armed struggle' of the Chukaku's 'Revolutionary Army'. Thus, for this gravely degenerating group, 'the immediate and main task' is to 'smash and stamp out' what it considers to be an obstacle to the struggle against the airport. In the December 12, 1983 issue of their weekly newspaper the Chukaku tried to justify this unjustifiable policy by writing:

'Having transformed themselves qualitatively and thoroughly the dropped-out farmers and the Fourth International are the foremost of the deserters who have manoeuvred to disarm the Sanrizuka struggle and who have worked to clear the way for the second phase of the airport construction by the Japanese imperialists and the airport authorities. The dropped-out farmers and the Fourth International have revealed themselves openly and have begun their destructive attacks against the Sanrizuka struggle as the genuine force of reaction. Therefore, the struggle against the planned second-phase construction by Japanese imperialism and the airport authority is to smash the dropped-out farmers and the Fourth International. Without smashing and stamping out the dropped-out farmers and the Fourth International there is no stopping the second-phase construction. To smash the dropped-out farmers and the Fourth International is the strategic link for the struggle to stop the second-phase construction.'

The terrorist spiral of the Chukaku is not only an intolerable act of violence within the workers movement but it is an attack against one of the most advanced struggles of the mass movement, that is the fight of the Sanrizuka farmers which has now lasted for almost twenty years. Far from taking on the bourgeois state, the Chukaku is saving its blows for the majority of the Farmers Opposition League, and for the JRCL which

supports their struggle. By so doing, it does good service to the class enemy and its repressive forces.

From this point of view the action of the Chukaku only serves to give the police an opportunity for an offensive against the sectors in struggle and those who support them. This is the appreciation that the Central Committee of the JRCL adopted at its January meeting in a resolution outlining its attitude towards the attacks that have been made on its members.

In this resolution, published in the JRCL journal, *Sekai Kakumei (World Revolution)*, on January 30, 1984, the Japanese Section of the Fourth International explained that 'seeing the Chukaku's attacks as a good occasion the police began provocative attacks'. In fact, 'parallel to the Chukaku's terrorist attacks, the police has intensified its intelligence and intimidation activities against the JRCL, with the aim of drawing the latter into the internecine violence. The police consider this is the best way to land a heavy blow against the JRCL.'

The JRCL, refusing to get involved in these *uchi-geva* and to fall into the trap held out by the Chukaku and used by the police, publicly addressed itself to all the activists of the Sanrizuka struggle and those who supported them, in order to strongly condemn the activities of which it had been the victim, and to build a 'broad and powerful campaign against the terrorist attacks of the Chukaku' in order to stop the attacks of this degenerate group against the JRCL. In this campaign the JRCL addressed itself to all the sectors of the mass movement, and particularly the trade-union class-struggle current organised around the journal *Rohdoh Johoh (Labour Information)* which supports the Sanrizuka farmers struggle. The JRCL has also acted to ensure the defence of its organisation and members both against the Chukaku's attacks and against the police provocations that accompany them.

It is in the framework of this campaign against sectarian physical violence, for respect for the principles of democratic debate in the workers and peoples movement and of autonomy for the bodies that mobilise the mass movement, that the JRCL has made an appeal for international solidarity. For the present, this will consist of widespread information in the workers and democratic movements on the situation created by the terrorist attacks of the Chukaku against JRCL members. This solidarity action could also take the form of support messages to the comrades of the JRCL at the following address: *Shinjidai-sha, 5-13-17 Shiba, Minatoku, Tokyo, Japan*. Also important would be statements by well-known democratic figures denouncing the terrorist attacks against the JRCL for their unconditional support to the struggle of the Sanrizuka farmers, condemning all forms of violence in the workers and popular movement in Japan, opposing all use of this situation for their own profit by the state repressive forces and demanding the release of the activists imprisoned for years for their participation in the mobilisations of March 26, 1978. ■

International Viewpoint



Demagoguery written in blood, juicy profits for imperialists

The current Iranian offensive comes in the fourth year of the Gulf War. This conflict has already resulted in more than 250,000 deaths, twice as many permanent injuries and an estimated 400 billion dollars worth of material damage.

The Khomeini regime's assault along a long front but centered around the Iraqi oil fields of the Majnun Islands, the Islands of Madness ("majnun" means "mad" in both Arabic and Persian), has ushered in one of the bloodiest phases yet.

Masses of "Islamic" volunteers with minimal training and minimal armament, a large proportion of them boys in their early teens, have been hurled against well-equipped Iraqi forces. Tens of thousands of them have perished. But the stalemate remains unbroken.

It is becoming more and more clear that it is unlikely either side can win the war. The patrons of both regimes cannot afford the destabilization that would result if either regime were to strike a decisive blow.

Salah JABER and Saber NICKBEEN

Any advantage on one side is quickly counterbalanced. Iran is by far the stronger and larger country. But the Iraqi forces are being better equipped by Soviet and Western suppliers of hardware. The Iranian human-wave attacks can be met by the Iraqis with poison gas.

If the pro-US sheiks contribute to financing the Iraqi war effort, Iran earns over 20 billion dollars annually from its oil exports to the West, over 12 billion of which is spent on the war (a large part going to maintain the soliders before they are sent to their deaths).

If the Iraqis get Super-Etendard planes from the French, the Iranians are supplied with badly needed spare parts for their Chieftain tanks by the British so that they can continue to launch attacks.

Peculiarly enough, both sides get their supplies from almost the same sources. The Soviet Union is heavily supplying the Iraqis. But the Iranians have also gotten Soviet arms indirectly through Syria and North Korea. The Iranians get spare parts and ammunition for their mainly American weapons directly from US suppliers, through the Israelis and on the so-called European black market. The Iraqis get military aid from their American friends through Egypt and Jordan.

As long as neither side can gain a decisive advantage and the flow of oil from the area is not blocked, the death toll can continue to mount.

The reactionary nature of both contending regimes itself makes it unlikely that this war will end soon. They have to bleed their own oppressed peoples to exhaustion before they can concede that they have achieved nothing.

The bourgeois nationalist regime in Iraq, based on savage and all-pervading repression, began this war in the attempt

to halt the advance of the Khomeini faction toward taking total control of the Iranian state. It feared that the consolidation of such a regime on its borders could cause instability inside Iraq itself.

The fundamentalist mullahs tightening their grip in Tehran had made clear their intentions to overthrow the secular Baathist regime in Iraq and replace it with an Islamic one based on the Iraqi Shiites. They started advocating this right from the February 1979 revolution that overthrew the Iranian monarchy.

For its part, the Saddam Hussein regime also hoped to capitalize on the turmoil in Iran to reverse the balance with its traditional rival in the region. It sought to wipe out the humiliation that it suffered at the hands of the shah in 1975, when it was obliged to sign the Algiers agreements giving joint sovereignty over the Shatt-al-Arab, Iraq's only outlet to the Gulf, to Iran. It

hoped, moreover, to establish itself as the new gendarme in the region, replacing the shah's state.

If the Iraqi regime had managed to break up the Iranian state in the war, it could have even realized the old Arab nationalist dream of annexing the oil-rich Khuzestan province of Iran, historically an area inhabited by Arabs. This would have thrust the Baghdad regime into a position of leadership of the entire Arab world.

In fact, it should not be forgotten that the Saddam regime, which came to power in 1968, originally presented itself as a spearhead of Arab nationalism, as the most fervently anti-imperialist Arab government. In the early 1970s, it appeared as one of the major causes of instability in the region.

Baghdad moved closer to the Soviet Union (whilst decimating the ranks of the Iraqi CP). It supported all sorts of radical opposition groups in the Gulf emirates. It projected the most violently anti-imperialist rhetoric in the region. It supported the Palestinian Rejection Front led by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine of George Habash. And in Iraq itself it carried out the most extensive nationalizations.

However, the Baghdad regime was obliged to make a big step toward reconciliation with the imperialists and their local pawns in order to defeat the Kurds in the 1974 civil war.

The price paid for betrayal of the Kurds

The Kurds, led by the traditional nationalist leader, Mullah Barzani, rebelled against the regime's attempt to deprive them of the gains they obtained in the revolutionary upsurge that followed the ouster of the pro-imperialist Iraqi monarchy.

At the beginning, the Kurdish nationalist forces received support from the US, Israel and the shah, who were anxious to bring pressure to bear on Baghdad. From the imperialists' point of view, the operation was a big success.

Thousands of Iranians have been slaughtered in the war (DR)



Baghdad accepted the Algiers accords granting Iran's demands in the long-standing border dispute between the two countries. It in effect accepted the dominant role of the shah's regime in the region, and it abandoned its support for the opposition groups in the Gulf sheikhdoms.

Having achieved their objectives, the shah, Israel and the imperialists cynically betrayed the Kurdish people of Iraq, delivering them to the tender mercies of the savage Baathist regime. The Kurds suffered one of the gravest defeats in their long and bitter national struggle.

Now, with the Iranian state in trouble, Saddam hoped even to get back the price he was obliged to pay for the heads of the Kurds. He also hoped, apparently, to be able to influence decisively the outcome of the power struggle going on in Tehran, to reverse the rise of the Khomeini faction. From his point of view, he preferred anybody else at the head of the Iranian state, from the monarchist general Oveissi to the Mojahedeen leader Rajavi.

The international isolation of the Iranian regime in the wake of the seizure of the US embassy in Tehran by Islamic forces and the taking of its staff as hostages meant also that an Iraqi attack could not be opposed by the USA and its surrogates in the Gulf.

Things turned out differently, however, than Saddam Hussein expected. Riding on a wave of nationalism, the Khomeini faction managed to oust the bourgeois liberal group from the government and rebuild the bourgeois state. It succeeded in strengthening the instruments of repression to an unheard of extent and to establish one of the most ruthless and dictatorial regimes seen in modern history.

Khomeini's counterrevolution

In the course of one year, Khomeini's Islamic Republic suppressed all forms of autonomous mass organization, militarized every level of social life and decimated all political opposition. The defence of the "Islamic homeland" and the need to unite against the aggression of the Kafirs (infidels) came to dominate all other considerations in the minds of the Persian masses.

This chauvinistic hysteria was so strong that it engulfed all the opposition from the extreme right to the extreme left. Even the son of the ex-shah, Reza, the pretender to the throne, offered his services to "defend the homeland."

In these circumstances, the Khomeini faction, which still had the largest active mass support of any of the factions, gained the decisive advantage. It used its upper hand to ensure its total dominance of the state apparatus. Khomeini himself described the war as "a Godsend."

Before the war was a month old, preparations were already underway for release of the hostages and rapprochement with the USA. A few months later, the Carter administration made it clear to Iraq that it was opposed to any dismem-

bering of the Iranian state. Iranian oil exports to the West began increasing rapidly, both to pay for the war and to meet foreign debts. This essentially put the minds of the Western governments to rest. In return, the so-called economic blockade of Iran was more or less openly lifted. Gradually, military equipment started finding its way to Iran. Despite the appearances, most of it came from Western sources.

Having gradually rebuilt its army and mobilized more than half a million volunteers through the Basij units controlled by the Revolutionary Guards and having suppressed the mass movement, the Khomeini regime managed in just under two years to push the Iraqi army back behind its own borders. Then it attempted to mount an invasion of Iraq, with the declared intention of "liberating" the Iraqi masses from the "infidel Saddam" and establishing an Islamic regime in Baghdad.

At this point the Saddam Hussein regime began to offer peace, declaring its willingness even to abide by the 1975 Algiers accords. The Khomeini regime, however, refused to end the war, demanding, among other things, about 200 billion dollars in war reparations and a change of regime in Baghdad.

What happened in the next year and a half is a long sad story of more destruction and more deaths, and for nothing. Khomeini's theocratic dictatorship has repeatedly spent a few months to mobilize tens of thousands of new "volunteers" by means of economic and political coercion, and then, on that basis launched another offensive. In the course of a few weeks, most of the volunteers are slaughtered on the Iraqi defenses, and then the whole cycle is started again.

The number of volunteers is relatively large, but in comparison with the population of the country, this does not mean that enthusiasm for going to the front pervades the society. A great many of these youth come from families dependent on the regime in one way or another. Many, of course, are also from sections of the population still influenced by the hopes aroused by the 1979 revolution and by the demagogy of the Khomeini faction. But the regime is being forced more and more to extraordinary means to press youth to go to the front, such as sending Revolutionary Guards to stop taxis and buses to check them for youth of military age not in the army.

Since the withdrawal of the Iraqi army from Khoramshahr, there have been seven major Iranian offensives, all of which have ended in a stalemate, but leaving over 100,000 dead. It seems already that the current Iranian assault, although the largest so far, is not going to have any different result.

Despite all the Khomeini regime's propaganda, it is abundantly clear that even among the Shiites of Iraq there is no significant mass support for the ayatollah's reactionary designs. The Islamic Council of Iraq set up in Tehran as a government to replace the Baathist regime

consists of elements that, if anything, are more reactionary than Saddam Hussein himself. For the great majority of the Iraqi people, it is hardly an attractive alternative. In fact, it seems to offer nothing but going backwards.

It should not be forgotten that by all the usual criteria — the extent of nationalizations, industrialization programmes, agrarian reform, a monopoly of foreign trade, etc. — the Iraqi regime is more advanced than the one in Iran. Khomeini's Council of Guardians has already rejected such reforms as being against the laws of Islam.

The main effect in Iraq of Khomeini's obstinate pursuit of the war to overthrow the "infidel Saddam" has, thus, been to increase political support for the demagogic but reactionary Baathist regime. This is clear from the increasing resistance of the Iraqi soldiers and the ability of the Baghdad government to enlist a growing number of volunteers for the war.

Why then is the Khomeini regime persisting in this costly and apparently futile campaign against the Iraqi "unbelievers?" The most immediate and obvious reason is to divert attention from the growing social and economic crisis in Iran aggravated by the rule of the mullahs.

The country's economic resources are being drained and wasted by parasitic bourgeois layers (which do not even offer any of the very mixed blessings produced by normal neocolonial bourgeoisies) around the regime, by the lumpen elements that live off the patronage of the mullahs and their traditional merchant base, and by the ever growing appetite of the swelling clerical caste itself.

Unemployment is mounting, having reached about 4 million. On top of this are the 2 million refugees from the war zones. For most of the masses, their standard of living has fallen to about a third of the 1975 level. The brutal repression of the working class has pushed the rate of exploitation to levels not seen for decades.

The mullahs crushed the Iranian revolution under the cover of the war. So, they are continuing the war to bolster the rule of the counterrevolution. This, however, is not the only reason, or for that matter the most important at the moment.

Having executed over 20,000 left activists in the last two years, Khomeini's regime has for the time being suppressed resistance among the masses. Despite the deep resentment felt toward the regime, there is no mass movement of opposition. There are sporadic demonstrations and an increasing number of strikes. But the level is not such as to threaten the rule of the mullahs.

The fact that there has been a steady evolution towards normalization of relations with the imperialist powers and re-establishment of bourgeois business as usual is an indication of how little remaining pressure of the revolution there is on the regime.

The reason behind the continuing war

drive of the Khomeini regime, therefore, must be sought elsewhere. This regime has its specific dynamic as a parasitic clerical regime trying to run a bourgeois state. The historical causes and the balance of class forces that enabled such an exceptional regime to come to power have now passed away.

Having accomplished their historical task of crushing the Iranian revolution, the mullahs must now clear the way for the return of a "normal" bourgeois regime. Some factions within the clergy are even talking about the need to restore the monarchy. The Khomeini faction, however, is in no way inclined to relinquish power. It has increasingly to try to justify its rule ideologically, whilst at the same time keeping its parasitic base mobilized.

What seems to explain the regime's latest adventure of escalating the war is that the election campaign for the next Islamic parliament must soon get underway. The government has already delayed the opening of the electoral period as long as possible because it is in no way certain that the Khomeini faction can control the elections and get a majority out of the ballot boxes.

The Islamic Republican Party, Khomeini's main political instrument, is in such a deep crisis that the ayatollah himself has had to take his distance from it in order to reduce his faction's dependence on it. Launching a large-scale offensive against Iraq and putting the entire country in a veritable state of siege in connection with it offers the Khomeini faction the means for intimidating the other factions and maintaining a degree of mobilization of its own forces for the election.

The desperate tactics of the Iranian regime in sending tens of thousands of nearly untrained and badly armed boys to their deaths and openly declaring its intention to bomb all the Iraqi cities but the Shiite holy sites indicates that it has lost all hopes of an actual military victory or a Shiite uprising. These actions make more sense as a means to create an atmosphere of intoxication for the elections.

If the Iranian forces make even the slightest gains, the "Divine Spirit" (that is what Khomeini's first name, "Ruhollah" means in Persian) can assure his grip on power for a few more years. This explains why the main concentration of the Iranian attack has been in the poorly defended marshland areas of Hoor Al Howeyzeh, which are easier to infiltrate than to hold, as long as the Iraqi army remains essentially intact.

In fact, the Iranian military has made scant provisions for resupplying and reinforcing the bridgeheads that it won at enormous cost. The Iranian regime is little concerned about how long it can hold these points. They are mainly useful as something to boast about in the election campaign.

Even if the Iranian regime could hold on to these gains, it would not end the war. If it held the Majnun Islands in par-

ticular, that would only be an incentive for Baghdad to continue the war and for the Iraqi people to support the fight to defend the national patrimony, "Iraq's oil."

The imperialists have no reason to be anxious to see the war end as long as it remains in the present framework. It weakens both the Iranian and Iraqi regimes and makes them more dependent and tractable.

As for the Soviet Union, it has to safeguard its interests in Iraq in the face of competition from France. Moreover, the war diverts the Iranian regime's energies away from Afghanistan. But it does not want to see the Khomeini regime overthrown because in its view that would weaken the anti-imperialist front in Iran and strengthen the US presence in the area.

It is quite clear, in fact, that the imperialists are the main gainers from this war. Thanks to it, the US has managed to get away easily with building four military bases in the region and has prepared world public opinion effectively for a direct US intervention.

Two vociferously "anti-imperialist" regimes are now at the mercy of imperialism. Iran, which according to its rulers, is already on the threshold of self-sufficiency is in fact spending more on imports from the West than it did in the most extravagant years of the monarchy.

The Iraqi regime, which in its early years was executing CIA agents on the streets of Baghdad will have to export all the oil it can produce for the next ten years, working at full capacity, simply to pay its debt. The pro-US sheikhs in the Gulf now are in a position to decide the fate of Saddam Hussein, who once claimed the mantle of leadership of the Arab anti-imperialist struggle. Iraq has become one of the biggest spenders on Western armaments.

If Iran loses the war outright, the US and its friends in the Gulf stand to lose a great deal. The situation in Iran has been evolving favorably for the US, albeit slowly. There are now ample signs that the US can hope, after some time, to regain its domination of Iran. On the other hand, a destabilization of the Khomeini regime resulting from a defeat could create new threats for the imperialists, the least of which being a possible disintegration of Iran and the development of a power vacuum on the Soviet border.

If Iraq loses the war outright, it would be difficult to halt the adventures of Khomeini's exporters of "Islamic Revolution." And Saudi Arabia would be next in line. This is not to mention the devastating effect a collapse of the Iraqi regime would have on French imperialism, which is owed over 6 billion dollars and has almost three times that amount tied up in various contracts with Iraq.

The destruction caused by the war, moreover, is quite good for business. This is especially true when the oil income of the two countries involved affords them the money to pay for the necessary reconstruction. Iran and Iraq are

in fact shaping up as lucrative investment sites for the next decade.

The capitals of both countries are being flooded with representatives of Western construction and service industries. The Western financial press reports rumors that deals are being signed in Tehran that already add up to 30 billion dollars. The Iraqis could be prepared to pay even more.

In addition, the war has helped reactionary regimes throughout the region. In particular, it has given much more maneuvering room to the main strategic instrument of US intervention in the Middle East, Israel. Without the Gulf War, the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and defeat of the Palestinian movement would have been more difficult.

The reactionary sheikhdoms in the Gulf are now well armed. The Arab Emirates are directly and openly collaborating with the US interventionist forces. A few years ago, it would have been extremely awkward to try to get the Arab world to swallow that.

All the crocodile tears the imperialists are shedding over the war do not mean that they have any reason to be unhappy about its results.

Of course, the longer the war goes on, the more the dangers of direct intervention by the imperialists will increase, in particular if the situation threatens to get out of hand from their point of view. Moreover, they will use every opportunity the war affords them to strengthen their means for intervening in the region and for manipulating the local conflicts. It is precisely this imperialist manipulation that exacerbates conflicts in such neocolonial countries and gives them a new mass murderous character.

In the grip of their savage governments, the Iranian and Iraqi peoples need the solidarity of the socialist, workers, democratic and humanitarian movements in the imperialist countries to keep the imperialist vultures out. It is essential to mobilize protests against all forms of imperialist intervention in this atrocious war, from the sending of imperialist forces to the area to the supplying and incitement of both local neocolonial regimes.

The quickest way to end the war is for one or both of the two murderous and reactionary regimes to fall. The toiling masses have no interest in seeing either side win. Their interests can only be served by weakening both and bringing them down.

So far the weakness of proletarian internationalist consciousness in both countries and savage and thoroughgoing repression have prevented a mass movement against the war from developing. Nonetheless the continuation of the war is growing more and more intolerable to greater and greater sections of the peoples of both countries.

- End the fighting now!
- Iranian and Iraqi soldiers turn your weapons against your own rulers!
- Imperialists out of the Gulf! ■

Workers unity precondition to defence of living standards

The huge workers struggles in 1968 and 1969 won Italian workers a number of very important gains.

One of the central concessions they won from the bosses was the 'sliding scale' (*scala mobile*) of wages, ensuring that wage rises would always keep pace with inflation.

They also established the principle of trade-union unity. The traditional three union federations are the CGIL, General Confederation of Italian Labour, CP-led; the CISL, Italian Social Confederation of Labour, the Catholic union; and the UIL, Union of Italian workers, Socialist Party-led. Although these remain separate components they have been united into one confederation. In the metalworking sector there is one federation, the FLM, although there are components within it linked to each of the three big federations.

This unity exists at the top level but, more importantly, at workplace level through the factory councils that have established not only their right to represent all the workers in their factory but to organise and call strikes and other actions, as well as to establish co-ordinating networks among themselves without having to have the approval of the trade-union apparatuses.

As the effects of the economic crisis hit harder in Italy there have been increasing battles by the workers to keep their gains both at the economic level and in trade-union unity.

The following article, first published in *Rouge*, newspaper of the French section of the Fourth International, reports on the recent assembly of factory councils to plan the next stage in the struggle.

Anna LIBERA

MILAN — A national assembly to organise the fight against the austerity measures introduced by the Socialist Party prime minister Bettino Craxi and his government took place here on March 6. The assembly had been called by hundreds of factory councils, co-ordinated nationwide.

This was the first open expression of the workers' anger, simmering throughout the country since early January, at the government's policies and the paralysing division between the union leaderships. Confronted with the recent attack on the sliding scale this anger turned into unified action. It was organised by the rank-and-file union structures in the factories, which called their own strikes and demonstrations mobilizing hundreds of thousands of workers throughout the country.

Bettino Craxi intended to impose the austerity measures demanded by the Italian bosses by utilizing his party's links with the workers movement. In fact, in January he had entered into negotiations with the union federations in order to 'revise the mechanism of the sliding scale'. When faced with the CGIL's rejection of the government proposals, while the CISL and UIL had agreed to them, he issued a decree that cancelled the automatic working of the sliding scale and limited the extent of

compensation for the cost-of-living increases to 50 per cent.

Why did the CGIL, the Communist majority union that had, since the governments of national unity from 1976 to 1979, been the propagandist for austerity and had itself raised the necessity of questioning the sliding scale agreement, decide to take a tougher stand in defence of the workers?

Workers organise fightback

Undoubtedly, its first motivation was a self-defence reflex by a union apparatus that has, because of its predominance in the industrial sector, the most to lose in a defeat of the working class. This is reflected in the sharp debate that has broken out within the union leadership over the government's policy.

But a more immediate motivation can be found in the strong discontent that has appeared in the workplace since the end of January. At that time delegates from 120 factory councils held a national

meeting in Brescia (an industrial town to the north of Milan). An appeal came out of this meeting asking union leaderships to oppose all new attacks on the sliding scale and to 'transform the discussion on the cost of labour into a struggle for the defence of jobs'.

At the same time there was a first assembly of local factory councils in Milan which came out against the government's proposals and organised a strike in defence of the sliding scale.

The CGIL leadership seemed to have understood it could not pacify this discontent with the thin gruel of vague compensations that it was demanding from the government, in exchange for a limitation on the system of wage adjustment.

The decision of the government to implement by decree what they had not been able to win by negotiation was the spark that set it all alight. Assemblies of factory councils were immediately organised in all the workers' centres: Milan, Brescia, Bologna, Florence, Bari, Turin, Reggio Calabria. Hundreds of factory councils took part in each town — 350 in Milan and Turin on the 23 and 24 February respectively — representing a broad rank-and-file movement not only against the hated decree, but also against the division existing at the top level of the trade unions.

Union tops try to take control

These assemblies first of all proposed immediate local actions. There were strikes called by the rank-and-file union bodies in Florence, Turin, Brescia, Bologna, Reggio Calabria, Milano, Rome, etc. that were widely followed. There was a total strike in industry in Rome, and the procession of 100,000 workers was the biggest local demonstration for years in the capital.

Just one example of the movement's strength is that the Fiat workers have resumed their place in the struggle. Since autumn 1980 when the big six-week strike was unable to prevent the 25,000 redundancies ordered by Agnelli, Fiat was almost a bosses' paradise rather than a beacon of workers' struggle. No strike had won the support of more than 10 per cent of the workers up until the recent actions, when some 50 to 60 per cent of the workforce answered the factory councils' strike call.

Along with the initiative in action, the councils took measures to strengthen the centralisation and self-organisation of the movement: co-ordination of the movement at local level, sending representatives to other co-ordinations, and calling a national assembly of factory



councils from all over Italy.

At the same time as the registrations for this assembly were arriving from all the big industrial centres, the union apparatuses were beginning their blackmail for 'unity', threatening to formalise the trade-union split in order to push the CGIL to take the councils in hand.

The Communist Party-dominated federation and the Communist Party leadership (PCI) were no less concerned about the dynamic of the movement, particularly its self-organisation and extension, which could bring down the government. To create a diversion, without directly going against the movement, the CGIL proposed local strikes and, together with the PCI, organised local and uncoordinated demonstrations on March 6, the day the factory councils' assembly met. The PCI also refused to continue the struggle at the parliamentary level by obstruction tactics that would prevent the ratification of the decree by the Assembly at the end of the sixty day period required by law.

Faced with these manoeuvres, the strength of the movement rests in its self-organisation and centralisation. This was demonstrated in the proposals put forward to the March 6 assembly: call for a general strike against the hated decree; the organisation of a national demonstration in Rome and an appeal to the left in parliament to organise fili-

bustering during the debate on the decree.

On March 8 a general strike took place in Piedmont under the banner of workers unity. The strike was called by 1,400 factory councils from the region. More than 100,000 people assembled in Turin for a demonstration — a larger action than the CGIL-CISL-UIL have succeeded in mobilising for years.

What a contrast between the powerful united rank-and-file movement in which the bulk of the Italian working class has been caught up in the last six weeks, and the long-winded declarations of the union leaders in the newspaper columns or the television interviews explaining why the division of the CGIL-CISL-UIL federation has taken place and why the formal split has to be carried right through to the end.

Workers stand fast for unity

In straightforward terms, what this means is not only the reappearance of three separate union federations but the dissolution of the factory councils. These are rank-and-file structures elected by all the workers in the workplaces — the veritable backbone of the Italian working class that has been built through big struggles.

What has happened in Italy in the last few weeks is a double test of strength be-

tween the workers and the government trying to apply austerity measures on the one hand, and, on the other, between the union rank and file and the federation leaderships, whose actions have facilitated application of these measures and whose division has prevented an adequate response.

The movement of self-organised factory councils has developed because of this division and paralysis. This was a class-struggle movement that was immediately forced to address the question of the defence of trade-union union as a precondition for victory against the government.

The delegates at the national assembly in Milan on March 6, represented the bulk of industrial workers. They were women and men of 35 to 45 years old, the same generation as built the factory councils in the 'hot autumn of 1968', who are strongly attached to their unions and not very easily manipulated by the federation leaderships.

The federation leaderships are engaging in big manoeuvres against this united response. Having used blackmail on the question of unity, counterposing formal unity at the top to unity in struggle at the base, they moved on to blackmail by threatening to create a split. The CISL and UIL have already begun to force their delegates to withdraw from the factory councils in the most moderate sectors. The 'normalisation' is proceeding rather effectively against the union organisers who have lined up with the factory councils.

In Turin, one leader of the CISL who supported the March 8 strike was sent a 'commissar' from the leadership for 24 hours, just long enough for him to reverse his decision.

The CGIL is following the same course but with different tactics. Thus, on the evening of March 6, after the call for a demonstration in Rome on March 24, made by the councils, the CGIL issued a communique announcing that it was 'calling' the demonstration, and that it did not want the support of the unitary factory-level bodies.

Its decision to take over the movement aims to wrest the leadership from the factory councils. If it was for unity, it would have done quite the opposite — prized and encouraged the unitary nature of the initiative and played on the internal divisions of the CISL and UIL by trying to link up with those sections that rejected the decisions made by these two federation leaderships.

Despite the decision of the assembly to call a demonstration first and put off the decision on a general strike to the end of the month — a compromise and presented as such — the continuation of the national and local co-ordinating networks of factory councils and the new assembly that will take place on March 30 are important underpinnings for the continuation of the movement. The struggle against austerity and the defence of trade-union unity are the two inseparable facets of this movement. ■

Manifesto for trade-union unity and democracy adopted by the March 6 assembly

We undertake to fight for the application of the following principles:

1. *No question concerning contractual conditions or working conditions can be discussed between the trade unions and other parties without the previous agreement of the workers concerned. This mandate must be given by factory general assemblies. The duty of solidarity between workers, moreover, forbids submitting the question of redundancies to a referendum vote.*

2. *In the factories and workplaces the representation of the workers is entrusted to delegates and delegates councils elected by all the workers in secret vote. The delegates councils cannot be divided between the different union organisations, they represent the workers united. The decisions taken by the councils are binding on the trade unions. The CGIL-CISL-UIL federation must call an assembly of all the delegates at least once a year. Such assemblies must be called in any case before any decision is taken concerning questions related to a general demand.*

3. *The workers must decide on the basis of a thorough knowledge of the facts. It is the duty of the union bodies to provide this information.*

4. *Democracy is based on freedom of choice between different positions. This is why, when different positions exist within the union, they must be submitted to a vote of the workers concerned. The result of this vote is then binding on the union bodies.*

5. *The CGIL-CISL-UIL federation is charged with the responsibility of political leadership and proposals for the councils and the workers. Thus a thoroughgoing reform of its internal life and functioning is required, based on a greater openness and decentralisation in decision making, a reduction in the role and weight of the trade-union fulltime apparatus, and an increase in the role of those who are actively involved and have technical and scientific capabilities.*

We undertake to lead a political battle on these principles among the workers, in the councils, in the CGIL-CISL-UIL federation. As far as we are concerned, we undertake to respect the framework of our responsibilities.

This is why we ask the workers to strengthen the CGIL-CISL-UIL by joining it and participating in its activity.

Mass mobilization and the planned elections

While attempting to isolate the Nicaraguan revolution with an economic and diplomatic boycott, American imperialism is launching increasingly large-scale military actions. The Kissinger committee report on Central America has just reasserted both the "inevitability" of US intervention in El Salvador and the analysis that, for the United States, "the use of Nicaragua as a base for Soviet and Cuban attempts to penetrate the rest of the Central American isthmus, with El Salvador as the prime target, imparts a major strategic dimension to the conflict." (1)

The recent decisions of the National Reconstruction Government and Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), such as the amnesty for Miskitos involved in counterrevolutionary activities, the stepped-up distribution of land to the peasants in the last few months of 1983, and the announcement that elections for a Constituent Assembly and the offices of president and vice-president of the republic will be held on November 4, 1984, must be viewed in this context of increasing danger of imperialist intervention.

Claude DEVILLIERS

The question of Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast peoples — Miskitos, Sumas, Ramas and Criollos — has become a major theme of the imperialist propaganda campaign against the Sandinista regime. The Sandinista government has been accused of wanting to exterminate these peoples. At the same time, the *contras* have made a major effort to win their support. At first, the *contras* tried to win over a few traditional leaders of the village communities; later, they organized the systematic kidnapping and deportation of entire communities to Honduras.

As a result, a real danger developed that the Atlantic Coast populations targeted by the *contras* might become completely estranged from the revolutionary process. The problem was made worse by the fact that the Sandinista leadership had been caught somewhat unawares by the complex problems that emerged when it attempted to involve these peoples, who were very attached to their traditions, in the process of the revolution and in the sort of mobilizing structures it had set up in other parts of the country. The Atlantic Coast peoples' attitude towards the Sandinista government is different from that of the rest of the Nicaraguan people because of a series of historical facts ranging from the low level of political consciousness and involvement in the anti-Somoza struggle in their region, to cultural and linguistic particularities, and the extreme poverty left behind by imperialist companies who ruthlessly used the labor of these peoples to cut wood, mine gold and grow bananas, only to move on when these activities became less profitable.

The Sandinista leaders' unpreparedness led to some initial mistakes when they established their first contacts in the

region. The FSLN rapidly recognized and corrected these errors. (2) A recent statement of Commandante Sergio Ramirez recalled this fact and explained that "We are paying the price of the many mistakes we've made. There are not very many Miskitos. Their isolation and backwardness were traditional things. The first problem is to change their consciousness, to teach them the new techniques without rushing them and with a display of respect for their differences. Then things will change of themselves. However, we think that the Miskitos are also Nicaraguans, and we cannot accept that they should live outside the revolution. All we need is to find the right balance." (3)

Amnesty for Miskitos

By now, the Sandinista revolution's record on this issue is quite positive. The Atlantic Coast peoples already enjoy a series of social gains such as literacy, the reestablishment of their traditional village organization, and the land reform which has turned over fertile lands to them and enabled them in 1983 to increase their revenue and improve their crops. The Miskitos who were removed by the FSLN from the fighting zone near the Honduran border and settled further inside the country in 1981, "are now living better and more happily," says Sergio Ramirez; "at this point, they would rather remain in their new settlements" where they have access to a whole series of social facilities (sanitary equipment, doctors, schools) that their traditional isolation had deprived them of. (4) This positive balance sheet is confirmed by the fact that the *contras* have downgraded the relative importance of their war drive on the Atlantic Coast, a clear military gain for the Sandinista forces.

Decrees issued December 2 and 4, 1983, declared amnesty for "Nicaraguan citizens of Miskito origins who have committed violations against public order and safety and all related offenses, between December 1, 1981, and now, in the department of North Zelaya." They apply to those who are presently in jail, whether or not they have been sentenced, as well as to those who are at liberty inside the country, and to those who have fled abroad.

The political considerations that led to this decision are a good illustration of the FSLN's approach. One of the points made is that "the situation of counter-revolutionary aggression prevalent in their region, their centuries-long underdevelopment, the exploitation they suffered and the delays in establishing communication networks there, have made these populations easy victims of manipulation, deception and subjection through terror at the hands of counterrevolutionary bands." (5) This analysis and the measures taken represent a demonstration of political strength by the Sandinista regime. They are all the more remarkable for having been taken at a time when Nicaragua is facing a vicious imperialist aggression.

As of now, hundreds of Miskitos have benefitted from the amnesty, either by being able to return from Honduras or by being freed by the Sandinistas. Moreover, when some of these communities expressed their desire to return to Nicaragua, the *contras* initiated a series of new raids designed either to kidnap Miskitos, such as the December 20 raid against the Francia Sirpe community, or to massacre them, such as the January 6 attack which killed 200 Miskitos of the Mokoron settlement in Honduras as they were attempting to reach Nicaragua.

It seems that the political impact of this decision has been largely positive for the revolution, even though there does exist a risk that the *contras* may be able to use the amnesty to "legally" infiltrate Nicaragua, and that the bourgeois opposition may gain some leeway in its attempts to attract the political support of these communities. The Sandinista leadership understands that the problems of differing levels and rhythms of involvement of different layers in the revolution, a consequence of the social, cultural and political diversity of the Nicaraguan masses and of the social weight of the non-proletarian layers, cannot be resolved by the amnesty alone. Sergio Ramirez pointed this out when he said: "The amnesty has already produced some good results. Many Miskitos are coming back but the amnesty will not be enough." (6)

This type of problem was also reflected in the definition of the land reform:

1. Quoted in *Intercontinental Press*, New York, February 6, 1984.
2. See *Inprecor* (IV's French-language sister publication), No 155, July 18, 1983.
3. *Le Monde*, February 15, 1984.
4. *Idem*.
5. *Barricada*, December 2, 1983.
6. *Le Monde*, February 15, 1984.



Election date was announced on the fiftieth anniversary of Sandino's assassination (DR)

the social weight of the peasant layers and the focus of the *contra* propaganda addressed to peasants led the Sandinista leadership to proclaim the "inalienability" of the land distributed to peasants, as well as of the land of "patriotic producers who respect the revolution." The reason for this move was a sentence at the end of the land reform titles granting land which stipulated that land was state property. The *contras* had used that sentence as grist for their anti-government propaganda mill. At the same time, a discussion has been initiated regarding the conditions under which land reform titles can be sold and on the specific limitations that should be imposed on potential purchases of such land to avoid the reconstitution of large estates.

During the last months of 1983, in the midst of overt imperialist aggression, the distribution of land to the peasants has been stepped up. This also represents a decision to confront a big challenge to the Sandinista revolution. In 1978, the top 5 percent of landowners owned 41 percent of the arable land in estates of over 350 hectares (864.50 acres), while the bottom 70 percent of agricultural producers farmed only 2 percent of arable land on plots of less than 7 hectares (17.3 acres), and one third of the active population — that is 80,000 families — were landless and jobless. (7) The land reform had to solve the problems of the two latter categories of the rural population.

1983 decisive year for land reform

The first decrees after the fall of the dictatorship confiscated the lands of Somoza and then of the Somocistas. This first phase saw a little over one million hectares (2.47 million acres), i.e. 20 percent of arable land, turned into an Area of People's Property (APP) and redistributed in the form of state enterprises since most of the former estates had been

large sugar-cane and coffee plantations that the Sandinistas did not want to break up. This meant that the state gained control of a decisive sector of the economy.

The second phase of the land reform began in July 1981 with a decree expropriating lands that had been abandoned, left to lie fallow or underutilized. It began to satisfy the democratic demands of the many landless peasants for access to small land ownership. By the end of 1983, over 350,000 hectares (864,500 acres) had been expropriated under this decree and distributed to 22,000 peasant families either individually or as part of cooperatives.

These reforms have already profoundly transformed the structure of land ownership since the largest landowners now own 12 percent of the arable land, as opposed to 41 percent in 1978, and the small landowners have received an additional 65 percent of arable land over and above what they had in 1978.

The distribution of land was considerably stepped up during the last months of 1983, amounting to what can be considered a third phase of the land reform. In 1983 alone, 250,000 hectares (617,500 acres) of land were distributed to the peasants, i.e. two and a half times more arable land than was distributed between October 1981, and the end of 1982. Land distributed in the last 41 days of 1983 represents 30 percent of all land turned over to the peasants since October 1981. It should be noted here that of the 250,000 hectares distributed in 1983, only 175,000 (432,250 acres) came from newly expropriated land; the rest came from the APP which will be further reduced in 1984 according to existing plans.

Nevertheless, 1983 can be described as the year of a decisive step in the implementation of the land reform, despite the imperialist war against Nicaragua. This is confirmed by the fact that the distribution of land was complemented by a

moratorium on the debts owned by more than one third of peasant cooperatives and individual peasants to the state.

Plans for this year project the distribution of even more land than in 1983. Commandante Bayardo Arce, the FSLN Political Committee coordinator, announced that 500,000 (1,235,000 acres) of land would be distributed as part of a program due to start on February 18, with grants of 35,000 hectares (86,400 acres) to the peasants of the Palacaguina zone of the Madriz department in the north of the country. By the end of 1984, one million hectares (2.47 million acres) should have been distributed to the peasants in a country whose total surface is 130,000 square kilometers (50,780 square miles). (Nueva Nicaragua Agency, Paris, February 23, 1984.)

The stepped up implementation of the land reform was accompanied by increased mass mobilization and political intervention occasioned by the debates going on in the Council of State. Commandante Jaime Wheelock said on December 9, 1983, that "We have over 600,000 militants in the people's organizations. I believe the Sandinista Front is the strongest political organization in Nicaragua. From the point of view of moral and political power, we might even have the strongest organization ever in Nicaragua or Central America." (8) The fact is, for a country of 3 million people, the membership figures of the various mass organizations are quite impressive: 40,000 in the Rural Workers Association (Asociacion de los Trabajadores del Campo — ATC); 90,000 in the Sandinista Workers Confederation (Central Sandinista de los Trabajadores — CST); 70,000 in the Luisa Armanda Espinosa Nicaraguan Women's Association (Asociacion

7. These figures are taken from *Nicaragua Aujourd'hui*, a weekly telex release of the Managua Central American Historical Institute (IHCA), January 29, 1984.

8. *Intercontinental Press*, February 20, 1984.

de las Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Armandita Espinosa — AMNLAE); 30,000 for the July 19 Sandinista Youth (Juventud Sandinista — JS 19), several thousands of whom are involved in the volunteer brigades harvesting cotton; 500,000 in the 12,000 Sandinista Defence Committees (Comites de Defensa Sandinista — CDS); and 70,000 in the Farmers' and Livestock Raisers National Union (Union Nacional de los Agricultores y Ganaderos — UNAG). (9) This mobilization extends to the military front, with the organization of the Sandinista People's Militias (Milicias Populares Sandinistas — MPS) that have recruited over 80,000 people on a volunteer basis, while another 10 to 15,000 have joined reserve battalions. A draft (Servicio Militar Patriótico — SMP) is also being established, all to back up the 20 to 25,000 strong Sandinistas People's Army (Ejército Popular Sandinista — EPS).

These figures alone do not convey the full scope of the people's mobilization in Nicaragua. This mobilization has also been reflected in the intervention of mass organizations into the Council of State debates, as occurred when the AMNLAE stepped into the discussion of the Law on Education, in October 1982, to demand that the rights of unwed mothers be taken into account, or when it entered the debate on the draft to demand that women be allowed to participate in the active division of the patriotic military service, on a voluntary basis, contrary to the initial conscription law which had exempted them from the draft. Clearly, the Council of State is not only the gathering place of the representatives of the toilers' mass organizations but also an arena for real political debate around the various laws being considered. This is the political achievement that the projected Constituent Assembly is expected to embody. At least, this is how the organized popular masses of Nicaragua view the elections scheduled for next November 4.

The exact procedures for these elections are only beginning to be formulated. The first decrees announcing simultaneous elections for the offices of president and vice-president and to a 90-member Constituent Assembly, were published in early December 1983. They specified that candidates would be elected by universal suffrage and for a term of six years. The president and vice-president would be chosen in a nationwide ballot, the Constituent Assembly members through regional votes on the basis of proportional representation.

The first two years of the Assembly are to be dedicated to drafting a Constitution, the next to legislating. The decrees also strip leaders of counterrevolutionary organizations, those convicted of counterrevolutionary actions and not amnestied, supporters of the restoration of a Somocista or similar regime, and advocates of foreign intervention in Nicaragua, of voting and eligibility rights. They establish the right to vote for eighteen-year olds. On February 21, 1984, on

the fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of Augusto Cesar Sandino, the "general of the free people," and a day of national mobilization of the CDS, the date of the elections was officially announced: November 4, 1984.

There are several indications that the Sandinista leadership also hopes to use this electoral process to hold off, at least temporarily, the threat of a direct imperialist military intervention. The very choice of the date, scheduled for two days before the US elections can be interpreted in this light. The same seems to apply to Commandante Humberto Ortega's statement that "the electoral process cannot be separated from the Central American developments and the aggressions perpetrated by the United States and Honduras against us," (10) or the January 4, 1984, Council of State decision, to indefinitely postpone the debate on the draft law on the organization of elections, following a series of *contra* air raids launched from Honduras and claimed by the Nicaraguan Democratic Forces (Fuerzas Democraticas Nicaraguenses — FDN).

Mass organizations influence debate on election law

But by January 6, the Council of State had already reconsidered this decision. The Sandinista leaders have repeatedly made the point that the scheduling of elections could be jeopardized by aggression or aerial bombardments. At the same time, the FSLN remains conscious that "Washington only projects a military solution (and that) the United States will never accept the legitimization of Sandinista power through elections" Sergio Ramirez recently stated. (11)

The domestic bourgeois opposition, although it had been tirelessly calling for elections over the last two years, immediately disassociated itself from the elections when they were actually announced. It particularly decried the fact that the election law "explicitly forbids political leaders who are outside the country from participating in the elections." (12) The "Ramiro Sacasa" Democratic Coordinating Committee — a coalition of the bourgeois opposition parties (Constitutional Liberal Party, Social-Democratic Party, Social-Christian Party), the Cosep (Supreme Council of Private Enterprise), and two trade union confederations, the Nicaraguan Workers Confederation and the Trade Union Unification Confederation — waged its campaign around the following issues: For a separation of party and state; amnesty for "all" Nicaraguans; for giving Somocistas the right to vote; for setting the voting age at 21; for removing the right to vote from the military; and for holding the elections to the Assembly and the Presidency on separate dates... As of now, then, the bourgeois opposition is moving towards a position of boycotting the elections, but this perspective has not been adopted unanimously.

The mass organizations have reacted against these criticisms and mobilized. Many articles in the FSLN's organ, *Barricada* have reported these popular reactions. As a general rule, they present the elections as an institutionalization of the revolution, "another battle the people must wage to legalize the power it conquered on July 19, 1979." A report published in the January 26 *Barricada* gave extensive coverage to the workers' reactions.

One of those interviewed said: "I don't want elections, things are good as they are;" another: "I think the elections will strengthen the revolution even further. We, the workers, will answer the bourgeoisie by supporting the Sandinista Front."

The election law has already become a major challenge for the organized Nicaraguan masses and their leadership, the FSLN. On January 19, the CST's general secretary announced that this body would help organize "a national mobilization of the working class to guarantee that the draft election law for Nicaragua corresponds to our hopes."

The Sandinista Youth has also entered the fray with a campaign to lower the voting age to sixteen. On January 31, 600 officers of the capital's CDSes met in Managua and came to the conclusion that the voting age could be lowered to fifteen. Youth have demonstrated on this issue, and the JS-19 has launched a petition to win the right to vote for sixteen- and seventeen-year olds under the slogan: "We are building the country, we want to vote." Speaking at the February 21 rally, government coordinator Daniel Ortega announced that he considered 16-year olds had won their right to vote by their massive participation in the revolution and legislation to this effect would be recommended to the Council of State. This body is meeting daily to draft the new electoral law and is expected to complete its work by mid-March. The latest reports are that the election period will start in mid-May with most aspects of the state of emergency being lifted by that time. Political parties that run a full slate of candidates will receive 600,000 dollars in state financing. To be on the national ballot they must collect 5,000 signatures. (13)

The way in which the masses are approaching this test of strength very clearly demonstrates their unwillingness to relinquish the slightest bit of their hard-won power. This was clearly stated by the CST general secretary: "These elections will institutionalize the power of the workers,...we are going to make sure that not a single firm, not a single factory, not a single bank, not an inch of territory can be taken out of the people's hands. We are going to make sure that the bourgeoisie will never return to power." (14)

9. *Barricada*, December 26, 1983.

10. *Le Monde*, February 7, 1984.

11. *Idem*, February 15, 1984.

12. *La Prensa*, January 17, 1984.

13. *Intercontinental Press*, March 19, 1984.

14. *Barricada*, January 19, 1984.

Rethinking and regroupment on the Left

Vibhuti Patel, a leader of the Communist League, Indian section of the Fourth International, was invited to participate in a conference on the role of nongovernmental organizations in rural Asia held in Dakar, Senegal, in February. On her way back from this conference, she gave the following interview to Gerry Foley in Paris.

Question. Since Indian political life has already begun to focus around the general elections expected next year, how is the contest shaping up?

Answer. The lines are very unclear. At the time of the State of Emergency (1) there was a clear difference between the government and the opposition. But today everyone is using the same jargon, the same populist slogans. Within the opposition itself, the alliances are constantly shifting. There is no consistency. What's going on is a lot of very crude bargaining about the distribution of seats.

Q. There are no clear issues or polarization at this point?

A. No. But on the other hand, the Congress-Indira is more systematic in presenting its economic program, and, in particular, in playing up its role in the Nonaligned Movement and its proposals for Third World economic alliances. In fact, this has won the approval even of the two Communist parties, the CPI and the CPM. (2) They have adopted resolutions saying that they support Mrs Gandhi on international issues, while continuing to have their reservations as regards her domestic policy.

Indira Gandhi was able to take effective advantage of this to throw them off balance. She argued that there is always a connection between domestic policy and international policy, that the two cannot be separated, and so the CPs were inconsistent to say that they supported her foreign policy but not her domestic one.

The prime minister has rebuilt her image very skillfully, making statements opposing the US invasion of Grenada and the Pakistani regime's repression in Sind. She has also made statements decrying the attacks on the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

The Indian press and bourgeois politicians in fact are having a field day with the situation in Pakistan. They love to make invidious comparisons between the setup there and India, "the World's Largest Democracy." But this is rank hypocrisy.

The Indian treatment of oppressed nationalities can be quite as brutal as the Pakistani treatment of the Sindhis. This is true in a number of cases in the North-east Indian states, in particular in Assam. (3) The Indian government forced

through fraudulent elections there, compelled people to vote. There were mass killings and mass rape and a lot of repression. The Indian army was responsible for all that.

Q. What were the reasons for all the conflict and killing in Assam? It was presented in the world press as an outbreak of savage antirealism against the Bihari (4) refugees from Bangladesh who have settled in Assam.

A. Fundamentally, it is a problem of an oppressed nationality, the Assamese. The Indian central government has always treated the Northeast as a colony. There has been hardly any economic development. There is a very high rate of youth unemployment. Moreover, there is no place for the emerging Assamese petty bourgeoisie.

In Assam under British rule, the Bengalis were the first to get education. Many of them found their way into the British administration. After the British left, the Bengalis dominated the bureaucracy. The Bengali language was imposed. The Bengalis always considered themselves as a civilized and superior race, looking down on the Assamese as tribals. It was rather like the attitude of Vietnamese toward Cambodians. And so bitter resentments developed among the Assamese toward Bengalis.

Then on top of all this you had the influx of the Biharis fleeing discrimination against them in Bangladesh. They became very strong in the agrarian sector. In the plantation sector also, non-Assamese — Tamils and people from Orissa — are very strong.

A feeling developed among the Assamese that they were being pushed out

everywhere. They face high youth unemployment. There is no industrialization. And even agriculture is being taken over by outsiders. And this was aggravated by the suppression of their own national aspirations.

Q. So that's what led to the campaign against the Biharis. How long has it been going on?

A. It has lasted for two years. It has been a persistent and sustained movement. It pervaded all classes of society, from illiterate Assamese in the remotest part of Assam to people in the capital city. The leadership was in the hands of the intelligentsia, mainly professors and students. The Assamese Literary Society played a very important role in drafting the program of the movement.

Q. What were the concrete demands?

A. First, they wanted to deport all people from Bangladesh who came into Assam after a certain date. They proposed 1950. The Indian government accepted the principle of a deadline, but after that there was a lot of bargaining, with the government proposing 1960, then 1955, and so forth.

Then the movement demanded economic aid. The Sixth Five Year Plan has no allocation for Assam. The Northeast has never been treated as a priority.

They asked for a quota of jobs in the public sector and government offices for Assamese. They demanded educational facilities.

Another demand was for protecting the interests of Assamese in the areas where they have become the minority. Bengalis are now in a majority in many areas in the state, and the Bengalis have demanded that these areas be treated as a separate state.

Q. What was the attitude of the Indian section of the Fourth International to this problem?

A. In the beginning there was a controversy about it. Obviously, it is a difficult question. But now the great majority consider that the fundamental problem is the national oppression of the Assamese.

This became clearer in the second phase of the struggle that started last year, when the government called elections for the state. The leadership of the Assamese mass movement called for a boycott. The Indian government's reaction was just to try to impose everything

1. Indira Gandhi in the face of an expected unfavorable court ruling, invoked a state of emergency in June 1975, which ushered in a period of arbitrary rule and extensive repression. In 1977, her Congress Party was badly defeated in the national elections. She, however, returned to power in 1980. — IV.

2. In 1964, the Communist Party of India split under the impact of the Sino-Soviet conflict. A section formed the Communist Party Marxist (CPM). The CPM aligned with Peking but never became fully ideologically Maoist. The ideological Maoists in the usual sense are generally identified with the Naxalite movement that favored armed struggle. That is, the two terms are synonymous in Indian

politics, although they refer to a whole spectrum of groups. — IV.

3. Assam borders on Bangladesh, and this area of India was isolated to a certain extent by the creation of East Pakistan (which became Bangladesh in 1971). Over the past year, it came into the international news in connection with communal riots involving massacres of villagers. — IV.

4. Biharis are non-Bengali Muslims who settled in East Pakistan in the context of the population movements that followed the partition of India in 1947. With the rise of ethnic-based nationalism in East Pakistan, they became increasingly the object of resentments of the Bengali majority and were subjected to more and more pressures. — IV.

by military force.

Q. What was the objection of the Assamese movement to the elections?

A. They argued that the election was just stage managed. The repression had been very extensive. Assamese were being butchered by the Indian army. The state regime was quite militarized. And before that there had been governor's rule in Assam. The Assamese masses were terrorized.

The Assamese leaders said that unless there was serious consideration of setting a deadline for citizenship rights, they were not prepared to cooperate with the central government. For example, the 1981 Indian census does not carry any information on Assam, because the census was boycotted.

Q. What did the Indian section propose with respect to this demand by the Assamese for deporting the Biharis?

A. We proposed that all the states of the Indian Union share the burden of providing for the Biharis. Bangladesh is economically worse off than India. These Bihari Muslims are treated as second-class citizens in Bangladesh by the Bengali majority. They are mainly manual laborers. They have lived in Bangladesh for generations but the worsening economic crisis there is making their situation desperate. As a result, they come to Assam or Tripura, or other north Indian states. But these states are economically the most backward in the whole of India. So, our demand is that all states should try to absorb them, that it should not be left to Assam alone.

Q. What sort of political effects do you think the conflict in Assam has had outside that state?

A. One of the most immediate effects is on the other states and peoples in the region. As a result of the Assam struggle, people in other states of the Northeast are trying to build a coordinating committee. There are seven states in the area. They all face the same problems. Since Indian independence, they have all faced prolonged military rule.

National movements are developing among a lot of peoples. For example, there is the area of Charkand in Bihar. Actually, it extends into three or four states. A Charkand Liberation Front has developed.

Such questions tend to become a political dividing line both at the all India level and locally. There is a left coalition government, for example, in the Northeast state of Tripura. It has taken the same attitude to the Assam struggle as Indira Gandhi, that it is a communal riot problem. That is also the attitude of the two CPs nationally.

The CPM, the stronger CP, and the government it controls in West Bengal applies a gross double standard toward the struggle in Assam. They call it communalist. At the same time, they support the Akali Dal movement in Punjab, which really is communalist. The Sikhs

are not an oppressed nationality. They have been a very powerful group in Indian politics, they are strong in the military, many of them are well-to-do traders. Moreover, a lot of Sikhs have emigrated and so a considerable amount of money from abroad comes into the Sikh community.

The CPM is openly collaborating with this movement. They are prepared to make electoralist alliances with communalist parties such as the Hindu RSS and the Muslim League, or with Christian Democrats in Kerala.

Q. What is the evolution of the Indian left now? How do you expect the left parties to do in the upcoming general elections?

A. There is a lot of cynicism about the left in government. You take the experience of the left-wing government in Kerala. What did it do? It made alliances with Christian Democrats, with the Muslim League, with RSS. Compared with that Indira Gandhi offers at least the prospect of stable rule.

The major forces on the traditional left are the CPI and the CPM. The Social Democracy has disintegrated. There are some personalities with a base of their own in trade unions or other mass organizations. But it's not a cohesive force.

In West Bengal, the left coalition government has offered a number of populist programs, for example an agrarian program. But the rich peasants got all the benefits from it. Without supporting programs, the people became demoralized.

We have a strong unit in one of the West Bengal districts, Shantipur, where our comrades are in the leadership of a union of agricultural laborers and marginal farmers. They report that there is a lot of repression of the struggling masses. In some respects, the CPM government is more repressive even than the bourgeois state governments.

It is more intolerant to the other groups that have come out of the Maoist current, for example. (In India, there are 16 formally organized Maoist groups and forty grouplets, mainly in West Bengal.)

When the CPM government took over in West Bengal, the first circular it issued was on the need to curb the so-called ultraleft groups. There are some 8,000 Maoists in prison, and torture is a frequent practice. This state of affairs was exposed in a very widely circulated journal, *Sunday*, and its editor was subjected to persecution as a result.

There is also a lot of infighting in the CPM-dominated coalition, since it includes the Revolutionary Socialist Party, The Revolutionary Communist Party, the CPI, CPM, the Forward Bloc, in all a lot of groups.

Q. What do you think the chances are for the left-wing state governments hanging onto to power in the general elections?

A. The CPM might win in West Bengal just because the Bengali masses want to avoid any repression of the kind they witnessed during the Congress regime under the State of Emergency. They went through very horrifying experiences. The memory of that will keep them from voting for the Congress-I.

In Kerala, it is hard to say. Because of the sort of alliances the government has made, Christian Democratic Forces, the Muslim League or other opposition groups might win ground.

In Tripura, as I indicated, the left government has been becoming seriously discredited and the outlook is not good.

The problem with the traditional left as a whole is that it has been unable to attract our generation.

Q. What do you mean exactly by "our generation?"

A. People in their twenties and thirties. The old left parties cannot attract them. A number of the old left personalities have big bases in the unions, it is true. When you have that, you have facilities so people come to you for economic advantage. Or if they are in government, they can offer jobs or some facilities, and so people are attracted to them. But as soon as they are out of government, the followers go too. They have no consistent following.

Q. What is the relationship between the two CPs today? Is there any change in their relative strength?

A. Broadly speaking, they don't have any ideological differences any more. The CPM has been talking about equidistance from Moscow and Peking. In fact, both parties are competing for Kremlin support.

There are differences on some issues. The CIP supports job reservation for women. The CPM doesn't. There are a lot of polemics about that. There are also deep rooted personality problems. I think that this is the main thing that stands in the way of their unification.

As for the relationship of forces between them, the CPM remains stronger and its lead has increased as a result of a new split in the CPI.

The CPI made a self-criticism because they gave full support to the State of Emergency, arguing at the time that its purpose was to curb the rightist forces. The section of the party most attached to the old line quit. It included a pioneer CP leader and pioneer unionist, Dange.

This new party, the All India Communist Party, supports Indira Gandhi completely. It is a wonder that they don't merge with the Congress-I.

After this split the CPI lost its trade-union base in most major cities. But in general the young working class is not either with the CPI or the CPM. The Bombay textile strike is a graphic illustration of this.

The CP were the pioneers of union-

ization in the textile industry. Now the relationship of forces has completely changed. The crown of the CPs' work in the union movement, the National Campaign Committee of 16 all-India unions and 58 local federations has proved effective.

During the textile strike, the National Campaign Committee did hardly any solidarity work. It just passed a few resolutions. So, in Bombay, when it issues a call, it is hardly able to attract 5,000 or 10,000 people at the most. But when Datta Samant [the leader of the textile strike] issues a call, it's always 100,000 minimum and up to 500,000.

Q. What is the Campaign Committee exactly? What does it represent?

A. Well, it mainly just passes resolutions. It was formed as a response to the defeat of so many strikes. After the defeat of the 1974 railway workers strike, there has not been a single major strike where the workers have achieved anything. There was a strike of 1,400,000 government employees. It lasted for seven or eight months, but it ended in defeat. Then, we had the local running staffs' strike. We had a public sector strike. In none of these could the workers achieve their demands. These actions were all ruthlessly crushed, with most of the activists being suspended or dismissed.

So, in this context, workers from all the major unions pressurized their leadership to form one campaign committee. In the late 1970s also, the whole series of new repressive laws began to come down. The fight against the Industrial Relations Bill marked the first time that the working class from all over India came together around a common platform.

There was a demonstration of more than a million workers in Delhi in front of the government building. There was an attempt to overcome the old sectarian and craft divisions. But when actual, concrete struggles developed, the old sectarianism and paralysis took over again. And this organization badly failed the test of the Bombay textile workers strike, as I said.

Q. What have been the results of the defeat of the textile strike?

A. About 100,000 workers are out of a job. There is a flight of capital from Bombay. Many of the mills have been taken over by the government because the private capitalists are not prepared to run them. A very extensive rationalization and mechanization of the industry is in progress. Nearly all the activists have been victimized.

The Indian government has a massive arsenal of repressive acts. They have a preventative detention act. There is Article 151 on antisocial elements. It was used against all of us during the textile strike. They have the National Security Act. They have the Disturbed Areas Act. Wherever a mass move-

ment develops, they declare it a "disturbed area," and that means all actions — sit-ins, strikes, meetings — are illegal. They have the Essential Services Act, which covers very wide categories of workers. For example, they declared an emergency in the railroads when there was a strike of local running staff. A large proportion of the young workers were suspended or dismissed.

Q. Was the textile workers union broken by the defeat of the strike?

A. No. Moreover, there were some political gains from it. Datta Samant is now talking about the need for a labor party. Samant has expanded his base now in Gujerat, outside Bombay, and in other parts of Maharashtra. He is looked on as a martyr.

In that sense, the outcome of the textile strike defeat is very different than that of the last big strike that was defeated, the railway strike in 1974. Fernandez, who was the leader of that strike, was discredited. There were a lot of feelings of suspicion and betrayal.

But the textile workers do not blame Samant for the defeat. They say that it was because the other unions did not support us that we were defeated.

It was not Samant who initiated the strike. The workers went to him. Some 25,000 workers in 8 textile mills had already gone on strike in October 1982. They had been functioning through area committees, since the workers live in sorts of ghettos, called "textile villages." The workers appealed to Samant to organize a struggle. He told them that he did not know the history of the textile workers movement. He had mainly worked in engineering, pharmaceuticals and other modern industries where the bargaining power of workers is high. He did not know how to work in the textile industry. So, the workers told him that if he did not declare a strike within 24 hours, they would do it on their own. So, he agreed.

The textile workers know that all textile strikes in India have been long drawn out. They have all lasted more

than 30 days, and often many months. So, they were prepared. Their central demand was for repeal of that black act, the Bombay Industrial Relations Act. They knew that that would not be easy. The management was willing to make economic concessions. But the workers were not willing to accept anything less than getting rid of the bosses' union, winning the right to have a union of their own.

Q. What about the basic union organization? Is it still there?

A. Definitely, in Maharashtra.

Q. Despite the fact that most of the activists have been fired?

A. Yes, a lot of the activists have become full timers. Some have migrated to rural areas. Some are working in the Employment Guarantee Scheme that the government has provided. They are continuing to fight there, since textile workers are very militant. They are fighting corruption in government contracting, they're unionizing, they're organizing rallies in different villages.

Q. Wasn't there any demoralization after the defeat?

A. There is a certain sense of defeatism among broader layers, since in spite of such a heroic strike by 250,000 workers, lasting 18 months, the struggling workers could not achieve much. Now the communalist forces are gaining strength.

Q. Did the Communist League gain anything from its work in the strike?

A. We were able to recruit some workers who were looking for an alternative to the Communist parties. The role the National Campaign Committee played in the strike badly alienated the textile workers.

We were also able to win the confidence of a lot of workers affected by syndicalist moods that were strong before. Their attitude was that anyone who talks about politics is not a worker,

Sikh demands for autonomy—one of Mrs Gandhi's problems (DR)



that they are just trying to use the workers for their electoral ambitions. But because we were active in the strike, we are on good terms with these workers now.

The party that gained the most from the strike was the Lal Nishan party, a regional party that has a rather strong historical base in the state.

Q. What is the Lal Nishan Party? What does it represent politically?

A. It goes back to a breakaway from the Communist Party. In 1942, in the framework of the wartime alliance between the Soviet Union and the imperialist powers, the CP decided to support the British regime in India. The Lal Nishan founders split and lined up with the nationalists. Since then they have had a strong base in Maharashtra, both in the industrial cities and in the villages.

Their politics are a weird combination of right-wing and ultraleft deviations. They don't have any consistent program. They can come out with a call for boycotting elections or very radical programs. Then, a big section supports Indira Gandhi, arguing that she is the only charismatic leader available to fight communalist and rightist forces in India.

In the countryside, they do not support the peasants movement and focus exclusively on agricultural laborers and marginal farmers. Their central campaign is for extending the minimum wage to agriculture.

Q. Have the difficult experiences of the last decade in India had any positive effect on the left groups? Are there any tendencies that are favorable to revolutionary Marxism?

A. There have been very rapid evolutions in the Maoist movement. It was hit very hard by the effects of the de-Maoification, the modernization drive of the new regime, the debate around the Gang of Four and the persecution of the opposition, the Chinese invasion of Vietnam. Bettelheim's break also came as a big shock, because his book, *Class Struggles in the USSR*, was sort of a bible for them.

They have also been affected by the capitalist development of India. Because before they just talked about international questions or the monopoly bourgeoisie. This did not make any sense to the masses. Nor did their line of a Bloc of Four Classes in the countryside, which meant supporting the rural rich. Now they have had to start thinking about Indian realities.

So, now there are many Maoist groups that think that the concept of a two-stage revolution is irrelevant for India. After 1977, they started thinking that the industrial working class also has a role to play. So, they have tended to give more priority to trade-union work. They have started rethinking about the concept of armed insurrection, about the definition of armed insurrection, about how to go to the masses. They are less sectarian, less dismissive about other

groups.

In fact, we have attracted many Maoists to our party. In West Bengal, a lot of the Maoists are interested in our analysis of imperialism, in our analysis of postcapitalist societies. We have a lot of debates with different Maoist groups. We exchange literature. Some of these Maoist groups with very ultraleft histories are ready to sell our literature in their bookstores. They invite us to take part in united fronts.

For example, in Shantipur, we have been working in a mass front with Maoists for some years and our comrades put out a thick journal together with them. This front includes dissident CPM members (this party is not considered Maoist any more), dissident Maoists, and Trotskyists.

We can collaborate with such Maoists and former Maoists on many concrete issues, labor struggles, democratic struggles, women's struggles.

The Fourth Internationalist movement has also acquired more credibility in the past period. The idea that these people coming from a Maoist background had was that Trotskyists were Euro-centric, that they were interested only in world issues, not in Indian reality. Now that image is gone. They have seen Trotskyists who are rooted in the masses, who are active in mass fronts, for whom India is the priority. We are gaining credibility among the new radical groups, among the Maoist groups. This makes us very hopeful because these people are young revolutionaries with a lot of idealism.

We could also see a lot of rethinking in the Marx centenary conferences organized by the CPI and the CPM. A West Bengal State Committee member of the CPM has questioned the two-stage theory, saying that he cannot understand why we can't have a directly socialist revolution.

Writing in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, one of the main ideologues of the CPM has said, for the first time to my knowledge, that the main problem in the Soviet Union is that there is no workers democracy.

The CPM has had a bad attitude to the antibureaucratic movements in East Europe up till now. For example, they consider Solidarnosc a CIA operation, and Lech Walesa a CIA agent. When a Solidarnosc representative, Henryk Szlajfer, came to India, they tried to rag him and disrupt his meetings.

He came in June 1982. I was his translator. We organized a meeting of workers to hear him and the CPM people came and tried to act like hooligans.

Just about a month ago, a gathering of CPM ideologues at a Marx centenary symposium made a criticism about their party's past position on the women's movement and the student movement. They have denounced the women's movement in the past as a nonclass movement that divides the working class. Now they are ready to admit that rape, violence against women, are not nonclass issues. They have formed women's caucuses in

the unions they control. They have formed a women's organization of their own.

One of the main differences we have with the CPs is that we have a clear-cut position on caste, the women's question, tribal questions, a position of support for the struggles of oppressed castes, the oppressed sex and oppressed nationalities. Whenever such struggle have occurred, we have supported them, actively intervened in them, as for example during the caste riots that took place in 1,200 villages in Maharashtra where the ghettos of the Untouchables were ransacked and burned.

There was arson, looting and mass rape. All the comrades went there. We visited these areas, we publicized their struggles, we supported them. We are active in the mass fronts on the caste issue.

When the women's movement developed in the mid-1970s, we intervened in it. We never called it a nonclass petty-bourgeois movement. Our attitude and work on such questions has brought us a lot of gains.

Q. What are the prospects for fusion with other revolutionary groups?

A. Right now, we are headed for fusion with the Bolshevik Leninist Group (BLG). We have been engaged in merger talks with them for a year, and we will hold a joint conference in May this year.

One of the key points in the discussions was the question of the Fourth International. There are a number of independent Marxist groups in India who are very close to us programmatically on the questions of the Indian revolution. But they want to avoid the label of Trotskyism. They argue "What do you need this Fourth International for?" Some of the BLG comrades were influenced by arguments of this type.

Our answer was that it was important to be in an international organization, since we are involved in a worldwide struggle. This is important to develop mutual solidarity and exchange experiences. We pointed to the example of Poland and the work done by Fourth International sections in other countries on the question of sex and national oppression. It was the experience of other sections of the Fourth International that enabled us, for example, to understand the women's movement when it arose and to take the correct attitude toward it. So, the BLG comrades now agree that the united organization should be the Indian section of the Fourth International.

The fusion will have an immediate importance in one respect in particular. The BLG has contacts in southern India, where we have never done any work before. None of our comrades know Dravidian languages. They are very hard to learn, since their structure is completely different from that of the Indo-European languages of northern India.

So as a result of this fusion, we hope to make a big step toward working on an all-India basis for the first time. ■

Growing guerrilla movement fueled by peasant desperation

Since the assassination last August of the opposition leader Benigno Aquino, the Marcos regime in the Philippines has been going through a prolonged period of open political crisis.

The world press's attention has been focused mainly on the extraordinary wave of mass mobilizations that has dominated the political life of the country for six months now. In Manila above all, but also in the provinces, demonstrations have followed mass rallies without letup.

On January 31, 1984, there were again a million and a half people in the streets of the capital demanding the resignation of President Marcos.

These urban mass mobilizations, which have been facilitated by the entry of the middle classes and an important part of the business community into active opposition, have involved all sections of society and pointed up the isolation of the regime. The government is able to remain in power only because of the backing of the army, the support of the United States and the division of the opposition forces (1).

Even if the media are not so interested in it, the worsening of the social and economic situation in the countryside is also a major factor in the development of the national crisis in the Philippines. These problems have given impetus to peasant mobilizations and offer fertile soil for the communist guerrilla movement.



25,000 demonstrate in Manila against President Marcos (DR)

Paul PETITJEAN

The New People's Army, known by the initials of its English name, was founded in 1969. For several years, its forces remained quite small. But in the mid-1970s it began both to consolidate its strength on the local level and to spread. This twofold process made it into one of the most dynamic guerrilla movements in the world, after the one in El Salvador, although the extension of the Philippine movement has been relatively slow and the level of its operations remains generally modest. (2)

The mountainous terrain of the country has made it easier to establish small

guerrilla nucleuses. But the fact that the Philippines is an island archipelago including more than 7,000 large and small

islands, creates many logistical problems for the NPA and makes it impossible for it to set up "sanctuaries" in remote border areas.

Liaison among the various regions is difficult, and the political-military leaderships of the various guerrilla zones have to demonstrate real capabilities for operating independently. It is nearly impossible to bring in arms in large quantities from outside (from a friendly country or purchased on the international black market). The NPA has to find its weapons in the country itself, by capturing them from the enemy or buying them from corrupt officers in the government army. (3)

Linguistically divided, the majority of the Philippines' 53 million inhabitants are peasants, and there is a considerable range of differences in the agrarian structures. These conditions make it difficult to achieve a rapid unification of the peasant struggles. All this has obviously worked to slow down the spread of the NPA. On the other hand, the policy of the martial law regime, the constant widening of the market economy, and the increasing integration of the country into the world economy in the 1970s have strongly promoted the geographic spread and convergence of the democratic and social struggles. Many mass organizations have been formed, and the guerrillas have been able to take advantage of the new situation.

By the start of the 1980s, the NPA's main "fronts" were no longer concentrated, as they had been in the initial phase, on the northern island of Luzon alone. It had established a front in the Davao zone on the southern island of Mindanao and on the island of Samar (in the middle of the archipelago, to the east of the Visaya island group), as well as in the Cagayan Valley in the northeast of Luzon.

More generally, the conditions seem to have been assembled today for the communist movement to reinforce its work in the countryside on a national scale, on political and military levels, as well as in struggles for immediate demands, in both semi-legal and clandestine forms.

For the first time, the activity of the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) extends to the bulk of the country. It in fact goes far beyond the guerrilla zones where the NPA, its "armed wing," operates. It extends to the "white" rural zones — that is, those controlled by the government army — and to the urban centers.

1. For a general analysis of the crisis of the Marcos regime, see Paul Petitjean, "The Philippine Dictatorship in Crisis," IV, No 37, October 3, 1983; "The Growth of the Philippine Revolutionary Movement," IV, No 38, October 17, 1983.

2. The NPA sometimes conducts large operations, marshalling hundreds of guerrillas. But its forces generally remain divided into small units in the villages or the forests. Although it has no really "liberated zones," the NPA has gained important mass support in several regions and partially controls some areas with a significant population.

According to a recent article in the CPP's underground magazine, *Ang Bayan*, the NPA currently has 45 guerrilla fronts covering areas

in 53 provinces. This article also claims that the NPA has 20,000 full-time guerrillas and 10,000 rifles. The CPP membership, less than 100 in 1968-69, grew to 2,000 in 1972, rose to this figure again in 1976 after a decline, and today has reached an estimated 30,000. (*Ang Bayan*, December 1983.)

3. Unlike the NPA, the Muslim guerrillas of the Moro National Liberation Front in the south of the archipelago have the benefit of an active contraband trade carried out by outboard motor boats, in particular with Sabah in the Indonesian archipelago. The Muslim guerrillas are much better armed than the communist ones, but their struggle affects only the southern part of the country. It is possible that on the island of Mindanao, the NPA benefits indirectly to some extent from the traffic run by the Moros.

The situation that prevails today on the island of Negros illustrates both the new possibilities open to the revolutionary movement and the complexity of the problems that have still to be solved.

On the island of Negros in the western Visayas, sugar is king. Since the nineteenth century, sugar cane has dominated its entire economy. The archipelago's first big export crop, sugar cane growing, was given its initial impetus by Anglo-American commercial capital while the country was still a Spanish colony.

From the outset, this industry was oriented toward international markets, and it was granted special access to the American market by the Laurel-Langley Treaty when the Philippines became independent in 1946. (At the end of the nineteenth century, the US took over the Philippines from Spain and ruled it as a colony for about fifty years.) But in 1974, the Laurel-Langley Treaty ran out, and the Philippine sugar industry had to face competition from other producing countries and sugar substitutes.

Crisis of the sugar industry

The shift in 1974 opened up a deep crisis, although it was momentarily concealed by a considerable but temporary rise in sugar prices on the world market. A long time before, Hawaii, followed by Australia and other producing countries, had mechanized their plantations. But in the Philippines, the bulk of the crop was still brought in by wage workers (on Negros) or by share croppers (Luzon).

Assured of a stable market in the US, the Philippine "sugar barons" were content to go on superexploiting their workers and did not try to modernize. Most of them seem to have been counting on a renewal of the special agreement with Washington and were taken by surprise by the expiration of the Laurel-Langley Treaty.

The crisis of the sugar industry in the Philippines was compounded by a political crisis. The Negros "sugar barons" belonged to the traditional bourgeoisie and were not represented in the new coterie around President Marcos.

Taking advantage of the powers derived from the establishment of martial law in 1972, Marcos gained a monopoly in sugar trading. For this purpose, he set up government banks and agencies and put one of his intimates, Roberto S. Benedicto, the new sugar czar, at the head of them.

The sugar industry in the Philippines has remained one of the most backward in the world. Systematic efforts to mechanize, based on Australian methods, began only a few years ago. No social preparations were made for this. However, the mechanization of all operations (cultivation, weed removal, care of the soil and the plants, cutting, collecting, etc.) should lead to a drastic reduction in the labor force employed — by 60 to 90%.

"This is a tragic situation," a trade-union activist explained to me in 1983: "The island and its people depend entirely on the sugar crop. The government has provided no plan for agricultural or industrial reconversion. There is simply nothing else for the laid-off workers to do. Unemployment is already rampant in the rest of the country. And in any case the plantation workers have had no training to enable them to adjust to another trade. In many cases, their parents lived on the plantations before them. It is the only world they know."

The island of Negros has an old tradition of mass struggle that goes back to the revolution of 1896, the uprising against Spanish colonial rule. But the communist guerrilla movement took root on the island only recently. Still relatively weak, it has operated mainly in the mountainous areas, where the slopes are worked by share croppers or small farmers.

Agricultural workers unions have organized the plantations on the island's western plain. The most dynamic of them, the National Federation of Sugar Workers (NFSW), was founded in 1971, a year before the institution of martial law. This union now has a long experience of economic struggles and has managed to establish itself on a significant number of plantations on Negros (as well as in the center of the island of Luzon). But it faces great difficulties in its organizing work. One reason for this, of course, is the repression. But the forms of exploitation and dependency to which the workers are subjected also pose obstacles.

Full-time workers live on the plantation. The houses they live in belong to the landowners. They are often obliged to buy their supplies at the plantation store, if only because transportation to the market is too expensive. They are in debt, often deeply. They are paid by the day or on a quota rate. In the off season, they depend on rice distributed to them by the landowner, whom they reimburse out of their wages when they go back to work.

But the plantation owner may refuse to give rice to a union activist. It is very difficult for workers to leave a plantation if they are too badly treated because they are often in debt to the owner. Moreover, the other plantation owners in the area would probably refuse to hire them (since the bosses stick together), and then these workers would have no other alternative but to go join the ranks of the urban poor in the shantytowns.

What is more, the full-time workers are traditionally only a minority of the workforce, by comparison with temporary workers and migrant seasonal workers. The *sacadas*, the cane cutters, generally come from the neighboring island of Panay. They are organized into "gangs" by the recruiting agents. They are paid miserably but they are also trapped by the spiral of debt.

Thus these workers form a poverty-stricken rural subproletariat, and they

have been the first to pay the price for mechanization. The number of *sacadas* employed for a season is already much lower than in the past. This has a direct effect also on wives and children. Because the plantation owners often introduce mechanization in stages, starting first with those tasks traditionally done by women and children — planting, spreading of fertilizer and pesticides, weed removal.

The NFSW is trying to get the social legislation enforced. "On paper, the Philippines has the best social legislation in Asia. The problem is that the laws are rarely enforced. The minimum wage today (early 1983) is 14 pesos a day, plus cost-of-living allowances, making a total of about 20 pesos. The real average wage is 10 to 12 pesos a day. What is more various methods are used to try to get members of the workers' families to contribute unpaid labor, in particular through the Pakiao system."

The Pakiao system is a cruel form of piece work often applied on many plantations. The workers are paid according to the area covered, per hectare of cane cut for example. The rate is so low that they are obliged to get their whole families to help them so that the family can collectively earn a little money.

"There are cases where the daily wage of an individual member of the team is as low as one or two pesos," that is about 12 cents. Thus, a family of eight might earn a dollar a day.

Growing tensions

Social tension is obvious today on Negros. Plantation workers who lost their jobs killed a particularly inhumane manager out of desperation. The landowners are worried about the safety of their agents if they fire workers on too massive a scale.

For some years army outrages have been increasing. And summary "liquidations" are stimulating the growth of a human rights movement. Big mass mobilizations have developed around social and political demands (such as the boycott of faked elections). In December 1983, 90,000 people demonstrated in the city of Bacolod.

Living conditions vary considerably from plantation to plantation. Some owners are more humane than others, especially those who live on their plantation and not in town. Some managers are also better than others. One of the measures that makes the biggest difference in the living conditions from plantation to plantation involves subsistence farming by the workers. On one plantation that I visited, for example, the owner let the workers grow for their own use or sale vegetables, maize and rice along

4. See Alfred W. McCoy, "In Extreme Unction: The Philippine Sugar Industry," in *Political Economy of Philippine Commodities*, Third World Studies Program, University of the Philippines, 1983.

the bank of a stream. This was vital for the families concerned. They could eat what they grew. You cannot live on sugar cane!

It is an ingrained experience in agricultural workers that sugar means hunger. (5) The commercial crops are no use to those who grow them. So, agricultural workers retain the mentality, the aspirations of small peasants. They dream of getting a bit of land on which they can grow things for themselves, for their families.

This factor explains the ambivalence of the program and struggles developed by the NFSW. The union fights to win a measure of control by the workers over the plantations. It defends the legal rights of agricultural workers in the courts. It organizes strikes to get these rights respected, as it did in the La Carlota district in 1982, for example, to force the owners to pay the workers the annual bonus to which they are legally entitled. (It was a very big strike but the workers were unable to win their demand. Because of the sugar industry, the relationship of forces is unfavorable to the workers.)

But since 1973, the NFSW has also included agrarian reform in its program — distribution of a part of the plantation land to the workers so that they can grow on it what they need. It has supported large actions where workers have planted food crops on unused land in the face of fierce opposition from the owners. Today, the NFSW explains that this is one of the few means available for dealing with the social crisis opened up by the mechanization of production, that is, to take advantage of the resulting increase in productivity to give the workers left wholly or partly unemployed some of the plantation lands.

This paradoxical situation — agricultural workers aspiring to a peasant life that neither they nor their parents have ever known — illustrates a fundamental feature of the social crisis gripping the Philippines. Everywhere production for the market, national or international, is tending to replace, or at least dominate subsistence farming.

This is an inevitable effect of modernization in a capitalist country. When a new commercial crop is introduced, it offers the small producers an attractive income, which induces them to modify their farming decisions — to “modernize.” In other cases, the landowners impose such changes on share croppers by threatening to deny them the right to cultivate the land.

But very often, once the cultivation of a crop becomes wide spread, the real income of the small producers falls below what it was before. With the money that they get, they can no longer buy the equivalent of what they produced for themselves and for barter under subsistence farming. This is because the market prices fall with the increase in production. Because the prices of the fertilizers and pesticides essential for the new crop go up. Because the land gets exhausted. And because the small producers are too dependent on the merchants and therefore are subjected to an unequal rate of exchange.

Poor peasants ruined

Big producers can make substantial profits owing to the size of their farms, their ability to get information about the evolution of the market, and the quality of their land, etc. But for the inverse reasons the small producers can find themselves left in a desperate situation, getting less than a subsistence income.

This is what happened in fact in the coconut industry in the Philippines. This is a very important sector, since coconut products are one of the country's primary exports. There are a few big coconut plantations. A lot of producers are small holders. Others are share croppers or agricultural workers. For a period when coconut products were selling well on the world market, in particular coconut oil, the commercial growing of coconut trees became widespread.

Then an overproduction of vegetable oils appeared. The price collapsed. But in order to compensate for the drop in prices and raise productivity, it was necessary to invest capital (better seed stock,

fertilizer, etc.). The small producers did not have it. In particular, if they had any surplus, they could not wait eight years to get their money back, since this is the time it takes for a coconut tree to begin to produce.

What is more, as in the sugar industry, the Marcos regime's policy was not to aid the mass of producers by subsidies but to create a government monopoly in the sugar trade, a governmental monopoly controlled in fact by the president's cronies — the minister of defense, Enrile, and the businessman Cojuanco.

Marcos even managed to finance the creation of this new economic empire by taxes levied on the producers themselves! Mass demonstrations in protest developed in the coconut producing regions, which in some cases were suppressed bloodily by the army.

What keeps small producers (either small holders or share croppers) tied to a commercial crop when the money they get for it is so little is that it is very difficult to extricate yourself from the trading circuits once you have gotten into them (and when the entire regional economy has started to be transformed).

Very often the small producers are in debt to the land owners or the merchant who provides their basic necessities. So, they borrow on their future crops and cannot break the cycle of production without the agreement of their creditors.

In this way, they are obliged to keep on buying and therefore selling, even though, because of their debts, they almost never see the money their crops bring in. Lifetime indebtedness, passed on from generation to generation, is not uncommon.

Producing for the market then becomes the precondition for keeping up some small subsistence farming, which enables the producers to survive because of their very small monetary income. They have to continue growing this commercial crop, not to earn a living but to hold onto the land on which their houses stand and where they can raise a few chickens and a pig, when they can plant vegetables and fruit trees. (6)

You can see the same conditions in other sectors. An example is a village in the north of Luzon, lying among dry hills. The two main crops here are mountain rice, grown without irrigation, and tobacco. The first is for family consumption, the second is for sale. With a local farmer, I added up what each crop cost to produce (fertilizer, etc.) and what they brought in (the sale price of the tobacco and the savings made by growing rice, comparing the production cost with the market price).

It turned out that the farmer worked almost for nothing. In a good year, he got the equivalent of about 8 dollars for a month's work, in a bad year, nothing.

5. This experience coincides with that of the sugar workers in Brazil. See Linhart, *Le sucre et la faim*, Editions de Minuit, Paris.

6. See Ribogerto Tiglao, “The Political Economy of the Philippine Coconut Industry,” in the Third World Studies Program, *Op. Cit.*



"Last year, when I sold my tobacco crop, after paying my debts and my land rent, I had enough left to buy a pair of underpants," he remarked bitterly. But he has to continue to produce to continue to live in the village, to get fruit from the trees, to survive.

Thus, the market economy subordinates subsistence agriculture. It modifies the social relations and the living conditions of the villagers. It tends to integrate the local economy more and more into the national and international capitalist economy. It draws the country into an irreversible process of modernization, a modernization that very often leads to the absolute impoverishment of large sections of the population and an exodus from the rural areas, which, in turn, because of the lack of sufficient jobs in the cities and in industry, generates vast shantytowns.

In this way, the extension of the market economy generally accelerates the concentration of land ownership in fewer and fewer hands and the growth of social divisions within the peasantry. Those in the most advantageous positions take advantage of the widening of the market to increase their profits and acquire more land. The rest, the majority, are crushed under the burden of debt.

Moreover, in countries dominated by imperialism, the market economy is not incompatible with the maintenance of backward and complex social structures. It is not necessarily in the interests of creditors to seize the lands of peasants unable to repay their debts.

A new serfdom

The government assures its control over the profits more through the mechanisms of trading than of production. And the same holds true for the multinational corporations, which prefer to hitch the small and middle producers to their chariots rather than transform them directly into agricultural workers.

The way in which the policy of the food and agricultural companies has evolved is clear in the Philippines. The banana industry on the southern island of Mindanao is a good example. It was in the 1960s that the commercial growing of bananas became widespread on Mindanao, with production oriented to the Japanese market.

The bulk of the industry is in the hands of three big American transnational food and agricultural companies — Castle and Cook, operating under the name "Stanfilco"; Del Monte, under the name of "Philpak"; and United Brands (formerly the United Fruit Corporation) under the name "Tadeco."

Only the last of these three has set up a plantation employing agricultural workers. Stanfilco signed contracts with 377 small producers. And Philpak signed contracts with middle producers, with capitalist farmers.

Through tight control of the trading circuits and by contracts with the pro-

ducers, the big companies have in fact gained a grip on the production process right down to the last detail, without however becoming the owners of the lands concerned. They can impose the forms of cultivation that suit them and sell the agricultural products to anyone they please.

The producers, especially the small ones, have been robbed of their power of choice. On the other hand, the big company does not have to assume a series of costs (land tax, hiring temporary workers, etc.) This burden is left on the legal "owners" of the plots of land. What is still better from the big companies' point of view, the small producers will get their families to work for nothing and the capitalist farmers will superexploit their workers. All this goes to swell the profits of the multinationals.

By controlling both the prerequisites for production and the outlets for the products, the food and agricultural companies can keep the producer-owners on a tight leash. This has the additional advantage of standing in the way of the small producers developing a common consciousness, focused either around limited demands or revolutionary aspirations. It reduces them in practice to a quasi-proletarian status but keeps them attached to legal ownership of the land.

Almost all sectors of agriculture in the Philippines have now been hit by economic or social crisis. (7) This is what is enabling both the communist guerrillas and the CPP's underground structures in the "white" zones to expand to new territory and wider social layers.

However, in order to achieve this growth, the Communist Party had to modify substantially its initial orientations, which were too militarist. After the formation of the NPA in 1969, the CPP tried to establish a "Yenan" (8) in the Cagayan valley region (in the northeast of the island of Luzon). But by 1971, government troops had been concentrated there to nip in the bud this first attempt at establishing a guerrilla focus. For the NPA, the experience was a very bitter and costly one.

In an article looking back, *Liberation*, the underground organ of the CPP-led Democratic National Front, described the lessons of this experience as follows:

"The region became a land of torment and misery as the government's encirclement and suppression campaigns forcibly relocated and hamletted thousands of peasants in the manner of 'depriving the fish (NPA) of its water (the people).'"

"The systematic and sustained repression campaign continued under martial law. For the next four years, the NPA suffered tremendous losses due to massive enemy operations which were compounded by big errors in policy committed by some leading cadres in the region. These cadres' reliance solely on physical terrain in an effort to preserve the guerrilla army from the encirclement and suppression campaign had spawned passive defense and also limited NPA areas of operation to already depopulated forested areas.

"In 1977, the NPA launched a rectification campaign. New priorities and new tactics enabled the Red fighters to break out of enemy encirclement and expand into virgin territories. In this way, the guerrilla army was able to preserve its diminished forces and increase manifold. From the forested areas of Sierra Madre, it reached the populated plains of Cagayan Valley and the neighboring Apayao." (9)

Thus, since the first stages the conception of the guerrilla war has been modified. It has developed from a technical one of seeking protection from the government armies solely in the terrain to a more political one where the guerrillas protect themselves by building a base among the masses.

This reorientation of the NPA fits in also with a whole series of adjustments in the CPP's perspectives for work. Such adjustments have been made successively since the mid-1970s. They have involved mass work; work in the cities; the attempt to gain a more working-class social base; reevaluating the role of semilegal activity, and even intervening in elections; the party's agrarian program; and alliances. While making all these adjustments, the CPP has sought to strengthen its focus on the armed struggle.

The acceleration of the social crisis in the countryside and the cities, together with the political crisis of the regime that opened up after the assassination of Aquino, are posing many of these problems again, but on an unprecedented scale.

The CPP is trying to respond to these developments by combining reinforcement of the NPA in the guerrilla zones with centralizing a vast nonviolent movement for democratic rights and immediate demands in the "white" areas.

However, it is far from easy to coordinate mass struggles in areas where military battles are being waged and in areas where the struggle is nonviolent and to coordinate highly diverse political and social movements. It is very tricky to try to build at the same time underground revolutionary structures and broad legal or semilegal mass organizations. Nor is it simple to set immediate common objectives for this entire movement beyond just the overthrow of Marcos.

The practice of the CPP and the NPA will probably continue to evolve under the impact of the present mobilizations. ■

7. This article does not deal with the rice-growing industry. For the overall picture, see Walden Bello, David Kinley and Elaine Elinson, *Development Debaacle, the World Bank and the Philippines*, IFDP and PSN, USA, 1982.

8. Yanen was the sanctuary, the liberated zone, where the Chinese Communist Party took refuge after the defeat of the Second Chinese Revolution in 1927 and after Chang Kai-shek started extermination operations against the Red Army. At the end of the Long March (1935), the Chinese Communist Party established itself in Yanen, in the northwestern part of the country.

9. *Liberation*, Vol. XI, No 6, September 1983, p. 17. This evolution of the Chinese Communist Party indicates what differentiates it from the Communist Party of Thailand. In this regard, see the article on the crisis of the Thai CP in this issue of *IV*.

The crisis of the CP and the left

For the Thai left, the last ten years will be remembered as a decade of dashed hopes. From 1973 to 1978, the revolutionary forces in the Kingdom of Thailand experienced a rapid growth. In particular, this upsurge was given impetus by an unprecedented wave of social struggles, as well as by the defeat dealt to the American imperialists in Indochina. (1)

With the radicalization of new strata, followed by a rapid expansion of the guerrilla zones, the Communist Party of Thailand seemed to be in a position for the first time in its history to seriously undertake a struggle for power. But, subsequently, the CPT and all the progressive forces in the country have gone into a crisis, which has been growing more acute year by year and more and more difficult to overcome.

This crisis was fostered by the turnabout in the regional situation that occurred in 1978-79, when the tensions between the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Chinese regimes worsened to the point of leading to open military conflicts. But, more fundamentally, it reflects the impasse into which the policy followed by the CPT leadership led the Thai revolutionary forces.

Paul PETITJEAN

When the fall of the military dictatorship opened up a period of semi-democracy in 1973, the Communist Party of Thailand was still in a very marginal position in the country. But it was the only force able to make rapid gains from the explosion of mass struggles that followed the student and popular uprising in Bangkok in October 1973.

The other progressive formations were too weak, too new or too disorganized to offer a significant alternative to the CPT. When a new dictatorship was installed in 1976, following a bloody coup d'état, the CPT was the only party that had redoubts in the countryside and guerrilla forces that could offer a basis for organizing armed resistance.

It was at that time that the CPT really consolidated itself as the backbone of a dynamic revolutionary left. By the thousands, students, peasants and also workers (although in smaller numbers) flocked to the CPT's base in the jungle.

In 1977, the Coordinating Committee of Patriotic and Democratic Forces was formed. This reflected the adherence to the armed struggle of trade-union, student and peasant leaders, well-known intellectuals and political organizations such as the Socialist Party of Thailand.

In 1978, the guerrilla forces were burgeoning. According to the government's figures, they had more than 10,000 soldiers (perhaps 12,000 or 14,000). According to the CPT's figures they numbered 20,000.

However, during the next four years, the CPT was undermined by violent disputes. It suffered a veritable draining away of its membership. It lost the bulk of its major guerrilla bases, including a



number of those that had already been established before 1973.

The Coordinating Committee faded out of existence, and the main leaders who had adhered to the armed struggle in 1975-76 either returned to Bangkok or left the country.

1. For a general description of Thailand and its problems see Dorell and Chai-anan, *Political Conflict in Thailand, Reform, Reaction, Revolution*, Oelgeschlagen, Cumard Haig, Cambridge, Mass., 1981; Turton, Fast, Caldwell, ed., *Thailand, Roots of Conflict*, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1978. See also *La Thaïlande*, by Jean Guilvout and James Burnet, Editions Karthala, Paris, 1983. This book has a chapter on the evolution of the Thai left. *L'Enjeu thaïlandais* by Sylvia and Jean Cattori, Editions l'Harmattan, Paris, 1979, offers a detailed study of the decisive struggles in 1973-1978. See also "After the October Days: An Ambiguous Situation," *Inprecor* (English edition), March 13, 1975, "Growing Class Polarisation," *Inprecor*, No 38, November 20, 1975, and "Thailand's Military Coup: A Civil War Measure," *Inprecor*, No 63, November 25, 1975.

2. On the beginnings of the crisis of the Thai

In 1982, the Fourth Congress of the CPT met finally after long being postponed. Far from resolving the contradictions and reestablishing a semblance of unity in the party, it opened up a new period of crisis, marked by mass defections and a member of the Political Bureau surrendering to the government.

The years 1973-1978 were a time of testing for the CPT. It got a historic opportunity to put down roots and to lead a revolutionary movement on the national scale, to overcome its political marginality and the limitations of its geographical and social base.

The CPT leadership succeeded in winning the new generations of activists. But it then proved unable to resolve the difficulties that inevitably accompanied the eruption of the Sino-Indochinese conflicts or those created by the rapid evolution of the situation in Thailand itself. To the contrary, the party leadership demonstrated a fatal dependence on Peking, political ossification and apparatus routinism.

The consequences of this failure on the part of the CPT have been grave. The mass movement has been disorganized and often disarmed. In turn, this has had its adverse effects on the social struggles. A generation of activists remains disoriented, and, to a large extent, demobilized.

The political initiative has fallen back into the hands of the royal family, the army and the big bourgeois parties. The progressive forces have been paralyzed, since no revolutionary formation today is able to offer a concrete alternative to the CPT, which itself is divided, greatly weakened and on the defensive. (2)

It is still difficult to retrace the history of the CPT. But it is possible to identify a certain number of major problems that make it possible to get a better idea of the nature of the crisis the CPT has been going through and the reasons for its present setback. These problems remain central to the attempts at reorientation underway in the Thai left. (3)

Since the beginning of the 1960s, when the pro-Maoist faction gained the majority in the CPT leadership, the party's strategy has been based on a slow buildup of military forces, spreading from the periphery of the country (generally mountainous areas not served by roads) toward more populated areas and the center. This strategic conception is expressed in the following key formula: "The

left, see "L'évolution des partis communistes thai et philippins," Paul Petitjean, *Inprecor*, (French edition) No 84, September 11, 1980; and No 85, September 25, 1980. Since that time, the CPT crisis has grown considerably worse. All the figures who remained with the CPT whose names were cited in these articles, such as Seksan Prasertkul and Thirayuth Boonimie, have now broken with it. An abundant documentation of the evolution of the Thai left up to the eve of the Fourth Congress of the CPT can be found in the *Bulletin thai d'information*, c/o Thibeaut, 9 rue du Dauphine, 93600 Aulnay-sous-Bois, France.

3. One of the main problems had to do with the regional context, the CPT's policy toward the Sino-Indochinese conflict, and the nature of its ties to Peking. This important question cannot be dealt with here. In this regard, see the two articles previously cited published in *Inprecor* in September 1980.

jungle leads the villages, the countryside encircles the cities.”

The CPT was formally founded in 1942 (the first communist organizations date back to the 1930s but they were destroyed by the repression). During the resistance to the Japanese occupation, the party gained a certain military experience, especially in the southern part of the country.

For several years during and after the second world war, the CPT tried to pursue a course of political mass action, mainly in the urban centers. The hardening up of a dictatorial military regime at the end of the 1950s convinced a number of activists of the need to retreat into forest areas far from the centers, where the surveillance of the state apparatus was weak, and to build up a basis there for armed struggle.

However, this reorganization of the CPT was not accomplished without difficulty and internal conflicts. The first guerrilla nuclei did not go into action before 1965, when they came under the pressure of government forces that had had the time to prepare to deal with them.

From 1965 to 1973, the guerrilla struggle of the People's Liberation Army of Thailand (PLAT) showed a slow but steady growth in the northeast and north, along the Cambodian, Laotian and, later, Burmese borders and in the south. In the Muslim far south, various groups of the Communist Party of Malaysia established bases on the Thai side of the frontier.

Before 1973, thus, the development of the PCT was slow, even though it got major aid from outside the country. The Thai regime was not in an open crisis, since the US was unsparing in its aid. And no other party was doing better than the CPT, far from it. The orientation adopted by the party leadership, therefore, could seem all the more correct when in 1973, although it was in fact almost unknown, this leadership enjoyed considerable prestige and moral authority in the eyes of the young generations of activists. Very few of these young people had any previous political education and very few made any critical assessment of the CPT's "maoism."

The missed opportunities of the urban upsurge

The Communist Party's audience and openings expanded abruptly with the fall of the military dictatorship in 1973 and the increasing economic and democratic struggles. But it was then that the limitations of the CPT's organization and orientation were revealed.

The CPT's traditional apparatus had given priority to military activity. But from 1973 to 1976, the stage was dominated by big social and political mass mobilizations. While this was happening, the party was besieging remote country areas and neglecting Bangkok, the capital.

But it was in Bangkok that the October 1973 insurrection toppled the dictatorship. It was in Bangkok that the

movement of university and high-school students was centered. It was in Bangkok and its suburbs that the backbone of the trade-union movement was being built up. It was to Bangkok that peasant delegations were coming from all over the country to demand application and extension of the agrarian reform laws.

It was also in the capital that the success of the October 1976 coup was decided and where, since then, a number of political battles have been waged that have dominated the political life of the country as a whole.

The reason that the central apparatus of the CPT was ready to neglect Bangkok during these crucial years was because it based its strategy exclusively on a steady buildup of its military forces, while it rejected urban guerrilla actions. Obviously, the party had networks operating in the capital. But the focus of their orientation was elsewhere. They worked to support the guerrillas, facilitate national contacts and assure the circulation of information.

In 1973, there was no longer a political leadership for the capital itself (supposedly for security reasons). What is more, it did not have the status of an autonomous region in the CPT. Every network that the party had in Bangkok was directly linked to the national leadership, or to a rural guerrilla zone, whose leadership had authority over the activists working in the capital.

Nonetheless, CPT members were active in many struggles in Bangkok as well as in the provinces. Some networks took it on themselves to intervene more systematically in the mass movements. But it was impossible to mobilize all the CPT's urban members to assure the success of a campaign or an initiative.

Cambodian refugees in Thailand (DR)



The national leadership remained largely ignorant of the real situation in the capital, since it was not on the spot. As a national organization, the CPT remained generally out of the picture, unable to propose concrete orientations for struggle and work, while the regime was regaining the initiative and the young generations were facing more and more complex and difficult tests.

"Where's the party?" the student and union movement cadres often asked anxiously in 1974-75.

The inflexibility of the jungle apparatus

The October 1976 coup put an end to the semi-democratic period and temporarily opened up the way for an extremely repressive regime. For the CPT leadership this was, in a way, a "return to normality," as it had predicted would happen. The stress put in the preceding years on maintaining and consolidating the guerrilla zones now seemed fully justified.

Activists and sympathizers abandoned the "white areas" (that is, those controlled militarily by the government) to seek refuge with the CPT, to avenge the hundreds of students massacred at the time of the coup d'etat and all the peasants and trade unionists who had been struck down since 1975.

Nonetheless, the CPT's rural and militarist orientation had disastrous results. The royal family, the army and the far-right groups were able to maneuver more freely to prepare the way for the coup d'etat, setting up more and more provocations and traps. Lacking a national political leadership, the movement that arose in 1973 could not avoid divisions and costly errors.

The movement was unable to hold the political initiative. Likewise, it was unable to systematically build up ahead of time the basis for maintaining networks of activists in the "white" urban and rural zones that could provide an underground support structure for the mass movement after the coup.

When the exodus to the guerrilla zones took place, too few activists and cadres were willing or able to stay in the urban areas to assure the continuity of political work. The mass movement, in particular the unions, is still suffering from the effects of this exodus.

Finally, the CPT's traditional apparatus remained untouched by the extraordinary experience of the social struggles in the period 1973-1976. But it was on the basis of this experience that the new generations of activists joined the People's Army and the party. It was on the basis of this experience, moreover, that the necessary strategic reorientations could have been discussed.

There could not in fact be any simple "back to business as usual," that is, continuing the party's previous orientations. The period 1973-1976 was not a mere "interlude" between two military dictatorships. The upsurge of mass mobilizations for economic and democratic demands marked the country's entry into a new historical stage, the era of modern class struggles. The whole society was changing.

In order to adjust to these changes, the Communist Party had itself to modify its line, its internal functioning, its outlook and its bases of support. It could only do this by going through the experience and analyzing it. The mass influx into the party of new generations of activists coming precisely out of this new reality offered the CPT a unique opportunity to do this. But the party's central apparatus seems never to have been willing or able to understand even that the problem existed.

The change that the CPT had to go through, in accordance with the transformation of Thai society, was, to be sure, a very deepgoing and complex one. It was not only a matter of correcting militarist or guerrillaist deviations, giving greater importance to mass work in urban areas, or the party taking its distance from the Chinese bureaucracy. In order to understand the problems, it is necessary to look back at what sort of a formation the CPT was, to look at the specific features of its development, over and above its Maoist ideological attachments.

Still more than the theme of the countryside encircling the cities, which is common to all the traditional Maoist organizations, the formula "the jungle leads the villages" points up the distinctive features of the CPT. It can be said that in the 1960s the CPT formed itself into "the party of the jungle."

It was not the countryside, but the jungle — and, to a certain extent, even an external base, since part of the CPT apparatus lived in China and the aid that the party got came from that country —

which became the CPT's organizational and political center of gravity.

The fact that the bulk of members of the party and the People's Army lived in jungle encampments was a physical reality that reflected a lot more in this case than a certain political orientation. It represented a distinct form of insertion into the traditional society, a very special form of struggle. It was also a physical reality that shaped a mode of functioning and a political rigidity that it was very difficult to break out of.

"The jungle leads the villages" was an orientation that was in fact followed in practice and for a period enabled the guerrilla struggle to grow. In the mid-1970s, the CPT and the PLAT already had several thousand members and mass support in the northeast and in the south (in the north, they were allied with the highland tribes).

But the CPT and the PLAT assumed the role much more of a people's protection force than of a revolutionary one. They generally intervened to protect the village or the tribe against an external enemy (the government army, a corrupt functionary, gang leaders, "protection" racketeers and pirates in the Gulf of Thailand area), and to provide services not offered by the central state (medical service or education for tribal children who were sent to schools in China). But they intervened only very rarely to change the social relations themselves.

Revolutionists entrapped in local framework

In providing armed protection, the CPT attacked particularly grave aspects of oppression, and it is symptomatic that the Communist Party scored its main successes in areas where the state had alienated the population (the tribes; the Thai-Lao of the disinherited northeast; the south, which was relatively prosperous but subjected to harsh arbitrary rule by the central administration). It did not achieve such gains in the areas where the market economy was producing the most advanced social transformations (the central plain and especially the provinces surrounding Bangkok).

This context points up the extraordinary poverty of the CPT's agrarian program, which reflected no analysis of the varied structures of Thai rural society and gave no detailed list of demands.

The testimony of activists from various guerrilla zones coincides on the fact that in most cases the CPT and the PLAT gained a mass base not through economic struggles but by supporting the villagers against external threats (attempts to make the population move to make way for dams, attempts to evict people occupying government forests, extortion by some "godfather," exactions by the army).

It is obviously normal for a revolutionary organization to provide such protection when it can. However, in the absence of any other form of intervention on the national scale, while such activity may make it possible for the

guerrilla zones to make slow headway in the regions where conditions are favorable, it cannot give impetus to social and political struggles throughout the country.

The CPT owed its local or regional successes to its ability to fit itself into the traditional mechanisms of Thai society. This included flight into the jungle as a means of resisting the central government and winning gratitude by offering protection or other services (such as medical aid) that could induce a village to support the guerrillas by giving them food or information or by sending youths to their jungle camps.

However, this form of action proved particularly inadequate when social struggles developed on the national level. In 1974-1975, the peasantry in the north mobilized against land rents and more generally around such questions as the price of rice.

Mass organizations formed, such as the Thailand Peasants Federation (students in the city of Chiang Mai and CPT members helped build this organization). Struggles were organized to force the adoption and implementation of laws. Contacts developed between the student movement, peasants associations and trade unions. In the wake of October 1973, a democratic education program was pursued.

What was needed to respond to all these crucial developments was a national action program built around the key demands, a concrete perspective for expanding the mass organizations, and rapid consolidation of new party structures in the central regions. The CPT, the party of the jungle, was unable to take the initiative in this field.

The same problem reemerged in 1977-1978, as soon as the shock of the October 1976 coup d'état was over. The expansion of the guerrilla zones brought new tasks. More densely populated and central regions had to be organized. This problem was posed in particularly acute terms in the north, where the PLAT had been traditionally based in the highlands inhabited by ethnic minorities. It was now possible and necessary to establish the movement in the lowlands themselves. The CPT imposed its usual orientation. The party structures were set up in the jungle, and the villages were contacted and organized from this base. The objective was to get people from the villages to come into the jungle camps.

This policy was a twofold failure. First of all, the government army could move too quickly in these areas for the jungle to afford a sufficient protection. Secondly, it was hard to organize the villages from the outside, and the peasants did not see any advantage in going into the jungle camps.

It was after this setback that some young party activists, with the benefit of the experience that had been accumulated in 1974-75, decided to establish themselves right in the villages rather than in the jungle. The test in practice was conclusive. But it did not

induce the party apparatus to change its general orientation.

It seems that in some cases local or regional leaderships organized mass intervention with greater flexibility, notably in the Phuphan region in North Isan, the northeastern region where the Thai-Lao live. But, overall, the CPT remained a jungle party.

More disastrous than the CPT's underestimation of the importance of work in the cities was the effect of its traditional method of building its base in the periphery of modern Thailand. Given the rigidity of the party leadership, this mode of functioning kept the CPT from developing consistent mass work in either the "pink" (militarily disputed) areas or the "white" areas.

If this underlying problem only came to the fore recently, that is because before 1973 the CPT operated only in peripheral regions, even though some of these areas, such as the northeast and south, were rather densely populated. Moreover, for various historical reasons (4), the Kingdom of Thailand had not yet been shaken by a general political and social crisis.

Oppression and exploitation obviously existed, and even poverty. But the crisis in social relations in agriculture began to manifest itself only belatedly. The emergence of a nationwide interaction of urban and rural struggles was also a late development. This lag has now been overcome, and that is why the years 1973-1976 represent such an important turning point in the history of the country and of the revolutionary movement.

The CPT had to transform itself in order to be able to meet the needs of the new period. But the influence of Peking on the one hand (5) and the party's structure on the other made such a transformation particularly difficult.

The CPT's crisis started to become evident in 1979, when it lost the bases that it had set up in Laos. In reprisal for the party's aligning itself de facto with Peking

and the Red Khmer, Vientiane and Hanoi abruptly drove the CPT out of its sanctuaries.

First of all, the Coordinating Committee of Patriotic and Democratic Forces lost all its substance. It had never given rise to real united-front structures. Most of its members were gathered in a camp in Laos tightly controlled by the CPT, isolated from the movement and from the struggles.

After the CPT's break with Vientiane, some members of the Coordinating Committee remained in Laos, others went to Kunming in China and some returned to Thailand.

But, in any case, the CPT never accorded any real political role to the parties and personalities in the Committee. The setting up of this body did not go any further than a propaganda operation. It remained a head without a body, and the nonparty members had no real work to do. As its members resigned one after the other, the Coordinating Committee died.

On top of the difficulties the CPT had in intervening in the cities and in doing mass work, it faced problems in its international alignments and in its practice of the united-front policy. There was, moreover, a problem of internal democracy. The CPT never managed to organize a significant discussion on a national or interregional level.

For a long time, the central leadership was content to repeat nostrums about students who could not bear the burdens of guerrilla life and to strike a strong, silent pose in the face of more and more pressing questions raised by rank-and-file activists and intermediate-level cadres.

Isolated in the jungle camps, most of the former students were unable either to start up a real discussion or even to develop roots of their own. They left in greater and greater numbers, along with peasants and workers. The great majority of those who joined the CPT in 1975-1976 have now gone their own way.

Today a lot of former cadres are leaving as well.

In the wake of the Fourth Congress, the CPT's structures in several regions in fact collapsed. This congress, which was held in 1982 in the form of three more or less simultaneous regional assemblies linked by morse code messages to Kunming, offered the last chance for stemming the crisis. Opposing regional blocs confronted each other, and the theses of the "reform" currents won out by a narrow margin.

Struggle to reorient the party

The "reformers" proposed an orientation giving a greater importance to intervention in the cities and to political work. They advocated a "mass line," calling for a more independent international policy. The fact that the reformers' views got a formal majority shows that opening up a democratic discussion in time and holding a representative congress could have limited the effects of the crisis and led to major reorientations.

However, the documents presented to the congress have never been published, and the dominant faction has maintained its control of the central apparatus. Badly prepared, bureaucratically manipulated, aborted, the Fourth Congress opened up a new phase in the party's crisis. After being shoved to the sidelines in the leadership, the great majority of the reformers (notably in North Isan) have broken with the CPT.

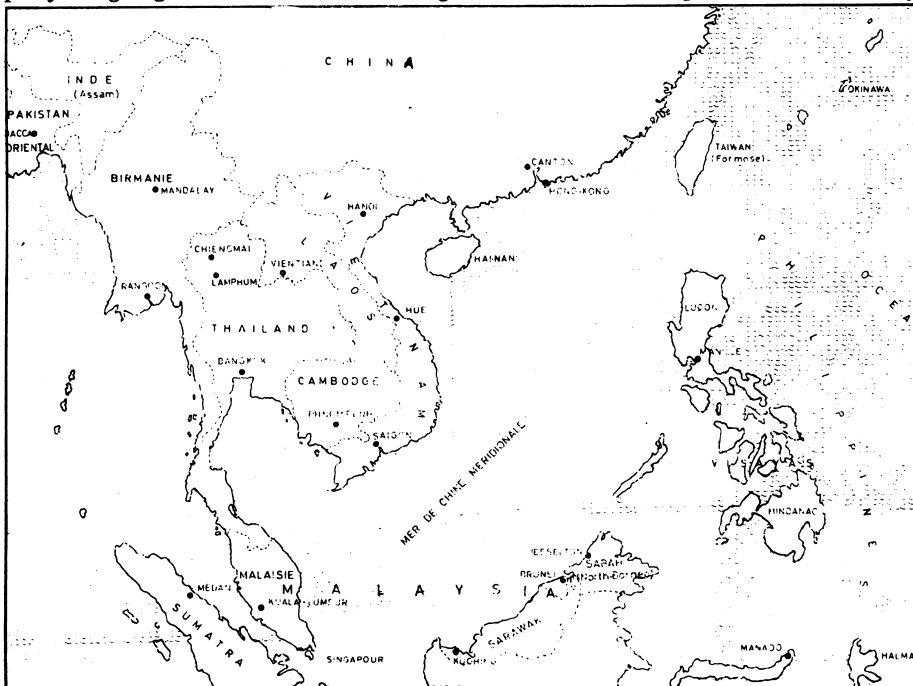
Moreover, the Thai regime has been actively playing on the CPT's internal contradictions, offering an amnesty to party members while keeping "returnees from the jungle" under surveillance.

The government army has been able to take bases that had long remained impregnable, and the PLAT is holding up the best today in the southern part of the country. In the cities, the army factions are taking advantage of the paralysis of the left forces to penetrate deeper into the unions.

It will take a considerable time for the Thai left to recover from the crisis of the CPT. In the absence of a solid mass base in the cities, activists "returned from the jungle" have had to concentrate on surviving and finding work. The demoralization will not be easy to overcome either. But while the mass movement remains disoriented, its back has not been broken. It will not be long before the movement revives and offers revolutionary forces a new opportunity to build a base. ■

4. Among these factors, the following should be noted: the fact that the country was never a direct colony and that the authority of the royal family has never been broken; the fact that for a long time the proletariat was made up of Chinese immigrant workers cut off from the peasantry; the fact that up to the end of the 1960s, virgin lands were still available, which offered the peasants an escape from intolerable conditions; the fact that Western capital did not penetrate into agriculture until late and the development of big landholding (with the exception of the royal family) remained limited.

5. Peking did not want a stronger revolutionary struggle in Thailand.





AROUND THE WORLD



First Congress of the OMT in Mauritius

Over the last year and a half there has been a very confused political situation in Mauritius. In June 1982 a left coalition led by the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM) won an overwhelming electoral victory (*International Viewpoint*, No 12, August 2, 1982).

Hardly a year later the government divided and there was a big split in the MMM. The group that split from the MMM finally formed a new group, the Mauritian Socialist Movement (MSM), and forced new legislative elections. It then formed a coalition, first for electoral and then governmental purposes, with the remainder of the local right wing, the Labour Party and the Mauritian Social Democratic Party, in order to get, with them, the majority of parliamentary seats. Thus, the reactionary right wing got back into power without putting forward any really new ideas. In fact, neither the left-wing coalition around the MMM in June 1982, nor the new reactionary right-wing government in July 1983 were capable of putting forward serious solutions to the social and economic crisis.

The economy of Mauritius is totally dependent on sugar production, which represents 75 per cent of export income and employs 25 per cent of the economically active population. Neither tourism nor the hope of industrial investment can change this situation in the present conditions. Unemployment is steadily increasing, income for the small planters is dropping little by little, and the working class has to increasingly submit to the bosses' arrogance and the government's repression.

The present government has only demagogic solutions on offer. To solve the problem of unemployment for tens of thousands of young people, it is content to propose that some of them go to look for work in countries like Zimbabwe or Saudi Arabia. To compensate for the drop in income for sugar production it proposes transforming Mauritius into 'the Singapore of the Indian Ocean', that is massively increasing foreign industrial establishment in the free zone to produce goods directed towards the external market. In order to do this it needs social peace. The industrialists of Hong Kong and Saudi Arabia are not going to come and set up in Mauritius if there is a working class fighting for its elementary rights.

But the fact that the present government in Mauritius can make such proposals without embarrassment shows that its left predecessor hardly made any other proposals during the eight months it was in power.

Despite the mass activity which followed the June 1982 victory there has never been a call to the workers to mobilise to change the rules of the game, to nationalise the sugar industry, get rid of the hangovers of colonialism and cut down on the immense wastage by giving control over the economy to the toiling masses. To the contrary, the left government fundamentally tried to establish its credibility with the imperialists and the local bosses, particularly the big bourgeoisie of the sugar industry. Although it had to give up its place, this was not because of its radicalism. It broke up under the strain of its internal divisions, particularly communalist ones, in as far as different factions of the employers and the bourgeoisie no longer had the same views on economic policy.

This is the context in which the Organisation Militante des Travailleurs (OMT, Militant Workers Organisation), formed by expelled members of the MMM, held its conference in January. Some of the main leaders of this new group had been activists of the MMM for a long time. For example, Serge Rayapoule, very well known in the support base of the MMM in Port-Louis, had been a member of the central committee of the MMM up until the expulsion of the Lalit Travayer (Workers Struggle) tendency. It was this current that formed the OMT. When they were members of the MMM, the OMT comrades also formed and led a National Front Against Unemployment (FNAS). Since the foundation of the OMT the FNAS has been defined as a political movement around the revolutionary nucleus, and transformed into a National Front Against Poverty.

Following the two congresses, the OMT and the FNAS presented their respective programmes to the press.

The OMT explains in the introduction to its programme:

'If Mauritius is to advance definitively in social progress and put an end to poverty, it has to finally rid itself of this (colonial) heritage. The struggle of the toiling masses in our country is in a way the continuation of our struggle for na-

tional liberation. But, this struggle obviously does not set that as its sole aim. It cannot be a question of simply reforming the system. Today in Mauritius there is a society divided into social classes, a state in the service of the possessing classes and working people who produce all the wealth of the country. Our struggle is a struggle for socialism. That is, to make Mauritius a democratic republic of working people.' Thus the programme of the OMT is a description of what the programme of a workers government should be.

The press particularly commented on the fact that the OMT proposes the nationalisation of the sugar industry, the banks and finance companies under workers control. But the organisation carefully outlined a programme of agrarian reform, women's liberation, dissolution of the repressive forces and respect for democratic rights in the police force and the army, safeguarding the different languages and cultures that exist within the country, etc.

The FNAS adopted a simpler, shorter programme, which proposed to its worker members to struggle for more immediate demands, against the social consensus and communalist divisions, to fight for independent organisation of the working people and against imperialism and for socialism. As the FNAS is a broader structure, 'a school of socialism for all the men and women who are active in it', it sets itself the task 'of giving all its members the opportunity to do an apprenticeship in political struggle and an apprenticeship in real workers democracy'. In some ways the FNAS is a school for entry into the OMT. But it also wishes to be a lot more than that in the future. The FNAS has the perspective of stabilising dozens of local groups throughout the island, which would be in direct contact with the daily problems of the people. The FNAS hopes that each group will stabilise and root itself through its daily work in defence of the 'ti-dimounes' (ordinary people) in their work and living places.

It is true that the OMT and FNAS do not yet represent a national force capable of having an effect on the relationship of forces between the classes. Nevertheless, in one year their members have succeeded in establishing a current that is very active and in direct contact with the struggles occurring. There are several hundred members and sympathisers who, under the banner of the anti-capitalist fight and proletarian internationalism, are working to build a 'real revolutionary party' in this island of 950,000 inhabitants in the middle of the Indian Ocean. ■

The results of the Basque elections

The elections for the Basque autonomous regional parliament were held on February 26. Because of the strong social and political tensions in the Basque country (Euzkadi), considerable attention was focused on them both internationally and in the Spanish state.

The capitalist press in the big imperialist countries played with the results to play up whatever political point they considered most edifying, some focusing on the increase in the vote of the PSOE since the last elections for the Basque parliament in 1980, some claiming that the gains for the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV) represented a vote for moderation; and in general they trumpeted the slight decline in the vote of Herri Batasuna (the People's Unity), which politically supports the militant nationalist guerrillas of ETA-Militarra, from the last Basque parliament elections represented a repudiation of "extremists."

Actually, the elections showed the continuing and even growing strength of Basque nationalism. Although the PNV has a right-wing leadership and line, it is a nationalist party with a broad following. There is no Chinese wall between its ranks and those of more militant nationalists. Furthermore, in the past period it has been in conflict with the PSOE government in Madrid on many issues involving the defense of Basque national rights against a Social Democratic government determined to prove to the Spanish-state bourgeoisie that it is a trustworthy guardian of its historical interests.

The actual pattern of the vote in Euzkadi in the last four elections is as follows:

In the 1980 elections, the PNV got 349,896 votes, or 38.1%; in the 1982 Spanish-state parliamentary elections it got 379,293 votes, or 31.7%; in the 1983 municipal elections it got 395,849 votes, or 39.6%; and in the latest elections, it got 450,953 votes, or 41.8% of the votes cast.

The PSOE in the 1980 elections got 130,484 votes, or 14.8%; in 1982, it got

348,620 votes, or 29.4%; in 1983, it got 264,396 votes, or 26%; in 1984, it got 247,660 votes, or 23.07%.

The HB got 152,097 votes in 1980, 16.5%; it got 175,857 votes, 14.8% in 1982; it got 143,059, or 14.3% in 1983; and 157,163, or 14.6% in 1984.

Since the 1980 Basque parliament elections, the Center Union (UCD) of former premier Suarez, the main bourgeois party in the period following Franco's death, disintegrated. In the 1984 elections, the remains of this party ran in coalition with the far rightist party of Fraga Ibararne, the Alianza Popular. This coalition got 100,627 votes, 9.4%, in 1984. In 1982, it got 139,148, 11.3%.

Euzkadiko Ezkerra, represents a faction of the militant nationalist movement that has moved to the right. It gained its initial electoral backing because it was the only section of the militant nationalist movement prepared to contest elections. Because of this history, despite the fact that it is now very far to the right, its vote is probably still mostly a militant nationalist vote. In 1984, it got 85,621, or 8% of the vote.

In reaction against the shift of Euzkadiko Ezkerra to the right, a large section of its activists split away to form the New Left. This group joined with the Basque section of the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state in a new coalition called Auzolan (which means "Collaborative Work" in Basque). This was the first time it has contested elections in the part of the Basque country covered by the autonomous parliament. Its only previous electoral experience was in the elections for the Navarra local parliament.

The following article from *Zutik*, March 1, 1984, the paper of the Liga Komunista Iraultzailea, the Basque organization of the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state, offers an assessment of the election results and the campaign run by Auzolan. Some parts have been shortened for space reasons.

* * *

A comparative study of the four last elections in the Basque country shows the following:

1. A continuing rise of the Basque Nationalist Party (PNV). In the latest elections, its vote increased by 55,000 over that in the May 1983 municipal elections and more than 100,000 over what it got in the 1980 vote for the Basque autonomous parliament. At the same time, the number of registered voters has hardly changed.

The success of the nationalist right reflects the extraordinary base of the

PNV in Basque society and the identification of broad sectors of the population with the policy of this party at the level of the Basque autonomous region, which they see as the only way of getting some local government for Euzkadi. The party has been helped as well by the way it has played on its conflicts with Madrid and by the charismatic personality of party leader Garaikoetxea.

Thus, the PNV's four years at the head of the Basque autonomous government have not discredited it, quite the contrary. No doubt, this is because this

body has so little powers with respect to the more unpopular policies of the bourgeois authorities, such as repression and industrial reconversion. The majority of the Basque population do not see it as responsible for these things.

2. The latest elections gave a better picture of the real support for the PSOE [the Social Democratic Party] than the previous ones. The 1980 vote, the first election for an autonomous Basque authority, was quite unrepresentative. The PSOE got a mere 130,591 votes. On the other hand, the vote that the PSOE got in the October 1982 elections for the Spanish state parliament — 348,560 — was inflated by the expectation that the party would win control of the national government. [This time, it got 247,717 votes.]

The PSOE's electoral support comes mainly from workers who have immigrated to the Basque country from other parts of the Spanish state. It represents a combination of a Spanish chauvinist and anti-ETA vote and that of sections of the population that want to prevent the domination of the Basque nationalist right.

3. There is not much to say about the right-wing bourgeois Spanish centralist vote in this election, the vote for the People's coalition of the far right People's Alliance (AP) and the remains of the Center Union (UCD).

Although the People's Coalition regained about 13,000 votes by comparison with the municipal elections last year, it far from reached the level of the combined vote of the UCD and the AP in the 1980 elections for the Basque parliament or the 1982 Spanish-state parliament elections.

4. With respect to the vote for Euzkadiko Ezkerra, the first fact that stands out is its essential stability (it rose by about 5,500 this time by comparison with the municipal elections last year, but fell by 4,500 and 6,000 respectively by comparison with the Basque parliament elections in 1980 and the Spanish-state parliament elections of 1982).

At the same time, it has to be noted that the fusion between Euzkadiko Ezkerra and the faction of the Communist Party led by Lertxundi, although the media and press focused a lot of attention on this group, has not brought any overall increase in the EE vote.

5. With respect to Herri Batasuna, it has to be said that it achieved a good result. Its vote rose by 14,000 votes with respect to the 1983 municipal elections and by 5,000 votes over the 1980 election for the Basque parliament, although it remained 18,000 votes below its score in the 1982 general elections.

In an atmosphere dominated by a general campaign against ETA and revolutionary nationalism by all the parliamentary parties and the grave polariza-

tion of Basque society following the assassination of the PSOE senator Enrique Casas, the revolutionary nationalist current closed ranks around the HB. A lot of people critical of the party or who had their doubts about it decided to go on supporting it.

However, the HB also waged a good campaign. It proved able to appeal to workers involved in struggles and to youth and to seek support from revolutionary currents in other parts of the Spanish state.

As for the Communist Party, these latest elections only reconfirmed its debacle as an electoral force in Euzkadi and its continuing decline.

* * * *

Auzolan's vote was less than what had been hoped for by those who formed this coalition.

We knew that in the present circumstances, since it was a newcomer to the political scene, Auzolan could not win the support of any significant layer of the Basque working people. But we hoped to influence a broader section of the militant nationalist (Abertzale) vanguard and other elements of the revolutionary vanguard who are beginning to draw conclusions about the need for a different sort of left policy. In this respect, the results were less than expected. Auzolan got less votes from people who have previously abstained and from those critical of Euzkadiko Ezkerra than hoped for.

To some extent, this was the result of the polarization and the reinforcement of established loyalties caused by the recent events in Euzkadi. But the decisive thing was that the rethinking that has been going on in sections of the militant nationalist and revolutionary vanguard has not reached the point where it could have a clear reflection on the electoral level.

As we saw, both through our own experience and the impressions of other people, the impact of Auzolan's election campaign was far greater than indicated by its vote. For example, the attendance at Auzolan's rallies was about the same as at the EE ones, and far bigger than at the CP ones. It was clear that our hopes were shared in the vanguard of the trade union movement, the women's movement and the anti-war movement.

The election results give only the barest indication of that political capital. But they represent a basis for the future, indicating that already in southern Euzkadi as a whole (including the province of Navarra) our vote is over 19 thousand. And this is an important platform for continuing the struggle for the national and social liberation of Euzkadi.

The following are the vote totals for Auzolan in the three provinces covered by the autonomous Basque authority:

Alava/Araba	1,367
Guipuzkoa/Gipuskoa	4,982
Vizcaya/Bizkaia	4,360

Total: 19,709 (0.67%)

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'In the trade-union movement as a whole we have already got support from many individual leaders, including social-democratic leaders of local workers organisations, as you will see in the next issue of our paper, *Klassekampen*. Special efforts are being made to organise intellectuals, as well as doctors, priests, small farmers, etc.

'On April 7 and 8, about one thousand people will meet in Copenhagen in a conference of the 'Trade Unionists for Peace'. Here the proposal will be put forward not only by my own local union and by revolutionary socialists but also leaders of other unions, including social

democrats. To win the 'Trade Unionists for Peace' to our idea will be a great step forward.

'Already a significant regional leader of the LO, Knut Anderson, leader of the Copenhagen suburbs federation, has endorsed our proposal calling it "a big and correct idea".

'But just as this is an international affair, international solidarity is very important. In order to build the movement in Denmark and thus to thereby inspire workers in other countries, we ask all trade unionists and peace activists to send messages of support to:

Initiativegruppen, Herlufmagle Skole, 4160 Herlufmagle, Denmark.

The appeal of Herlufmagle teachers

West European governments are continuing with the installation of 572 nuclear missiles directed against Eastern Europe, despite the fact that there have been gigantic demonstrations against them and that the overwhelming majority of the population of Western Europe oppose them. And despite the fact that there are many reasons why governments are elected, not simply endorsement of their stand on the missiles.

On the other side of the so-called Iron Curtain this move is being answered by the installation of still more missiles, directed against Western Europe. A new, expensive and dangerous escalation of nuclear rearmament is going on. From a rational point of view this escalation is unnecessary. The existing stocks of nuclear weapons seem more than enough of a deterrent as they are already capable of destroying life on Earth several times over.

But the new weapons introduce an even greater risk that such a disaster will in fact occur because, among other things, they drastically reduce the warning time, and thus the possibility of averting catastrophe at the last minute.

Everybody can see what the end will be if this insanity of rearmament is allowed to continue. Every means possible must be used to stop it. One of the most important means has been the symbolic but massive work-stoppages that have taken place in countries like West Germany, Finland, Belgium and Denmark, that have usually lasted for about five minutes. That is about the time it will take for a rocket to get to its target once it has been fired.

These work-stoppages have been very important. They have strengthened the peace movement and spread its ideas far and wide among the population. At the same time they have highlighted the *most important means* the population has at its disposal to stop this insanity: stopping society functioning.

But the symbolic five-minute strikes that have spread from country to country have not been sufficiently effective to convince the governments. They have to be extended, broadened and co-ordinated to become a *one day people's strike in all West European countries on one and the same day*.

This demand must be raised everywhere. Not only in workplaces but in the trade unions in the private as well as the public sector. We must use the already existing contacts across frontiers and develop new ones.

But, as it is a matter of concern to all layers of the population the demand should also be raised in associations of employers, farmers, shopkeepers, etc. so that the work-stoppages will take on the dimension and form of the people's strikes during the Occupation, and so that no one can say it is specially directed towards, for example, the employers. And the demand must be raised *now*. Let us find a common day where work stops not only in one single country but throughout Western Europe, and the streets are filled with protesting people.

Is this unrealistic? No, the most unrealistic and irresponsible action would be to let things go on. Let us at least try to raise the demand and see what the result will be!

But if there is to be a people's strike, even in Denmark alone, it ought not to be a question of negotiation behind closed doors between the trade unions and the employers associations for example. It is too important a question for that. *The demand must be pressed through from below*. We therefore ask everybody reading this to spread the idea among their friends and fellow workers, in the peace movement, in the trade unions. Set in motion existing groups and organisations, or build new ones and contact us.

You may wonder why we are raising the demand for the removal of the 572 Nato missiles, and do not make this demand *dependent* on the Soviet Union removing its missiles at the same time. The explanation is simple:

We stand for disarmament in the East as well as in the West. But, the fact of the matter is, *we* are living in Western Europe — not in Eastern Europe. And the demand of 'mutual disarmament' is exactly the demand that the governments talk about while they continue with rearmament at full speed. Besides, we mean that beginning *with ourselves* we will support those forces — including the unofficial peace movement — that in Eastern Europe too are working for a future without fear of nuclear destruction.

"For a Europe-wide people's strike against missiles"

The call for a 'European peoples' strike against missiles' by the teachers at the Herlufmagle school has already begun to have an impact on activists in the Danish peace and trade-union movements (see box).

One of the organisers, Vagn Rasmussen, who is also a leader of SAP, Danish section of the Fourth International, told *International Viewpoint* more about this initiative.

'We have taken this initiative because of the situation that we think the peace movement in Denmark and many other European countries will very soon find itself, if it hasn't already. In spite of the massive demonstrations the missiles are being installed. This could lead to demoralisation of big sections of the movement on the one hand, and a turn to violent or even terrorist actions on the other.

'In this situation it is very important to try and unite the peace movement around a new and radical form of mass struggle. This can only be, in our opinion, to work for a people's strike in all European countries on one and the same day.

'We are aware of how big a task this is and how far we are from our goal. But on the other hand this method is in accordance with the best traditions of the workers movement. If our government tries to drive us to war we will answer by stopping society from functioning. This is an old idea in the workers movement. And it is a follow up to the symbolic work stoppages that took place in a number of West European countries last October and November.

'We call for a people's strike and not a general strike for many reasons. First of all general strike 'in Danish' means a strike of workers alone. People's strikes, as in fact we in Denmark experienced during the Nazi occupation, means strikes where shopkeepers, independent artisans, etc. join with the workers. These layers are already involved in the peace movement to a certain extent. They too will be killed in a nuclear war and we have seen how people's strikes can be used as a form of mass struggle, for example on the West Bank or in Chile and Argentina.

'The reason for this call is also linked to the economic problems facing most workers. In a strike in Denmark they are not only going to lose a day's pay but they are also forced to pay rather heavy fines. In our action group (which is rather broadly based) it was a bourgeois opponent of the missiles who said to us "Remember what the employers said before the 5-minute strike last November. They said, 'Why should we pay for this political strike?' We must have an answer to this question. And the only answer is:

join us!" A nuclear missile doesn't make any distinction between a worker and an employer. So we have not only sent our resolution to workers organisation but to employers organisations as well. They will probably not join any strike, but this will help the workers to argue against the resistance from the employers.

'In the Danish parliament there is a majority of workers parties. What would be more natural than to ask them to pass a special law so that all public sector workers would be paid while striking?

'We should also not underestimate the fact that the demand for a people's strike has been raised by teachers. In October 1982 the whole of Denmark was shaken by gigantic strikes and demonstrations against the new bourgeois government. They were the biggest demonstrations since the Second World War, involving up to half a million people in a country of only five million people. This huge movement started in the B & W shipyard in



Copenhagen where our comrades are very active. Here the workers decided to stop work and demonstrate despite what anyone else did. This forced other factories and the Stalinists and left reformist leaders in the trade unions to join in. An 'unofficial' demonstration drew about 60,000 workers. Later on, the official leadership took over and there was a demonstration of more than 100,000 workers in Copenhagen alone.

'But at the same time a movement in the public sector was underway, headed by the local branches of the teachers union, the DLF, including my own local branch. This forced the leadership of the DLF to put pressure on the General Federation of Public Employees (FTF) in which the 70,000 teachers comprise nearly half the membership. The FTF also organised a demonstration of 100,000 in Copenhagen as well as several demonstrations in provincial towns and cities.

'If we can win the teachers union to our ideas we can also win the FTF. And the FTF can put pressure on its counterpart in the private sector, the General Federation of Labour (LO). The perspective of winning the teachers unions is better today than ever before. Some of the same people who two years ago were in opposition and led spontaneous strikes are now in the leadership of the union. But of course it is a question of raising the perspective of a strike in the FTF and the LO at the same time.

'Apart from the bourgeois forces who want the missiles, we have heard only one argument against our ideas, "Is it possible? Is it realistic? Everybody understands that demonstrations and resolutions are not enough to stop the missiles. But are we really capable of mobilising the very big forces necessary?" To this our only answer is: It's worth trying. Let's start *moving!*

'And it is possible. Within a few weeks our initiative is winning greater and greater support. First from our own local union branch which is now very actively helping us to mobilise other union branches, and also from individual members of the national leadership of the teachers union as well as other trade unions in our region. In the peace movement the idea of a people's strike is also spreading quickly. At a conference of all the peace committees from eastern Denmark on January 28 the proposal for a people's strike provoked the most applause from the audience. On February 25 and 26 our proposal was presented to the peace committees of the rest of the country, but in a much better prepared, organised and more convincing way and was unanimously adopted.

'In the trade-union movement as a whole we have already got support from many individual leaders, including social-democratic leaders of local workers organisations, as you will see in the next issue of our paper, *Klassekampen*. Special efforts are being made to organise intellectuals, as well as doctors, priests, small farmers, etc.