

# International VIEWPOINT

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## Special on South Africa : The rising storm

Defeat spurs  
sharp debate  
in Italian CP

The Miskito  
Problem  
in Nicaragua



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# Rising struggle against apartheid spurs debates and maneuvers

By 295 votes to 127, the US House of Representatives decided on June 5, 1985 to take a certain number of economic measures against South Africa. Just before this, a committee of the Senate, which is dominated by the Republicans, had also taken a position in favor of economic sanctions.

These votes indicate that a section of the bourgeois politicians no longer really believe in Ronald Reagan's so-called policy of constructive engagement. What this policy calls for in "theory" is not opposing the Pretoria regime in order to facilitate its efforts to reform the apartheid system.

Peter BLUMER

In reality, the Reagan administration's doctrine has been a miserable smoke screen to hide total complicity with Pretoria. Moreover, the most "realistic" declarations by government representatives have never really covered up the fact that the essential thing for them was safeguarding the imperialist interests in the country by maintaining the stability of the present regime:

"In South Africa, the dominant country in this region, it is not up to us to choose between Blacks and whites. In this rich state, inhabited by such a diverse and talented population, important Western interests are at stake, in the economic and strategic spheres, as well as the moral or political. We must take care not to undertake any action that could aggravate the terrible difficulties afflicting South Africans, regardless of their race." (1)

This policy no longer has the confidence of a section of the American ruling class. But what are the real reasons for this evolution? Should we believe the declarations of faith in democracy and the inevitable reflections on human rights that are always included with all official seriousness in strategic discussions?

The fact is that the US Congress decisions come after an unprecedented upsurge of anti-apartheid mobilizations in the United States. Since November 21, 1984, a continual sit-in has been maintained in front of the South African embassy in Washington. At the same time, agitation against the Pretoria regime has been assuming a broad scope on several university campuses, and eleven municipal governments have decided to break off their financial relations with US companies established in South Africa.

There is no doubt that the Congress took account of these mobilizations, as well as of the pressures brought to bear by some church lobbies. But this is not sufficient to explain so sharp a

turn — which, on the other hand, may be temporary, if other events occur in South Africa — in the attitude of the US House and Senate.

The official aims of Reagan's policy were to encourage some reforms in South Africa and solutions aimed at pacification in southern Africa. In both regards, the results have been lamentable. The elections for the "coloured" and "Indian" chambers were met with massive boycotts in both communities. Every day the repression of the mobilizations and strikes of the oppressed population has grown more severe. The Botha regime has gone back to its "internal solution" in Namibia, which the Western countries reject because they no longer believe in this road.

The Nkomati agreement with Mozambique was a swindle whose main consequence for the moment is a reinforcement of the pro-South African guerrillas of the RNM. In Angola, the authorities have just captured a member of a South African commando team who was preparing to sabotage Gulf Oil's installations in the province of Cabinda.

## What worries the US congress

All of this indicates what sort of margin for maneuver the racist regime has. Washington's policy is to establish a kind of peaceful coexistence in southern Africa in order to open the way for a new wave of US investment in Angola and Mozambique and to enable the Pretoria regime to resolve its internal problems and choke off subversion.

None of these objectives has been achieved because of the extent of the contradictions at work, the upsurge of the mass movement in South Africa, the economic crisis now afflicting the country, and the crisis of political leadership that is starting to take form in the white racist camp.

It is such factors, rather than the problems of human rights, that underlie the

congressional debates. The concerns of the representatives of the US ruling class are obviously of a more prosaic sort.

Moreover, a few days before the vote in the US House of Representatives, the French premier, Laurent Fabius, also announced that France might change its attitude toward Pretoria. "We want to invest in this region," he said. "But if in a reasonable time, 18 months to two years, definite steps are not taken by the South African regime to put an end to its practices, I think that not only will France not be able to expand its investments but it will have to call a halt to them." (2)

This statement was made at a public colloquium on human rights. But it should not be thought that it was motivated simply by the circumstances. Even if, as is likely, France does not carry out its threats, it can be reasonably assumed that the Western governments are now very worried about the situation in South Africa.

The imperialist governments have realized that South Africa may now be plunged into a situation of large-scale social confrontations accompanied by a strong radicalization of the Black population. The sort of threats Fabius made are only another muddled move that indicates that the imperialists are looking for a solution but they have not found one.

All this agitation has revived the debate over the question of whether or not to support a boycott against South Africa.

Ever since the question of a boycott was raised, the racist regime has responded by explaining that what was involved was an unrelenting Communist plot against South Africa, and moreover the main victims of a boycott would be the Black workers themselves.

Immediately after the decision of the US House, the South African undersecretary for foreign affairs said, as if he were simply stating an objective fact, that "The Americans must know that South Africa will defend itself and show to the entire world that it is a regional power in Africa." The recent raid on Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, allegedly aimed against activists of the African National Congress (ANC), was a warning to back this up.

The US administration was also to pick up this argument. George Schultz, speaking on April 16 to the National Press Club in Washington, explained that sanctions "would lead us to ineffective actions that would strengthen the resistance to change more than the forces of reform." He added: "There has been more change in South Africa in the last four years than in the thirty before."

To justify its position, the US government financed a study by Professor Laurence Schlemmer of the Institute of Social Research at the University of

1. Chester A. Crocker, undersecretary of state for African affairs, August 29, 1981.  
2. 'Le Monde', June 2-3, 1985.

Natal in South Africa on the attitude of the Blacks in the country about the withdrawal of foreign investment.

Not unexpectedly, this study came to the conclusion that three fourths of Blacks are opposed to disinvestment. This finding, however, has been disputed to a large extent by another academic, Herman Giliomee, of the University of the Cape and by a series of articles in the independent press. (3)

The debate on the boycott question is indeed a fundamental one that concerns strategic perspectives in South Africa. So, no poll in a highly repressive country can give a clear impression of the opinion of the Blacks on this matter.

The imperialists and their retainers wring their hands about the jobs created by the multinationals. They pretend not to know that these countries invest in the country of apartheid for reasons that have to do with the rate of profit. The rate of profit has begun to drop sharply, and it is not the boycott campaign but simply the laws of capitalism that are the reason why foreign companies are withdrawing their capital. None of these people are worried about the unemployment this is producing.

The economic crisis now gripping South Africa is sharply reducing the possibilities of a number of companies to rake in superprofits. Ford and Coca Cola have announced that they are going to trim their interests in South African companies and become minority stock holders. A North Carolina clothing manufacturer, Blue Bell, and a high-technology firm, Perkin Elmer, have sold off all their holdings. Several British companies, such as Associated British Foods and ICL, have done the same.

### The civilised capitalists?

According to the British business magazine *The Economist*, more than thirty American companies have withdrawn from South Africa since 1980. (4) All this is mainly due to the recession, and nobody in the capitalist world has had anything to say about its consequences for the jobs of Blacks.

Another argument that is generally used to justify and defend investment in South Africa is that the foreign companies bring a positive pressure to bear on working conditions and the laws. "Codes of Conduct" were in fact initiated to favor such a policy. One example is the Sullivan Code for American companies. But it has been known for a long time that these rules have not been followed, if at all.

Of course, more and more foreign companies are recognizing the independent nonracial unions and improving working conditions. But it is quite clear that the bosses involved are mainly interested in keeping strikes from increasing and in making sure that their

factories keep running. Their good will goes no further than the bounds of capitalist profitability.

A recent report on the 107 British companies working in South Africa points up the number of violations of the EEC code. Seven firms reportedly pay less than the subsistence wage to 1,700 of their employees. Thirty-nine pay less than the EEC recommended wage to about 9,000 of their workers. Among twenty out of 107 companies recognize the independent unions.

Moreover, a report to the British minister of commerce and industry notes that the number of workers paid less than the subsistence wage is now growing. (5)

All these facts do not do much to confirm any "positive" effects for the Black workers of the operations of foreign companies in South Africa.

Black workers have in some instances been able to take advantage of the fact that they were dealing with a multinational to gain certain advantages and openings for pressing some demands. But this has always happened because in the plants concerned there was a union that knew how to utilize this margin for maneuver.

So, it has been precisely because of the relationship of forces that in some foreign companies the workers have been able to extract certain favors from the bosses. But this is no different than for the South African bosses.

"General Motors (SA) recently provided an excellent example of the invest/technology/employment relation, and the gap between the words and deeds of foreign companies around disinvestment. On the same day as its managing director attacked the disinvestment campaign for its lack of concern with Black workers jobs, his company made two announcements. The first was that it would spend R40 million on retooling an assembly line in GM's Port Elizabeth plant, to bring a new model onto the market. It is almost certain that this money will come from profits earned by GM (SA) rather than representing a new capital flow into South Africa (6) ... But in another statement (7), GM announced that poor market conditions necessitated an 8-week layoff of 465 workers, more than 10% of the company's workforce, with permanent retrenchment a distinct possibility." (8)

Most Black organizations and personalities have come out in favor of the boycott of South Africa. They have generally argued that despite the negative consequences it might have for the workers, it would be a "short-term pain for the sake of a long-term gain."

Bishop Tutu himself has supported the idea of disinvestment if certain conditions are not met in the next 18 to 24 months. (9) The ANC has also long lined up behind the boycott position. Finally, a number of the independent nonracial unions that today organize hundreds of thousands of workers are

in favor of this policy. The biggest federation, the CUSA, has, however, declared through its chair that it is in favor of "selective disengagement."

### Protesters taking the bread out of the mouths of Black workers?

The second biggest federation, the FOSATU, has given a thoroughgoing explanation of its support for the boycott. In a resolution adopted in April 1984, it declared "FOSATU as a trade union organisation which is concerned with jobs and the livelihood of its members has to give careful consideration to the question of disinvestment. However, it is FOSATU's considered view that the pressure for disinvestment has had a positive effect and should therefore not be lessened. FOSATU is definitely opposed to foreign investment that accepts the conditions of oppression maintained by this regime. FOSATU is, however, also clear that its own focus of attention must be the building of a strong workers movement in South Africa that can set the terms of foreign investment and ultimately ensure that the factories, machines and buildings presently in South Africa will be retained in South Africa to the ultimate benefit of all."

In fact, once you start to make distinctions between speculative investment, factories and machines, and stocks or bank loans, the boycott policy begins to take on different aspects. Not all of these aspects of the problem necessarily have the same importance for the long-term strategy of the South African workers movement. This seems to have been what one of the leaders of FOSATU, Alec Erwin, was explaining when he said:

"Disinvestment pressure has a number of dimensions; it can be directly on the State through cutting off foreign borrowing facilities or it can be indirect through placing pressure on multinational companies who constitute a powerful lobby. These forms of pressure are supported by FOSATU. We must, however, separate out the question of actual withdrawal of existing assets from South Africa. This raises a fundamentally different political issue. The legal ownership of these assets may rest with foreign companies. However, they have been developed and enlarged by the hard work and labour of South African workers. In FOSATU's view therefore the assets now constitute a part of —

3. 'South African Labour Bulletin', May 1985.

4. 'The Economist', March 30, 1985.

5. 'Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens', April 1, 1985.

6. 'Business Day', February 22, 1985.

7. 'Star', February 22, 1985.

8. 'South African Labour Bulletin', May 1985, p. 56.

9. 'Rand Daily Mail', January 3, 1985. One notices that the time limit proposed by the bishop is exactly the same as that proposed by the French premier, in the presence of Tutu in May 1985 in Paris.

and in virtually all cases a necessary and useful part of — the social wealth of South Africa. We can see absolutely no sense in handing over part of the social wealth of this country in order to place pressure on this regime.” (10)

The other aspect of the problem up for discussion in the trade-union and political movement is the argument that attributes to the boycott a positive function for the development of South African capitalism in the narrow sense. The example generally given is the Rhodesia of Ian Smith's time. After the British took a certain number of measures designed to force their rebel colony to yield, we saw the development of a whole series of substitution industries and the development of a Rhodesian industrial bourgeoisie.

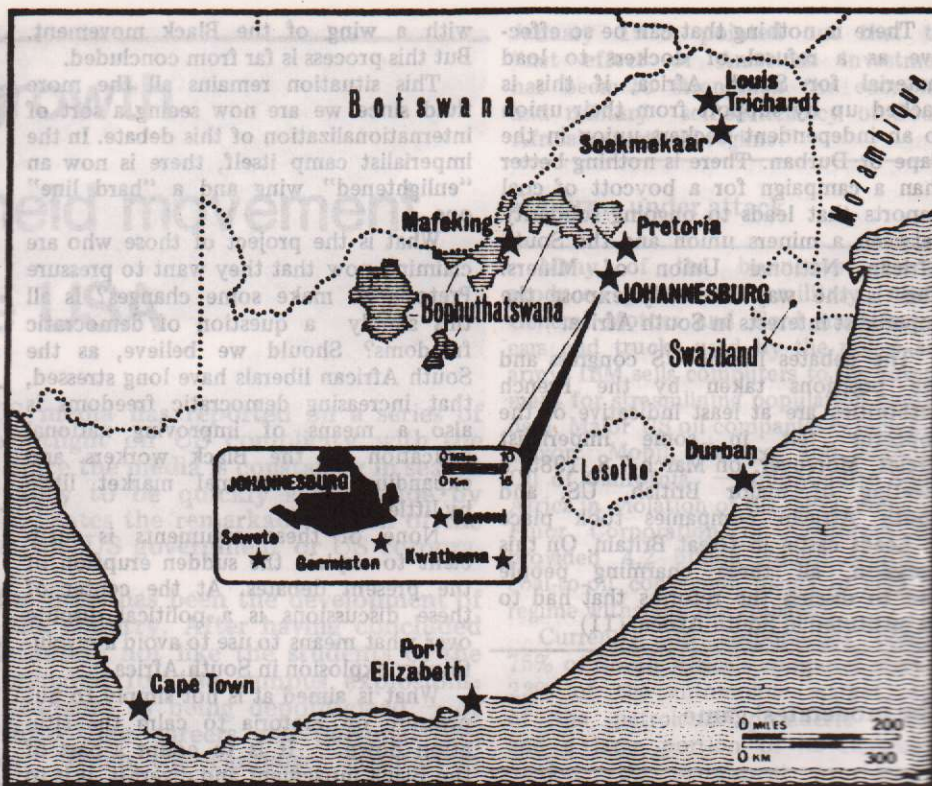
In the imperialist camp itself, comments have been made that the embargo on shipments of oil and arms to South Africa has already enabled the country to develop two major import substituting industries. The Sasol chemical complex makes it possible for Pretoria to convert coal into petroleum products, and the country is now an arms exporter.

The argument that the boycott aids the local bourgeoisie, however, is a feeble one. In fact, it has been possible for South Africa to compensate in this way only because the boycott has not halted the inflows of foreign capital and technological inputs into South Africa.

So, a certain level of boycott “could” be a formidable weapon against the South African government in an immediate sense.

The movement in solidarity with the oppressed people of South Africa does not have to get involved in economist's arguments. No one could think, moreover, that we are going to see a real total boycott of the South African economy by the imperialist countries. What is more, it has to be realized that a real boycott would have as bad effects for the world imperialist economy as South Africa alone. The latter is, in fact, the Western world's major supplier of gold. It is also the major supplier of rare metals such as platinum and palladium and strategic ones such as manganese.

Furthermore, a strangling of the racist regime could in the very short term open up a revolutionary situation in the country. So, the imperialist governments and the multinationals have



no interest in a real boycott.

It is, not therefore, very useful to have a debate on the effects that such a boycott could have, if, by some miracle, the western countries ever came to deplore apartheid to that extent.

### The uses of boycott

What the mass movement in the United States has already managed to achieve is quite positive, and the pressure of the “Black” municipalities and the churches has not plunged South Africa into an economic chaos in which the primary losers would be the Black workers.

The question of the boycott has to be looked at from a political point of view. Any such campaign is a way to show the complicity of the imperialists with the racist state and the fact that apartheid is fundamentally an instrument of capitalist superexploitation.

The first objective of boycott campaigns is, therefore, to denounce the investments of the multinationals

in South Africa and to show that only the pressure of the mass movement — and not any human-rights ethics of such companies — can force them to retreat.

In some cases, boycott campaigns can be very easily linked to the needs of the workers movement itself. This is true, for example, as regards South African shipments of coal to countries such as Great Britain and France, where the authorities are closing pits while keeping up their imports of South African fuel.

The banks can also be easily exposed by showing that the South African branches of British, American, or French banks are financing military projects or being used as channels through which industrialists can place investments in South Africa for a while and exploit all the advantages of apartheid. These are the sort of aims that should be set for boycott campaigns, and not that of strangling the local economic system. The latter objective, in any case, is utopian.

It is necessary above all to link such concrete support campaigns to the workers and people's organizations that are fighting in South Africa. Both things can be done at once because the problem is not to convince the racists that they should “democratize” the society. It is to help the oppressed overthrow this system.

In this way, boycott campaigns can be kept clear of the demagoguery of bourgeois democrats and Social Democratic governments. A boycott serves no purpose unless it is a means for the workers and anti-imperialist movement to offer concrete solidarity to the South African mass movement.

### US INVESTMENT IN SOUTH AFRICA

Direct US investment in South Africa amounts to 2,3 billion dollars. If you add indirect investment, stocks in US hands, the total comes up to 6.5 billion dollars. The South African government sells a gold coin on the world market, the Kruggerrand. In 1984, 578 million dollars worth of this coin were sold to the US, or about two thirds of the international sales.

While the US comes after Great Britain and West Germany in the size of its investment in South Africa, it is the country's main trading partner. In 1983, the US was both the major importer to, and the major exporter from, South Africa. It exported 2.4 billion rands worth of goods to South Africa and imported 1.7 billion from it.

About 350 American companies operate in South Africa, employing 55,000 Blacks. But many more companies with a much larger workforce are dependent to one degree or another on US Technology.

10. Speech at the University of Natal, May 8, 1985. FOSATU document.

There is nothing that can be so effective as a refusal of dockers to load material for South Africa, if this is backed up by support from their union to an independent dockers union in the Cape or Durban. There is nothing better than a campaign for a boycott of coal imports that leads to ongoing solidarity between a miners union and the South African National Union of Miners. This is the way to really expose the imperialist interests in South Africa.

The debates in the US congress and the positions taken by the French authorities are at least indicative of the concerns felt in some imperialist circles. Moreover, on March 7-8, 1985, a meeting of major British, US, and South African companies took place in Leeds castle in Great Britain. On this occasion, all these charming people had to discuss the reforms that had to be instituted in South Africa. (11)

### The moderates' game

The debate is a constant one within the South African bourgeoisie itself. There are, first of all, differences among the Liberals and nationalists, which partially reflect the division between big finance capital of Anglo-Saxon origin and the Afrikaaner bourgeoisie. Then, on top of this, there is the split between the "verligte" ("enlightened") and the "verkramp" ("hard line") wings of the nationalist camp, between those who want to propose some face-lifting changes and those who reject this.

In reality the debate is shaped by the conflicts among a whole series of capitalist strata whose needs for labor power, labor-cost problems, and trading interests are different.

However, what can be seen now is that the two traditional alignments in the white bourgeoisie are evolving. The Botha regime has been obliged to adjust on the political and social level to major changes in the South African industrial structure and economy over the past twenty years.

While the Botha regime has accepted "liberal" measures such as granting new rights to unions, it has had to build up its repressive machinery in order to contain a growing mass movement. It is, thus, the objective situation that is forcing the regime to try to feel its way, seeking to combine some major reforms with the traditional system.

Adjusting to the objective developments in the country, however, is not a simple task when the reforms are coming too late and the mass movement is advancing steadily. All this is little by little upsetting the traditional panorama of the South African bourgeois currents. For the moment there is a regroupment "at the center" around Botha. At the same time, a substantial extreme right is consolidating, as well as a liberal layer more and more inclined to flirt

with a wing of the Black movement. But this process is far from concluded.

This situation remains all the more fluid since we are now seeing a sort of internationalization of this debate. In the imperialist camp itself, there is now an "enlightened" wing and a "hard line" one.

What is the project of those who are claiming now that they want to pressure Pretoria to make some changes? Is all this simply a question of democratic freedoms? Should we believe, as the South African liberals have long stressed, that increasing democratic freedoms is also a means of improving national education of the Black workers and expanding the internal market little by little?

None of these arguments is sufficient to explain the sudden eruption of the present debates. At the center of these discussions is a political dispute over what means to use to avoid a revolutionary explosion in South Africa.

What is aimed at is not simply to put pressure on Pretoria to calm the situation down. It is to coopt a part of the Black movement and divert it. It is to divide the movement and hitch a section of it to a long-term perspective of a compromise solution.

Such a project makes sense today only because a part of the mass movement is dominated by the churches, whose main personality is Bishop Tutu. The churches are deeply involved in the United Democratic Front, where they share the real leadership with the pro-ANC "Chartist" current. They, however, have very little influence over the trade-union movement.

The furore raised by a part of the US ruling class about sanctions against South Africa is an element in this strategy. There can be no doubt whatever that the



entire US ruling class prefers apartheid to a revolutionary crisis. But it is divided over "how" to avert a spiral of social conflict.

By using the South African opposition churches, the backers of this policy of division are trying to pull the UDF to the right. In so doing, they could also test the ANC, which would then have to choose between maintaining its influence in the UDF by making concessions or abandoning this coalition as a means of organizing its supporters. (12)

### Splitting the movement of the oppressed.

The US Democrats have already begun this work of division. Edward Kennedy's trip to South Africa early in 1985 was a test. A UDF leader, the Reverend Allan Boesak, was one of the organizers of this junket. In the Cape, where he lives, the UDF organized a public meeting with Kennedy. Winnie Mandela, the wife of the imprisoned ANC leader, was also one of the supporters of this tour, and she accepted a bust of John F. Kennedy from the US senator.

While the UDF did not officially support the Kennedy operation, it did not support the protests against it either. Tutu explained, for his part, that the demonstrations against Kennedy gave de facto aid and comfort to the apartheid regime. The main union federation, the CUSA, agreed to take part in a meeting with Kennedy.

However, forces such as the Black Consciousness group AZAPO, a rival grouping to the UDF, the National Forum Committee, and some unions regarded the senator as an imperialist agent and did not support this operation. Even Oscar Mpetha, the chair of the UDF, refused to share a platform with the American politician.

When political debate is raging among the various currents, among the unions, between the unions and the UDF, etc., an operation such as the Kennedy trip was well timed to exacerbate the conflicts.

From Paris to Washington, what the imperialists are interested in now is dividing the mass movement and consolidating a moderate current around the churches and a section of the UDF. All the speechifying about economic sanctions against South Africa is a necessary phase of this strategy. ■

11. According to the 'Financial Times', the companies involved were the following: US - Caltex, Mobil, General Motors, Control Data, and Merks; British - Shell, BP, GEC, Barclays, Rio Tinto Zinc; South African - Barlow Rand, Anglo Vaal, and South Africa's Urban Foundation. This meeting was reportedly presided over by former Prime Minister Edward Heath and attended by American preacher Leon Sullivan.  
12. Bishop Tutu has, moreover, told the American press that "communism and fascism are the same thing."

# The growth of anti-apartheid movement in the USA

For more than six months the US media has reported on a series of demonstrations that focused the spotlight on US complicity with the apartheid regime in South Africa. Since the media is constantly in search of "new" news, with yesterday's story to be quickly swept aside by some newer event, this fact itself indicates the remarkable depth of the sentiment in opposition to any ties the US government or US corporations have with the regime.

Of particular embarrassment to the press has been the development of large-scale student protests across the country. After having concluded that the students of today were definitely not like the students of the 1960s, the media was totally unprepared for the campus explosions. Recently the press had profiled students as being depoliticized — or supporting Reagan-like politics — into their careers and personal life, working hard to become "yuppies." When the campuses erupted in anti-apartheid activity, the media covered it all the more avidly.

Dianne FEELY

The truth of the matter is that in some ways the student protests are similar to those of the 1960s, and in some ways dissimilar. There is the same sense of moral indignation that fueled the student protests of a generation ago. Students decided to disrupt the "business as usual" approach and, as part of the university community, demanded these institutions divest themselves of stock in companies that operate in South Africa. They threw up blockades and pickets, renamed campus buildings in honor of Steven Biko, Nelson Mandela and Winnie Mandela, and organized teach ins. They participated in city-wide demonstrations in front of South African consulates that have taken place since November. On April 24, more than eighty campuses participated in the nationally-coordinated Day of Action for Divestment.

Such a demand for ending complicity with the South African regime is not new — students at Columbia University in the mid-1960s organized a massive withdrawal of funds from the Chase Manhattan Bank, one of the South African government's prime lenders.

There had been flare-ups on campuses such as Cornell University in the aftermath of the Soweto rebellion in 1976. And just as the protests of the 1960s and late 1970s were directly influenced by the struggle taking place in South Africa at the time, today's protests reflect the current level of struggle there. The fact that the movement within the Black community in South Africa is being led by students and trade unionists had also had an impact here in suggesting parallel links.

Since the Soweto uprising a number of churches, universities and trade unions have withdrawn their funding from firms and banks doing business in South Africa. By late 1984 forty universities had taken full or partial divestment action. In fact, divestment legislation has been passed in five states and twenty cities. All of these successes took place under the pressure of coalitions led by unionists and the Black community. In several cases the struggle was led by government workers who were fighting to have their pension funds freed from investment with corporations who have offices and plants in South Africa.

Thus a solid basis for divestment has been established. To date the most impressive single success has been the campaign against The Polaroid company, manufacturers of cameras and camera equipment. That grass roots campaign — in which Polaroid's own employees were involved — exposed the company's dirty business of providing photographic materials to the government and its military apparatus. In 1977 after 29 years of operations, Polaroid pulled out of South Africa.

The US Chamber of Commerce in South Africa and a grouping of South African companies have acknowledged that there appears to be "a gathering momentum" for US divestment. They took the unusual step of placing a 10-page supplement in the October 1984 issue of *Fortune* magazine, in order to mount a counter-campaign.

Total US financial involvement in South Africa, including direct investment, bank loans and shareholdings, stands at 14 billion dollars. Since 1970 direct US investment in the country has tripled. A report by the US Senate Subcommittee on Africa, issued in

January 1978, pointed out that the "net effect of American investment has been to strengthen the economic and military self-sufficiency of South Africa's apartheid regime."

## Big firms under attack

Many of the businesses directly produce goods the military needs. General Motors and Ford manufacture cars and trucks used by the police and army; IBM sells computers to the government for streamlining population control data. Major US oil companies — including Exxon, Mobil, Texaco and Standard Oil of California — supply oil to South Africa in violation of the OPEC embargo. Fluor Corporation of California also provided 4.2 billion dollars worth of coal-to-oil conversion plants to help the regime withstand the embargo.

Currently US corporations control 75% of South Africa's computer market, 23% of the automobile market, 40% of the petroleum producers market and a large portion of its electronics market. US investment provides an important building block for key sectors of the economy, especially in areas where advanced technology is utilized. More than 350 US companies have subsidiaries in the country. Their average rate of return on investment between 1979-82 ran at nearly 19%. In addition, more than 125 US banks have made loans to either the government or private borrowers.

Firms such as Phelps Dodge — the seventh largest US investor in South Africa — take advantage of the apartheid system to increase their own profitability. At its fluorspan mine, Phelps Dodge pays its African workers less than forty cents an hour. The workers put in a 60-hour work week and sleep 12 to a room in migrant labor hostels. This is the very same company that has forced the decertification of the union at its copper mines in Arizona, under the protection of state police. Unions have pointed to these connections. A September 1984 publication put out by the steelworkers states, "The oppressed Black workers of South Africa and American workers are fighting a common enemy — corporate greed. Many of the US firms profiting from apartheid are also guilty of racism here at home."

There are, however, two striking differences between the campus protests of today and those of twenty years ago: — awareness of the connections between a number of foreign and domestic policies in which the government takes the side of the corporations, against the interests of the majority of working people — organized labor's involvement in the anti-apartheid struggle.

Already unions that oppose economic involvement with South Africa include the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union, United Auto Workers, American Federation of State, County

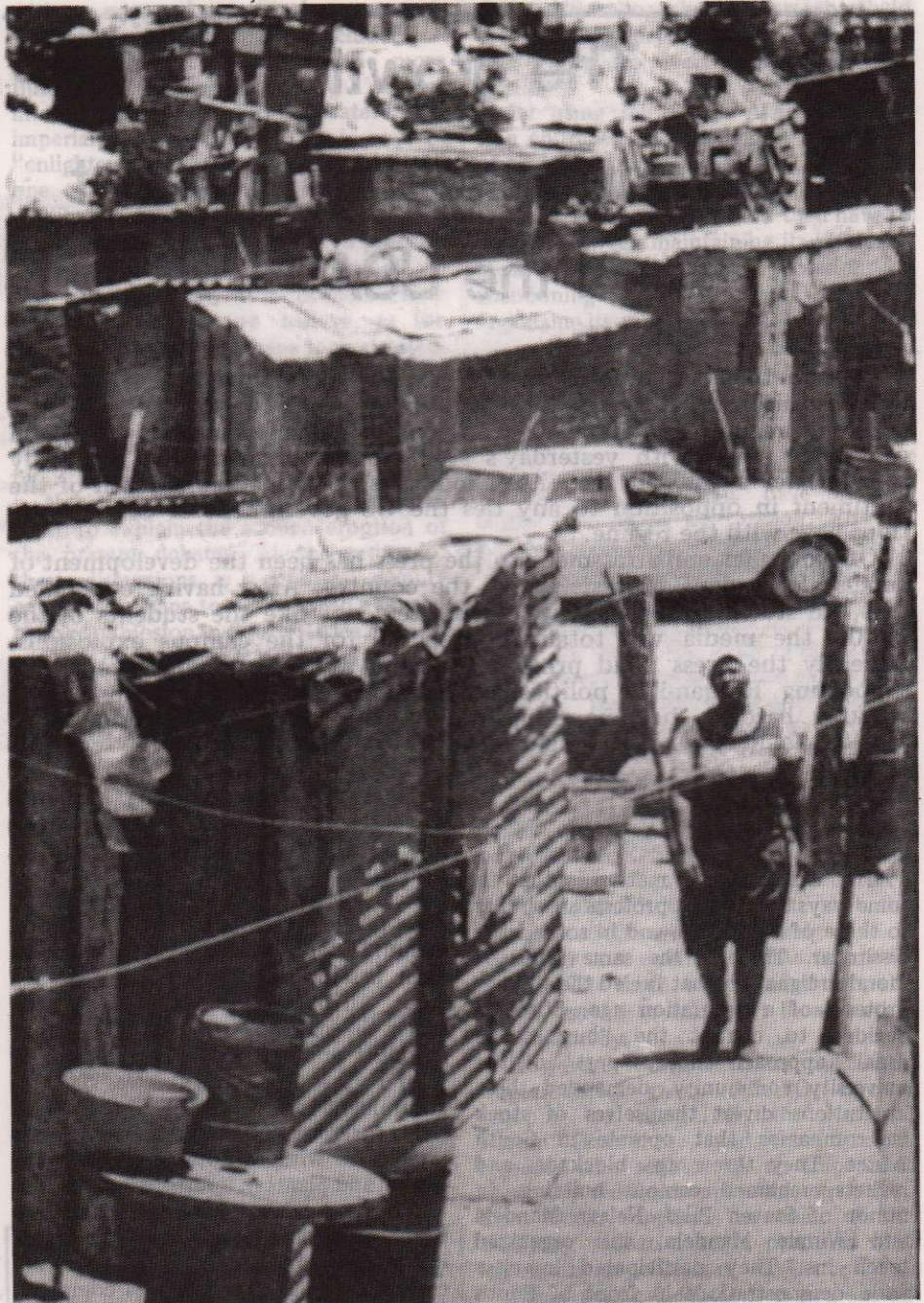
and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), United Steel Workers of America, National Education Association, United Electrical Workers, International Longshoreman and Warehouseman's union, District 1199 (hospital workers), District 65 UAW (primarily blue and white collar workers), and the Fur, Leather and Machine Workers Union. Many of these unions have developed links with the independent Black South African unions and have visited South Africa to observe the working conditions of their counterparts.

On their return, they have issued reports and organized tours for South African trade unionists in the US. Last March, for instance, Emma Mashinini, General Secretary of the Commercial Catering and Allied Workers Union of South Africa, an unaffiliated Black union representing 50,000 workers in the retail trades; Edward Mogane, President of the Building, Construction and Allied Workers Union of South Africa, an affiliate of the 130,000 strong Council of Unions of South Africa, and Nelson Nthombeni, President of the National Union of Textile Workers, an affiliate of the 110,000 member Federation of South African Trade Unions, were all featured speakers at a Labor and South Africa Conference in New York City.

### Students and working people unite

Given this context, it is not surprising to discover that when 156 students were arrested for anti-apartheid activity at the University of California at Berkeley last spring, 500 longshoremen meeting in San Francisco adjourned their convention in order to go to the Berkeley campus and express their concrete solidarity with the blockaders. The students' demand: that the university end its 1.6 billion dollars investments in companies that operate in South Africa. The longshoremen, for their part, are refusing to load or unload South African cargo.

Likewise, at Columbia University, where students demanded that the administration pledge to divest the campus of 42 million dollars worth of stock, clerical workers who are still fighting for a union contract worked closely with the Coalition for a Free South Africa. Daily rallies, held at lunchtime and after work, drew many campus workers. Much of the community support work for the Columbia students was organized by trade unionists, often Black trade unionists. A union of teamsters, who had divested their own pension funds, gave an initial check for 1,000 dollars and pledged 100 dollars a day for the duration of what was a 22-day blockade. AFSCME, a large union of government workers, provided the large plastic sheet that, when unrolled, completely protected the area where the blockaders vigiled — keeping the students dry during the spring rains.



*Crossroads - Blacks are forced into worst living conditions (DR)*

Other unions donated their musical talents, blankets, food and legal assistance. Each day delegations of trade unionists came to the campus, with statements of support.

The pattern at Columbia and Berkeley was repeated at campuses across the country — organized labor gave material support and joined the rallies and picket lines.

During the 1960s the high employment and general economic prosperity blurred the vision of even very committed anti-Vietnam war activists from drawing socialist conclusions. But today the parallels between US foreign and domestic policies are much more apparent. The contrast, too, between US support to the South African regime and US hostility to Nicaragua helps to educate students and working people about the nature of the government.

At Columbia there was a conscious decision to end the blockade last April and sink deeper roots in Harlem, the Black community from which the university remains aloof. A series of fall conferences, where students can develop a functional national network are in the planning stages. Meanwhile city-wide demonstrations around both symbolic, daily civil disobedience takes place in front of South African consulates in major cities like New York and Washington, DC. All these activities indicate the direction of the movement; toward broadening its base of support, fueled by the energy and resources of both students and working people, and toward placing the US government's commitment to South Africa against the desires and aspirations of the majority, both at home and abroad.



# The November stay-away and its lessons for the future

The successful two-day stay-away of Black workers in the Transvaal on November 5-6 is not simply the emergence of past forms of opposition. It marks a new phase in the history of protest against apartheid; the beginnings of united action among organised labour, student and community groups — with the unions taking a leading role.

Below we reproduce an edited version of an article which appeared in the May 1985 edition of the *South African Labour Bulletin*, a monthly review published in Johannesburg.

The article was produced through the work of the Labour Monitoring Group, set up specifically to monitor the November stay-away. Publication was delayed pending the outcome of charges laid against the stay-away committee.

## DOCUMENT

In comparison with past stay-aways this one was the largest. Precise calculations are extremely difficult. Adopting the figure of an average 60% stay-away in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) area (this being the consensus figure of employers and the media) then anything up to 800,000 and certainly not less than 300,000 participated. (1) The numbers involved are considerably more when one included the approximately 400,000 students who stayed away from school.

The significance of this stay-away in comparison with the student-led stay-aways of 1976 was the active involvement and leading role of organised labour. Most unions over the last ten years have been preoccupied with building organisation on the shop floor and have eschewed overt involvement in issues beyond the factory. It is a measure of the extent of the crisis in the townships that these unions responded so rapidly to the student call for support.

Since September three localised stay-aways had already taken place in Tembisa (the Simba Quix boycott); in the Vaal and in Kwa Thema Springs. (2) As a result of these actions the beginnings of a working relationship between community, student organisations and the trade unions was formed.

The November stay-away was also the culmination of three different but inextricably linked processes: in the townships, the factories, and the education system.

### — The crisis in township government

The present township crisis is caused by a popular reaction to the bankruptcy of the government's urban policy. After the November 1976 student-led township revolt that left the ineffectual Urban Bantu Councils in ruins, the state established the Community Councils with slightly wider decision-making powers. As part of its constitutional reform

package the Botha government sought to give greater autonomy to Black local authorities as a prelude to drawing them into a new regionalised "multi-racial", second tier level of government. This was the aim of the Black Local Authorities Act (Act 102 of 1982) which came into operation in August 1983. The elections for the new town councils were held in November with only a 15-25% poll. (3) Less than a year later, they were to become the target of mass resistance that has reached levels unprecedented in South Africa's history.

The Black Local Authorities Act was more the product of a constitutional conjuring act than of a real understanding of the material needs of the townships. Firstly, the town councils were given a limited autonomy but no viable fiscal base. The stated objective is that they should be self-financing and the government has drastically reduced its contributions to town council budgets. The townships, however, are little more than dormitory towns that have no taxable industrial enterprises. Furthermore, the predominantly working class residents, many of whom are unemployed, do not earn enough to provide a viable tax base. Consequently most of the councils are in debt. The Soweto Council, for example, is budgeting for a R30 million deficit in 1985, which it hopes to reduce by R10 million by increasing rents and service charges, in some cases by 100%. The proposed Vaal rent increases were in response to similar fiscal difficulties.

Secondly, whereas the state insisted that the town councils were adequate, democratically elected, representative structures, they were not linked up to central state representation, and hence were no substitute for full political rights. This lack of legitimacy was reflected in the low polls at the elections, the criticism of the system from councillors themselves, and eventually in the direct attacks on their property

and personnel that was to be a central feature of the recent unrest. A large number of councillors have now resigned, some in protest over the unviability of these institutions, and others because the state could not guarantee protection of life and property. As one councillor expressed it:

'I am virtually in hibernation in the board offices since my home was burnt down. If I just resign I will have two enemies — the board on the one side and the people on the other. I am pleading that I be accepted back into the community. (4)

Many of the councils were rendered inoperative and it was to address this crisis of legitimacy that a special Cabinet sub-committee was established.

The financial and political crisis of the town councils helps explain the present wave of resistance. It has also given rise to new oppositional organisations — the civic associations — that constitute an alternative source of legitimacy to the discredited creations of state policy. It is significant that employers' organisations are calling on the state to negotiate with these bodies over the real problems in the townships — instead of simply detaining their leaders. However, given that all the main civic associations and community organisations in the Transvaal are affiliated to the UDF, no resolution of the township crisis is possible which does not address the fundamentals of the apartheid state. Nor has the extensive use of military force, which has only raised the level of violence, proved successful in undermining the resilience and new-found power of the civic organisations. It was this failure to negotiate, together with the limitations of state repression, that resulted in the stay-away which was in effect a bid decisively to alter the balance of forces in the townships.

### — Trade union organisation and worker militancy

Recent years have witnessed a phenomenal increase in trade union membership amongst Black workers. (see Table 1). It was this growth in trade union organisation which made possible the successful November stay-away. What is particularly striking is the continuing growth since 1980, despite the fact of recession and heavy retrenchments. (5)

1. The conservative figure of 300,000 is obtained by multiplying the total number of Blacks employed in private industry in the PWV area (374,313) by 60% and then making allowance for retail and services. The figure of 800,000 is obtained by multiplying by 60% the total number of Blacks in paid employment in the PWV area (1,485,000) minus the number of mineworkers (150,000).

2. A boycott of Simba Quix products (mainly chips and crisps) was organised by workers dismissed by the company. The protest in the Vaal township was against high rents and brought together trade unions and community organisations. The third stay-away took place over a month later in Kwa Thema Springs and ended in a victory.

3. See 'South African Review' Vol II, Raven Press 1984.

4. 'Star' November 21, 1984.

5. 'South African Labour Bulletin' 10.1 August-September 1984.

Nor has recession and the threat of unemployment dampened the militancy of these newly-organised workers — as shown by the stay-away itself. If one looks purely at work-related stoppages, the number of strikes which took place in the first 10 months of 1984, is 14% higher than for the same period the previous year: 309 as compared with 270 strikes in 1983. (6) However the number of workers involved has doubled from 53,998 to 119,029. These global figures obviously mask important sectoral and regional variations and further research might indicate a shift towards more defensive actions. Even so the major employers' organisations have been alarmed by the rise in the strike rate. One personnel manager, in a curiously prophetic vein, stated in September: 'We will be lucky if by the end of the year we only have a labour relations problem.'

(7) This, together with the pressures of recession may explain the increasing use of mass dismissals during 1984 by employers in response to plant-based strikes. But to reiterate, these tactics and the threat of dismissal have not prevented continued trade union militancy.

#### Qualitative changes in the labour movement

There have been a number of qualitative changes within the South African labour movement in the recent past. At a "macro" level, the successful moves towards unity seem likely to result in the establishment of a new trade union federation in 1985. This federation will be the most representative working class body to have been formed in South Africa's history.

At shop floor level, the new unions are characterised by a high degree of worker control through mass participation, strict accountability, and the need for leaders to obtain mandates from rank and file members. These developments have been accompanied by the establishment of an effective shop steward system. So far these new unions have successfully resisted attempts to co-opt them through the industrial conciliation bureaucracy. Where unions have taken up places on industrial councils, it has been on the basis of continued worker control over representatives, and the freedom to pursue their interests at local level — as in the case of MAWU [Metal and Allied Workers of South Africa] at Highveld Steel. (8) Some unions, after considerable debate, have sought to turn certain aspects of the post-Wiehahn labour dispensation to their own advantage: registration, participation in industrial councils (9), recognition and stop orders, and the Industrial Court, which is empowered to rule on unfair labour practices. Of late the Industrial Court's rulings have been much less favourable to the unions, and there are signs that the honeymoon period is now over.

TABLE 1

### TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP 1969-83

	Registered Unions			Total	Unregistered Unions	
	African	Coloured/ Asian	White		(African mostly)	Grand Total
1969	—	182	405	587	16	603
1980	57	304	447	808	166	975
1983	469	330	474	1274	272	1546

Source: SALDRU, *Directory of South African Trade Unions*

Beyond the basic struggle for recognition and decent wages, the emerging unions have challenged management on a number of issues: arbitrary dismissals, retrenchments, health and safety, and the very organisation and running of the production process. (10) In this way the frontiers of management control have been rolled back. There have been a number of responses to this. The state has sought to depoliticise at least one potential area of conflict — health and safety — through its Machinery and Occupational Safety Act. (11) Employers have sought to reassert areas of "management prerogative" as part of a continuing ideological battle to sell the free enterprise system to Black workers (12) and at a practical level, in their conduct of shop floor relations. (13)

With growing politicisation in the townships particularly since the formation of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Forum Committee (NFC) in 1983 (14), unions have been under pressure to take up political positions. There have been a number of different responses: the development of political/community unionism, the growth of black consciousness unions, whilst CUSA (15) has dealt with the issue by affiliating to both UDF and NFC.

In the recent past trade unions have taken protest action, such as the half-hour strike involving 100,000 workers after the death of Neil Aggett in police detention in February 1982. Now, ironically, the very process of reform by the state has obliged unions to adopt a direct political stance. Thus FOSATU's active support for the boycott of the elections earlier this year was the result of pressure from its Indian and Coloured

members. The point must also be emphasised that those trade unions which had followed a "survivalist" policy of concentrating on factory issues were under intense pressure to abandon this approach.

FOSATU's approach, spelt out by general secretary Joe Foster, was critical of non-worker controlled political action labelling it as "populist". (16) However, despite extensive discussions at leadership and shop steward level this highly significant attempt to define a distinct working class politics was not sufficiently followed through — creating a political vacuum. With growing polarisation in the townships, unions have been under pressure to give a political direction to their members. The split inside MAWU in mid-1984 brought these tensions to the fore, albeit in a confused way. (17) Unable to resist this pressure, intensified in the Transvaal with the entry of the Defence Force into the townships, these unions were catapulted into a central role in the stay-away. Thus when these trade unions were finally to move beyond the factory floor it was to be on terrain not fundamentally different from that criticised by Foster as non-worker controlled. However, the demand for action was seen to come from working class communities. Because these unions were now strongly established, they felt able to give support and direction to the action proposed. The question remains as to whether Foster's original criticisms of this kind of action have been answered.

— COSAS and the crisis in education

The Congress of South African Students (COSAS) was established in 1979 to represent the interests of Black school students on a national basis. Its principal aims include alerting

6. See 'Star' November 6, 1984.

7. See 'Sunday Tribune', September 9, 1984.

8. See 'Work in Progress', No 34, 1984.

9. 'South African Labour Bulletin' 8.5, April 1983.

10. See E. Webster, 'A new frontier of control? Changing forms of job protection in South African industrial relations', Second Carnegie commission, paper no 3, Cape Town, 1984.

11. See 'South African Labour Bulletin' 9.7 June 1984.

12. See Paul Johnson in 'Financial Mail', November 23, 1984.

13. See 'South African Labour Bulletin', 10.2 October-November 1984 for an unsuccessful example of this at Simba Quix.

14. See 'International Viewpoint' No 77, June 3, 1985.

15. The Council of Unions in South Africa was formed in September 1980. For more information on this and FOSATU, see 'IV' No 8, 7 June 1982.

16. See 'South African Labour Bulletin' 7.8 July 1982.

17. Ibid 10.1 August-September 1984.



Blacks demonstrating in Southern Africa (DR)

students and the wider community to the repressive nature of schooling in South Africa, and to participate in drawing up an educational charter for a future non-racial democratic education system. Although rooted in the educational sphere, COSAS views the struggle in the schools as part of a much larger struggle against oppression and exploitation, and is an active affiliate of the UDF. Furthermore, COSAS has promoted the establishment of youth organisations to serve the interests of young workers and unemployed.

Since the Soweto uprising of 1976, Black educational institutions have become sites of struggle as increasingly politicised students challenge the state's authority and contest discriminatory education. By October this year, some 200,000 students, primarily in the PWV region, were boycotting classes and many of them had been out for most of the year. That student struggle goes beyond the narrowly educational sphere was demonstrated again recently by student opposition to the Coloured and Indian elections, and by the role students have played in the turbulent protests which erupted in the Vaal.

Throughout the year, COSAS took the fight to the Department of Education and Training via a series of concrete demands which include the establishment of democratically elected SRCs [Student Representative Councils]; abolition of the age limit; (18) abolition of corporal punishment; and an end to sexual abuse of female students by male teachers.

The initiative towards what became the November stay-away came from the students. There was a slowing down in the momentum of student protest by the beginning of October due to three main reasons: first, the failure of the state to respond adequately to students' demands; second, students as a whole and particularly COSAS activists were subject to detention — 556 in all in 1984 — and in some cases have been killed (19) — leading to a weakening of organisation; thirdly, end of year examinations were approaching and school principals and particularly the town councillors were attempting to mount a campaign to entice students back to school. Large numbers of boycotting students would return to school unless the terrain of struggle could be shifted and the support of broader social forces enlisted.

Consequently, a call was made by the students for parent solidarity, and meetings were arranged in a number of townships with a view to establishing local parent-student committees. At the same time, an approach for assistance was made to other organisations within the UDF and a meeting was arranged for October 10. At this meeting it was argued that the student struggle would be advanced only if the trade union movement as a whole was willing to act in solidarity. Accordingly, COSAS at a later date invited the trade unions to join them and community organisations in the stay-away.

In the meantime a highly significant meeting attended by 4,000 people was

taking place in Kwa Thema on October 14. This led to the establishment of a Kwa Thema parent-student committee consisting of ten students and ten parents. Many of the parents were active trade unionists and included MAWU and UMMAWSA shop stewards, as well as Chris Dlamini, president of FOSATU. This committee was mandated to send telexes to the minister of Cooperation and Development and Education, Viljoen, as well as to the minister of law and order, LeGrange, listing the following student demands: scrapping of age limit regulations; election of democratic SRCs; withdrawal of white teachers (usually members of the Defence Force); removal of security forces from the townships; release of all detained students; the resignation of all community councillors; and calling on students to boycott school until an appropriate response was received from the department of education and training. If these demands were refused by the ministers concerned, then parents would take action in solidarity with students. (20)

No response was forthcoming and at a lengthy follow-up meeting the

18. This is a demand for an end to the upper age limits which exist at each level in the education system, often preventing students from resitting the year or grade. This system discriminates against Black students.

19. For example Benjamin Khumalo, Soweto branch secretary of COSAS, see 'SASPU Focus' 3.2 November 1984. All figures on deaths and detentions supplied by SAIRR [South African Institute of Race Relations].

20. 'Sowetan' October 19, 1984.

next Saturday, which was punctuated by shouts of *Azikwelwa* ('we shall not ride' — the traditional boycott slogan), it was decided to call a local stay-away for Monday, October 22, and if this failed to produce the necessary response, a further stay-away would occur on October 29.

The stay-away on October 22 was highly successful due to strong organisation and clear purpose. Press reports indicate that over 80% of workers stayed home. The stay-away involved violent clashes between youths, who set up barricades in the streets, and the police. The setting up of barricades, however, was a tactic that was not approved by the student-parent committee. It was the success of this stay-away which, according to Chris Dlamini, guaranteed support for the later call for a Transvaal regional stay-away in November.

The momentum built up in the Kwa Thema stay-away prepared the way for a larger regional action. On October 27, a broadly based and very important meeting took place in Johannesburg in response to the original COSAS appeal for worker support. The meeting was attended by 37 organisations, including representatives of FOSATU and CUSA (21) unions, together with other unions and representatives of youth congresses, community organisations, and the RMC. COSAS called on unions to show solidarity with the specific student demands articulated earlier.

All organisations came prepared to take concrete action. In the case of FOSATU representatives, the process by which they reached this decision is illuminating. As mentioned above FOSATU officials were already involved in the Kwa Thema campaign, and there is no question that there was a groundswell of shop floor support for the students' demands — due in part to student solidarity with unions during the Simba Quix boycott.

### FOSATU takes the initiative

In terms of its deliberations, the Central Committee of FOSATU met on 19-21 October. Following reports from Transvaal locals on the crisis in the townships, all Transvaal representatives on the Committee, irrespective of political affiliation, felt some action was necessary. A sub-committee, made up of Transvaal members of the Central Committee, was established and given wide powers to both monitor the situation and to take appropriate action where necessary. Chris Dlamini was chair of the committee, and Bangi Solo [branch secretary of FOSATU-affiliated National Union of Textile Workers], the information officer. Both were detained after the stay-away. Meetings were held with students and student-parent committees. Thus FOSATU representatives arrived at the October 27 meeting with concrete



Chris Dlamini, president of FOSATU (DR)

proposals and empowered to take action. As far as can be ascertained, a debate over the length of the stay-away resulted in a compromise on two days. It was also agreed that the stay-away be broadened to encompass the demands of trade unions and community organisations. The representatives of the 37 organisations present formed a general committee (the Transvaal Regional Stay-away Committee as it was to be dubbed by the press), and a four-member coordinating group was elected to handle practical preparations. This core coordinating committee consisted of Moses Mayekiso (of FOSATU and MAWU), Themba Nontlane (of MAGWUSA — Municipal and General Workers Union), Oupa Monareng (of SOYCO — Soweto Youth Council and RMC — Release Mandela Committee), and Thamic Mali (of RMC) — ie two union organisers, one unemployed worker from SOYCO and one ex-detainee out on bail. UDF was not formally represented because it did not initiate the stay-away itself, and since some organisations involved were not affiliates. Also since UDF affiliates were present there was no need for the UDF to be formally represented. It was also felt that it was not possible for the UDF to assume leadership because the struggle was seen as specific to the working class African townships of the Transvaal.

Two days after the meeting of October 27, FOSATU convened a meeting of all the Transvaal unions to coordinate action for the stay-away. This was followed by a series of meetings of unions, locals, and shop stewards to report back to members on the proposed demonstration. The decisions taken by the sub-committee were ratified by the full Central Committee when it met after the stay-away on November 10. (22)

The initial pamphlet calling for a stay-away for November 5 and 6 issued the following demands: democratically elected SRCs; the abolition of any age limit on secondary education; the abolition of corporal punishment; an end to sexual harassment in schools; the withdrawal of security forces from the townships; the release of all detainees; no increase in rents, bus fares or service

charges; reinstatement of workers dismissed by Simba Quix. The last demand, a workplace demand, shows the continuity with previous campaigns. In the event, the Simba workers achieved their goal before the stay-away began.

The object of the stay-away was to articulate student, worker, and civic grievances, and to put pressure on the state and to redress these. The entire community faced severe problems during the current recession. Also it was felt that the education issue could not be divorced from workers' problems — they could not be comfortable at work when their children were dying in the streets; and whilst jobless parents were unable to afford an education for their children. On the question of reaching non-unionised workers on the shop floor, each organisation was given specific tasks in this regard. In particular, hostel dwellers who in the past had been ignored, were a main target. In contrast to 1976 many hostel dwellers, particularly on the East Rand, were now unionised. In addition, 400,000 pamphlets were printed for distribution. However, there was little activity on the West Rand and in rural areas. Finally, COSAS specifically addressed its students constituency to ensure the stay-away in the schools whilst the unions undertook to ensure the stay-away from work.

### Monitoring the stay-away

In our attempts to monitor the stay-away we sought to investigate the relationship of trade union organisation to the size of the stay-away. Thus our sample of factories consisted exclusively of establishments organised by trade unions. Using the SALDRU Directory of Trade Unions as our data base, we phoned every firm in the PWV area which had a recognition agreement with an independent union. We spoke to 71 of these, with only six refusing to talk to us. Our findings were:

- Unionised factories gave overwhelming support to the stay-away. 70% of our sample had a stay-away rate of over 80%.
- These unionised factories were concentrated on the East Rand and the Vaal — the areas where the stay-away rates (as also indicated by management bodies) were highest.
- In Pretoria, commuters from neighbouring homelands tended to come into work and a similar thing happened in Brits with location dwellers supporting the stay-away and commuters working normally.
- There was no weakening of the stay-away on day two as had been anticipated by some observers: 56% of establishments maintained the same level of stay-away for two days, 20% weakened, and 24% actually intensified on day

21. See 'IV' No 8, June 7, 1982.  
22. Details from official FOSATU press statements and statements from Alec Erwin, acting general secretary of FOSATU at the time.

two. In the past extended stay-aways have failed, such as the call for a five-day stay-away in November 1976 which simply petered out.

— All sectors where unions were present were equally affected. Mining was an exception where lack of participation was probably due to their isolation from the townships and the aftermath of their own recent strike. (Table II)

— There seems to have been no significant difference in the participation of migrants and township dwellers. In nine of the 71 establishments surveyed migrants were a significant proportion of the workforce. In five of these there was a 90% plus participation in the stay-away. Secondary evidence confirmed these findings.

— None of the employers interviewed envisaged disciplinary action. The most common response was to deduct wages for the two days absence. Some employers treated it as paid leave; others, more sympathetic, accepted employees accounts of "intimidation" and paid wages in full. There is later evidence of dismissals in smaller and unorganised factories.

— Many employers commented that Coloured and Asian staff worked normally.

According to press reports some 400,000 students observed the stay-away. In the Transvaal some 300 schools were completely closed. The Minister of Law and Order put the number of boycotting students at 396,000.

In terms of regions the overwhelming majority of schools in the Vaal Triangle, East Rand and Atteridgeville were deserted. The Department of Education and Training claimed that in Soweto attendance ranged from 30% to 90%. However, our investigation indicates a much lower attendance level — although most matriculation students did write their exams on November 6 and 7.

In addition, students at the University of the North observed the boycott.

State response to the stay-away needs to be assessed from several perspectives. During the stay-away itself response was relatively restrained: no serious effort was made to actually force strikers back to work. It was only after the conclusion of the stay-away that the state moved sharply towards a counter-attack that began with the Sasol dismissals (23) and brought on a wave of detentions apparently linked to a conspiracy view of events. The state's delayed response makes sense when the broader context of the stay-away is considered.

Economic grievances and student unrest came together during the winter of 1984 in Transvaal and Orange Free State townships in a mounting wave of attacks on state authority and symbols of South African capitalism (for example, with the destruction of banks and building societies).

The stay-away was marked by township revolts in which at least 23 died, (24) with Tembisa being the most

TABLE II  
STAY-AWAY PARTICIPATION RATES BY SECTOR

% Participation	Metal	Chemical	Food	Auto, Build, & Transport	Retail	All Sectors
90-100	50% (12)	67% (8)	70% (14)	43% (3)	63% (5)	59% (42)
80-89	4% (1)	17% (2)	—	29% (2)	37% (3)	11% (8)
70-79	4% (1)	8% (1)	—	—	—	3% (2)
60-69	4% (1)	8% (1)	5% (1)	14% (1)	—	6% (4)
50-59	8% (2)	—	—	14% (1)	—	4% (3)
less than 50	26% (7)	—	25% (5)	—	—	17% (12)
Total no establishments	34% (24)	17% (12)	28% (20)	10% (7)	11% (8)	100% (71)

seriously affected community. The South African Defence Force was put at its disposal. Already by October, The Minister of Law and Order, LeGrange, was justifying the use of the army in this way in a speech to the Transvaal Annual Conference of the National Party at Alberton. The state is clearly anxious about the possibility that township youths may try to develop no-go areas where police and army can appear only in force. Thus however menacing the withdrawal of labour may have seemed at the time to officials, the security forces were too thinly spread to make possible a physical suppression of the stay-away. Direct interference was largely limited to pamphlets mainly aimed at Soweto which called upon workers to unite against the strike. No sign was found of an effective attempt, on the lines of 1976, to create an anti-strike force among migrant workers.

### The employers' reactions

The first sign of a counter-blow by the state came in the form of mass dismissals of some 5-6,000 production workers at the Sasol two and three plants in Secunda, virtually the entire African workforce. Although management insisted that it took this action as a private sector employer, Sasol is a parastatal of great strategic significance and, one might speculate, requiring state consultation and assistance to bridge over the dismissal of such a huge labour force. The contrast to the 'no work no pay' stance of most large private sector employers was very marked. Police with dogs and hippos were quick to move

in and patrol the streets of the Secunda township, eMbalenhle, to assure the compliant removal of workers from hostels to the various bantustans. This was followed by a series of arrests and detentions, some thirty, in connection with the stay-away, including trade unionists and student leaders.

One can only speculate as to the purpose of the detentions. For the minister of Manpower, Pietie du Plessis, the stay-away can apparently be explained only in terms of sinister intimidatory forces using this 'lowest, most undemocratic and unchristian tactic'. While business feared that the state was putting the post-Wiehahn labour dispensation at risk by its high-handed actions and conspiracy theory, the government apparently was more concerned about the near disintegration of its political reform strategies. The Black local government structures for many parts of the Rand are in ruins, under threat, or entirely discredited; no alternative to force, as witness the massive house to house raids in Sebokeng and Tembisa, appears to exist for regaining control of the townships. The state's immediate response was to wave the big stick for display, partly to warn unions and partly to reassure a white electorate which is feeling the pinch of recession, inclined to blame concessions to the Blacks as the cause of their problems, and tempted increasingly, especially in less affluent Rand constituencies, to opt for the anti-reform Conservative Party. Van Zyl Slabbert of the PFP certainly saw the detentions as

23. A majority of the Sasol workers were subsequently reinstated. See 'IV' No 76, May 20, 1985.

24. Figures supplied by SAIRR.

an attempt to win support in the Primrose by-election. (25) However, press reports indicate certain reservations over this hardline policy on the part of senior government officials and some cabinet ministers. (26)

The first response of employer organisations was to play down the stay-away and so diffuse its effects:

'Not to over-react, not to vent a white back-lash which in turn causes a Black backlash and so fuels an ever-increasing cycle of action and reaction, must be the watchword'. (27)

Most employers were taken by surprise by the extent of the stay-away, and were unsympathetic to what they saw as a political strike unrelated to the workplace. As Leon Bartel, President of the Afrikaanse Handelsinstituut, expressed it:

'The responsible employer should seek to divorce politics from labour relations. The stay-away is clearly a political matter and the employers should make it clear that political demonstrations will not be countenanced.' (28)

### The government's reaction

Any future stay-aways are likely to be met by a harsher management response. Already some employers are calling for a trimming down of the workforce, and could well use stay-aways as a pretext for retrenchments. 'Enlightened' employers, however, would balk at any direct attack on trade unions, and are keen to maintain the fragile relations established with unions in the post-Wiehahn period.

This was clearly demonstrated when the three major employer associations, ASSOCOM, AHI, and the FCI sent a joint telex to the minister of Law and Order after the detention of CUSA leader, Piroshaw Camay, warning that the wave of detentions were exacerbating a very delicate labour situation. LeGrange responded aggressively, questioning their support among employers.

These different responses to the stay-away reflect different experiences and pressures. Employers readily saw in the stay-away a threat to industrial relations in the workplace, and quickly commenced talks with FOSATU and CUSA. In particular, employers were worried about the effects of further stay-aways. What seems to have triggered the joint statement to the minister was the detention of Camay. This was confirmed by Dr Johan van Zyl of the FCI, and Tony Bloom of the Premier Group, who in separate interviews in the *Sunday Express* stated that they thought they were making 'good progress' in their negotiations with Camay when he was suddenly detained. (29) A further pressure on employers was the need to 'reconfirm their credibility' with FOSATU and CUSA by publicly declaring their opposition to the detentions. (30) The general crisis is



Black trade-unionists in conference (DR)

forcing employers, like labour to adopt a higher political profile. As Ackerman of Pick and Pay — arguing for greater political involvement by employers — expressed it:

'The South African businessman (*sic*) has a crucial role to play in influencing internal change' (31)

The state, on the other hand, saw the stay-away as the work of a small group of agitators bent on using the trade unions for political ends. A number of reporters were subpoenaed as part of an investigation by the state for a possible offence under the Internal Security Act on the part of the stay-away organisers. Following massive international condemnation, those detained in connection with the stay-away were released. (32)

Employers feared that the state's initial reaction would curtail even the current limited reform programme — and the working relationship established with the state since 1979 to implement the reforms. Beyond this, capital's response to the stay-away and the general crisis includes a call for further and accelerated structural reform — particularly over influx control — in order to head off any challenge to the social system itself. The subsequent conference convened by the United States/South Africa Leadership Exchange Programme, which brought together representatives of capital and potentially sympathetic Black leaders, called for: co-operative schemes in the workplace;

consultation and community involvement; recognition from government of socially responsible investment as tax deductible; a programme of job creation and the development of skills; investment of pension funds in Black urban areas; improved communication between the races. (33)

Beyond immediate reforms the two key financial journals responded to the stay-away by suggesting a dialogue with the ANC. Both drew on Tony Bloom's timely speech to the Wits Business School:

'It is difficult to establish just how great the support for the ANC is among Blacks in South Africa, but I venture to suggest that it is very substantial. There is an inherent inevitability about talking to the ANC. It is not a question of if, but rather when?' (34)

Capital's reform proposals still stop short of one-person-one-vote — as Ackerman made clear. (35) However in the long-term, sections of capital may even be pushed to contemplate non-racial democracy, if the free enterprise system itself is threatened by the continuing crisis.

To conclude, therefore: — The stay-aways crystallised the central contradiction of state policy — the 'liberalisation' of the industrial relations system without meaningful political and social change. Hitherto the major trade unions have focussed on factory floor issues avoiding involvement in more overtly political issues. The state's failure to adequately respond to the educational demands of the students and the growing crisis in the townships have propelled the trade unions beyond the factory floor.

In spite of recession workers were willing to risk their jobs by taking part in the stay-away — even when faced by management threats, as at Sasol. The state's response — the detentions and the sackings at Sasol — forced the trade unions to take further action, such as the call for a "Black Christmas" [a boycott of Christmas products] — leading to a further politicisation. According to a recent FOSATU statement: 'the long-term implications of the stay-away could include more involvement of unions in political affairs.'

25. See 'Rand Daily Mail' November 17, 1984.

26. See 'Sunday Express', November 18, 1984.

27. See 'Finance Week' 15-21 November 1984.

28. *Ibid.*

29. See 'Sunday Express' November 18, 1984.

30. See 'Rand Daily Mail' 17 November 1984.

31. See 'Rand Daily Mail' 23 November, 1984.

32. The four members of the co-ordinating committee were allowed out on bail pending charges under the Internal Security Act; three went into hiding and charges were finally dropped against the remaining member, Moses Mayekiso, in April 1985.

33. See 'Star' November 21, 1984.

34. See 'Finance Week' 15-21 November, 1984 and 'Financial Mail' 15-19 November 1984.

35. See 'Rand Daily Mail' November 23, 1984.

The stay-away brought together the major opposition forces to apartheid in the Transvaal; groups which had not previously worked together. They share certain distinctive features: they are mass based organisations drawing predominantly from the working class: unions, student organisations — overwhelmingly from the children of workers, and youth organisations representing young workers and unemployed. In the end the stay-away was successful because it rested upon democratic grassroots support and organisation. It was because of the trade unions' deep roots in working class communities that they responded so rapidly to the requests of the students, and it was their highly organised and democratic structures which made it possible to mobilise at such short-notice for the stay-away. One important implication of these new forms of trade union organisation is that any policy of repression, of attempting to "behead" these organisations by detaining leaders, is much less likely to be successful.

### A new and stronger opposition

This new alignment has involved a further polarisation of extra-parliamentary oppositional politics. Buthelezi's [leader of Kwazulu and Inkatha party] vocal opposition to the stay-away call distances him even further from the mainstream of opposition in South Africa. His interference in the Sasol dispute and his advice to workers to go back on management's terms will not endear him to the trade unions. (36) The high level of involvement of contract workers in the stay-away suggests a critical weakening of Inkatha influence amongst organised workers on the Rand. Forced to choose between loyalty to Inkatha and to their unions many supported the stay-away. Indeed it appears that migrants were systematically mobilised in support of the stay-away by student and community organisations and the trade unions. The hostel dwellers were to play no small part in advocating the stay-away. Nevertheless Inkatha's conservative influence remains strong particularly in Natal — which underlines the regionally specific nature of the stay-away. This also has important implications for those unions attempting to build up nation-wide organisation. There is already evidence of an attempt on the part of Buthelezi to reestablish his presence on the Reef in alliance with other conservative township groups — such as the Sofasonke Party. (37)

— Where strong trade union organisation and community student organisation coincided the stay-away was most successful. It may be that the relatively weaker response in Soweto reflects the fact that there is less correspondence between working class and community organisation and the class profile of the area is more varied. Similarly the non-participation

of commuters in Brits and Pretoria indicates the absence of community organisation amongst commuters. Bearing in mind current decentralisation strategies this indicates a critical area for organisation in the future.

Where the stay-away was most intense — the Vaal, East Rand and Atteridgeville — school attendance was also negligible and student organisation was strong. As Dlamini put it, workers readily identified the demands of the students for democratic SRCs with their own struggles for independent

### The stay-away still an effective weapon

representation in the factories.

— In previous stay-aways a central tactic of the authorities has been to try and undermine the action by forcing workers out of their homes and back to work. That this did not happen on this occasion probably reflects two important developments: the scale and geographical spread of the action and the heightened forms of physical resistance adopted in the townships — barricades, attacks on state institutions, attacks on councillors and others who are viewed as collaborators. The security forces were thus thinly spread and had to concentrate their resources on sealing off the most affected areas in order to contain the situation.

— Sasol's headline approach revealed the vulnerability of workers to reprisals after a stay-away. Even so, organised workers were in many cases able to secure undertakings in advance from employers that there would be no dismissals. It is perhaps necessary to stress the limitations of stay-aways; workers do not have the large resources to sustain a long general strike. Moreover an action which is township-based can be easily sealed off by the security forces. By staying at home the workers surrender the initiative and are cut off from fellow workers in other townships.

— One feature of the stay-away was the absence from the scene of the Black consciousness organisations. Whilst they did not oppose the stay-away, they offered no organisational support. A spokesperson from Azapo criticised aspects of the stay-away: 'Its lack of political content — it was ridiculous for students to approach workers; it would be more correct the other way around. Its positive aspect was to force the unions into political activity.' It was also felt by Azapo that little consideration was given to the possibility of reprisals by the state. Also of concern to this critic was what appeared to be an "Africanisation" of the protest. While this may be one view, in fact this point implicitly underlines the working class nature of the stay-away — since the composition of the working class in the Transvaal is overwhelmingly African. This was also reflected in the dominance of the African affiliates of

the UDF during the stay-away.

— The decision to resort to stay-aways reflects the absence of political rights for Blacks — the vote, freedom of speech and association. So long as Blacks are refused access to political power, the stay-away will re-emerge as a weapon. However given the recession, the degree of organisation and the limitations of the tactic, the major unions have stated clearly that there will be no more stay-aways in the immediate future.

Stay-aways remain essentially non-violent demonstrations of power — and not an organised challenge to the state. (The large number of deaths during the stay-away — 23 in all — were not the result of the tactic itself, but were part of the ongoing township unrest which has claimed 161 lives since January and resulted in over 1,000 detentions). (38) In the past the state has responded to such demonstrations of power in a repressive manner with the result that legitimate protest has been forced underground or into exile. A similar response in the present situation would further deepen the internal crisis — and has already led to international condemnation. The demonstrations outside the South African Embassy and Consulates in the USA have achieved considerable publicity. More important was the response of the international trade union movement and particularly the International Metal Workers Federation — which earlier in 1984 pledged support to the struggle of Black workers for trade union and political rights. (39)

A number of specific questions are raised by this particular stay-away. Did the speed with which the decision was taken curtail normal democratic procedures? Perhaps this is inevitable in a crisis situation — and the success of the stay-away may actually be a measure of the harmony and common purpose of union leadership and rank-and-file. Were unions drawn into an essentially "populist" protest that was not of their making and not in their interest? Did they have a choice — given the pressures from the community? Was the state's response underestimated — and will it have its intended effect of again confining the unions to the factory floor? How successful can co-optive strategies be, and how significant is the difference in response between capital and the state? Can capital persuade the state to take more meaningful risks to bring about reform — or are government options constrained by the need to maintain wider political support amongst whites? The stay-away represents a new alignment of forces against apartheid. The question is, if it endures, what form will it take: a return to the tactics of the 1950s or the extension of working-class politics? ■

36. 'Rand Daily Mail' November 27, 1984.

37. 'Rand Daily Mail' November 26, 1984.

38. Figures supplied by SAIRR

39. See 'South African Labour Bulletin' 9.6, May 1984.

# National liberation strategy in the Irish elections

The following interview was given to Gerry Foley in Belfast just before the May 15 local elections in Northern Ireland by John McAnulty, a leader of People's Democracy (PD), Irish section of the Fourth International and a member of the Belfast City Council at the time. It deals with the questions of strategy posed by the series of local elections that ended with the Southern Irish local elections on June 20. On the results of the PD campaign in the South, see back page.

*Question. The mass movement in support of the Republican prisoners in the H-Blocks in 1980 and 1981 shook up the pattern of Irish politics quite violently. Here in the North, it turned the situation upside down, with the revolutionary nationalists winning over 40% of the vote of the oppressed population. In 1980, one of the first indications of the possibilities were the local elections, in which you, along with another PD candidate, Fergus O'Hare defeated the politicians who had tried to justify their opposition to the struggle of the oppressed population in the name of socialism and class unity. Now new local elections are coming up, both in the North and the South, only about a month apart. How much progress has been made in the past five years toward building a mass alternative for the exploited and oppressed, both North and South?*

*Answer.* Well, we have reached a stage where the question of where we go from here is more and more acutely posed. We need a whole new strategy for the national movement. We have got a massive Sinn Fein vote in the North. In the South, it's much smaller but growing. We have very widespread support for republicanism and for national independence. And now in the North in particular, we are getting the response from the imperialists and their allies. We have new laws aimed at the rights of political organizations, laws that could make elections a farce by disenfranchising up to about a third of the electorate. (1)

At the same time, Sinn Fein have set themselves rather limited goals in these local elections, aiming essentially to consolidate their support. There has also been some internal debate about the military struggle. That shows there is a great deal of searching to be done in order to meet the challenge of all these attacks, which are coming against a background of growing crisis. The anti-imperialist movement has to organise and lead a fight back.

*Q. So, what proposals about strategy*

*are you trying to put forward in these elections?*

*A.* We started approaching this question quite a while ago. In fact, what we are proposing is an extension of the fight we have been waging in defense of democratic rights. We fought a long campaign against attempts to exclude ourselves and Sinn Fein from the Council. Outside the council, we tried to organize a united campaign against these attacks on democratic rights, and we also held a series of discussions with other anti-imperialists about the whole question of strategy and a united fight back.

Unfortunately, things moved too quickly for us to have any chance to get a united-front structure in this election. The best that we were able to do was to reach a fraternal understanding with Sinn Fein, whereby they would call on their supporters to give us their transfers (2) where we are running. We will also call for transfers to them and a straight vote for Sinn Fein where we are not running.

*Q. Do you have any specific proposals for the Southern local elections?*

*A.* We would like to see a common slate of anti-imperialist candidates based on a platform of national unity, independence, and socialism. Unfortunately, we do not have the time now to make much progress on that either. So, our intervention there will be similar to what we are doing here. We'll stand a candidate or two of our own, and we'll work in Sinn Fein campaigns.

*Q. What are you looking forward to in the next parliamentary elections in the South, which aren't terribly far away now?*

*A.* I think that there are two key issues. One is the collapse of the Southern Labour Party, and the other is the New Ireland Forum. (3) I don't think that it is possible for Sinn Fein to go forward now and say that it represents the working class alternative. But it could be possible for Sinn Fein, People's Democracy, and working-class campaigns

to get together in a "Republican Congress" (4) or some structure such as that and put such a coalition forward as an immediate alternative in the struggle for the leadership of the Irish working class.

*Q. What does a "Republican congress structure" mean exactly?*

*A.* I think that it is still a bit too early to say. But one very interesting thing has happened recently. That is, John Mitchell, the general secretary of the retail clerks union IDATU [Irish Distributive and Administrative Trade Union] took the initiative in organizing the Trade Unions for Irish Unity and Independence. He's going to raise the question of independent working-class political representation. So, it is clear that a current exists that could play an important role in restructuring the working-class struggle. It is also clear that the left in Sinn Fein is taking a strong interest in this development.

*Q. But precisely what sort of unity are you looking for in the elections?*

*A.* It was the experience of the mass struggle in the H-Block campaign that gave impetus to the search for unity and attempts to offer an alternative in elections. What we need is a new round of mass struggle to consolidate and extend these changes. But the impulse for that is not very likely to come from the Republican leadership directly, because they have always taken a very pragmatic attitude to mass struggle.

We think that we can make progress toward anti-imperialist unity, including in the elections, by continuing propaganda on this question, and by taking advantage of the opportunities for discussions with Republicans that do exist, and by helping them to link up with specific working class struggles. We are building up a basis.

*Q. But how do you propose to focus this in the elections?*

*A.* I think that the issue may be an alternative to the New Ireland Forum. I think that we need at the very least a common program that links the economic exploitation of the workers with the political domination of the country by Britain, that takes all the economic

1. The new laws require iron-clad personnel identification of the sort that the poor, the young, and the oppressed often do not have.

2. Under the proportional representation systems, voters can cast preferences in order for more candidates than the number of seats to be filled, which are distributed as the candidates in higher order of preference are elected or eliminated.

3. A scheme for a negotiated settlement of the national question in Ireland promoted by the incumbent Dublin government.

4. An attempt to form a united front of the Republican movement and left and social organizations in the 1930s, still taken as a model for a united front of social action around the Republican movement.



arguments of the New Ireland Forum and turns them on their head, that says that the only way to a better life for Irish workers is the freedom of the country and control of the economy by the working people.

*Q. How do you see the link between the struggle against national oppression as it exists in the North and as it exists in the South?*

A. Just recently, The British authorities have announced that they won't be building a pipeline to bring gas from the South. The implication of that is that there isn't going to be any infrastructure, there isn't going to be any industry around local structures or linked to the South.

What we are going to see in the North will be the growth of a giant pool of unemployed that will establish us as a sort of a Hong Kong of Europe. That has big implications for workers both North and South, and also for the British working class. A lot of experimenting is going on now about how to resist this. And we have to intervene in these struggles.

There is a sort of scizzors crisis in the Irish workers movement. Political consciousness is higher among Northern nationalist workers with experience in the republican struggle. But it is in the North that the weight of the economic crisis has fallen most heavily. The social and economic weight of the Southern workers is much greater, but their political consciousness is not so developed. It is going to be quite a battle to bring these two things together. But I think direct personal intervention by Northern workers in the South will help, as it did during the H-Block campaign.

*Q. It is also true now that a significant proportion of workers in the South are nationalists from the North.*

A. Yes. And in a number of areas the Northerners have taken the lead because of their political consciousness and experience.

*Q. What about the attempts of John Mitchell's union to organize workers in the North?*

A. I think they can organize in the North, but I think it will be a rather slow process. But there is a more general contribution they can make. A lot of the campaigns that are going on cannot be won by traditional trade-union methods. One of the strengths of IDATU in the South is that they have been willing to turn to political groups for help and they have been willing to go to the community for support. That is a lesson that has yet to be applied in the North. It could have a dramatic effect here.

Take the strike just recently at the Royal Victoria Hospital, the biggest employer in West Belfast, the nationalist

area. The local supporters of the British Militant group are active in it. They are trying to use the traditional strike methods. But the struggle needs an enormous amount of community and political support, and it's the republicans and socialists who understand best how to accomplish that.

*Q. What about the organization of youth? You could see the beginnings of a youth movement in the H-Block struggle.*

A. The youth most active in the H-Block campaign joined Sinn Fein. But the traditional Republican youth organization, the Fianna, is an unpolitical form of organization. It was in fact largely disbanded during the H-Block campaign. Sinn Fein didn't create a separate youth movement. What the youth then did was throw themselves into the big electoral battles. But these were too widely spaced out, and a lot of them fell into inactivity.

The youth radicalization is still there but it is scattered. There are no structures for nationalist youth specifically. There is a big cultural movement around the Irish language, which some people are involved in. As far as I know it's only PD that is raising the question of an independent youth organization.

There is also a specific youth problem. There has been a sort of political collapse among the most demoralized youth that has led to a kind of nihilistic movement called "The Hoods." They go around robbing and terrorizing the nationalist neighborhoods.

*Q. That is precisely the thing that the rise of youth organization in the H-Block committees stopped. There have been stories that the Republicans are resorting to punishment shootings now to stop it.*

A. That's another debate and it shows the tensions in the Republican movement. Gerry Adams [the top leader of Sinn Fein] condemned punishment shootings and pledged that the movement would not use them. And then, right after that and on the eve of an election, a guy identified as a criminal element was shot dead. That provoked a furious response. People in the community actually organized hunger strikes outside the Sinn Fein offices. The whole thing cut across the valuable work that Sinn Fein were actually doing. In the Lenadoon area, they had set up a very significant committee. They were trying to do things to improve the area and at the same time to identify and oppose the criminal elements. When the IRA resorted to punishment shootings, ignoring the broad democratic committee that existed, it cut the ground out from under them.

This is a specific case of the general problem that Sinn Fein by itself can't

represent the whole movement. So, when they try to use the Republican structure against the Hoods, they fail because they don't have the political authority.

*Q. Do you see the Republican movement continuing to evolve toward mass revolutionary forms of organization?*

A. They have not yet resolved their main contradiction and as they try to use more political methods, they get caught tighter and tighter in it. One of the lessons the Republican movement took from the H-Block campaign was an understanding of the gains that could be made by participating in elections. But that had to be squared with their traditional militarist conception. Danny Morrison's formula of the armalite and the ballot box was an attempt to do that. What this seems to have meant originally was that election campaigns involved more people and that was good in itself, but it also meant more support for the military campaign and therefore more activity by the military wing.

In practice, it hasn't worked that way. The British and Southern governments reacted to the Sinn Fein election successes by stepping up their pressure and making their repression more selective. As they get a clearer intelligence picture of the military organization, they are able to hit it harder. It becomes more and more difficult to carry out an extended military campaign. That leads to all sorts of contradictions. It leads to discontent among the fighters, who feel that they aren't getting enough support. It also raises the question of what are you going to do with your mass support. You can't transform them all into soldiers.

It seems to me that what has been missing from Sinn Fein's concept is the understanding of mass struggle, the idea that once people vote for you, you can move on to encourage them to organize independently and make them a real force. That hasn't happened. That also involves being able to guide people politically without directly controlling them, and being able to find programmatic bases for unity broader than your own organization. The Republicans still seem far from that. It is impossible to say how quickly they will progress on this front.

The new left leadership is anxious to maintain the unity of the movement. And that is very responsible, because a lot of the differences that exist are the result of a lack of political development, which can be overcome by discussion. The problem is that this leads to a sort of consensus politics that makes it difficult to clarify lessons. Also, they and we, do not have unlimited time. So I expect that the political initiatives will continue to come outside the Republican movement, as they generally have in the past.



# Election defeat sharpens internal conflicts in Communist Party

The rebuff the Italian Communist Party (PCI) suffered in the May 12 elections has provoked very sharp internal debates. In a number of cities record attendance has been seen at activists' assemblies. For example, in Rome the first scheduled assembly had to be postponed until a larger hall could be found. The May 23-25 Central Committee plenum became an important sounding board for the criticisms and self-criticisms appearing at all levels.

Over the past thirty years — that is, since the denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union — the PCI has on several occasions experienced debates and differentiations over tactical and strategic questions. But rarely, if ever, have what the participants themselves call "diverse and clashing views" [Alessandro Natta, the party secretary] emerged so clearly, or have tactical and strategic options so explicitly been put in question. (1)

Livio MAITAN

At the center of all the speeches at the Central Committee (CC), reprinted at length in the party's daily *l'Unita*, were questions about the reasons for the electoral defeat. Almost all the speakers have to be given credit for not having looked for easy ways out and for having made an effort to develop analyses of the setback on various levels.

In the first place, several speakers pointed to what might be called a structural weakening that has weighed negatively on the workers movement in general and on the PCI particularly. For example, the former mayor of Turin, Novelli, stressed with justified anxiety "the profound malaise, characterized by a lack of confidence and hopelessness that has been provoked by the high rate of unemployment." He referred as well to "the sense of uncertainty, of instability, of fear on the part of those who have jobs today but no guarantee for the future" and have the feeling of belonging to "a species that is dying out."

Occhetto, a member of the National Secretariat, talked about "processes of disintegration in the old social milieu that are putting in question the old forms of class solidarity." Another speaker, Gerace, used still more drastic language: "The weakening and in some cases even the crumbling of our social bloc under the blows of the restructuration of production have led to a lack of confidence and abandonment of the struggle by some popular strata aligned with our policy."

Ingrao did not hesitate to say that "the main force in the vote was the capitalist reorganization." Finally, referring more specifically to the situation in the plants, Bisca, a worker at Ansaldo in

Genoa, drew attention to the upsetting of the "old relationships" brought about by the restructurations and by the rotation of workers because of the unemployment scheme ("every month we have to rebuild our organization"). (2)

In such a context, the union organizations find themselves, in a manner of speaking, out of the game. While they try to advance general questions, "in the factories...the workers are no longer refusing overtime. If the bosses don't demand it, they ask for it so as to be able to make ends meet." According to another worker, Batacchi, from Nuovo Pignone in Florence, the May 12 defeat "resulted from a steady loss of power in the workplaces by the workers vis-a-vis the bosses."

The consequence of such structural changes is a weakening "of the positions and essential instruments of the party," that is, besides the unions, the local authorities and the parliament. [Reichlin]. Ingrao noted, "In the last thirty years, a democratic struggle has advanced on three legs — the united trade-union movement, the parliamentary battle and the local authorities. All three of these forms of struggle are now being seriously undermined." (3) Since the May 12 elections were at the local government level, the discussion in the CC centered mainly on the second area.

## Twilight of "red" local government

With respect to local government, almost all the speakers stressed the growing difficulties being experienced by the left administrations. (4) In some cities such as Turin and Florence, the crisis has been provoked by the Socialist Party's policy of alliances with bourgeois forces. In line with the choice repre-

sented by its participation in the five-party ruling coalition, it has opted for alliances with the center, bringing down some left administrations even before the elections.

However, above and beyond the role played by the PSI, the 'red' local administrations have in their turn paid the price of the economic crisis and stagnation and of the government's economic and financial measures. For example, the former mayor of Rome, Vetere, said that the law legalizing housing constructed without permit, because of its ambiguous character, had a bad effect on the PCI's electoral base in two respects. On the one hand, "the conditions were too burdensome." On the other, "for some, it represented a liberation from the feeling of being outside the law" and thus touched off conservative instincts.

Similarly, the former mayor of Turin pointed out how increases in the rents for low-income housing imposed by the CIPE (5) had created discontent in working class neighborhoods where the majority voted for the PCI. In some areas, the PCI lost up to 15% of its vote. This loss of credibility, Fassino, the secretary of the Turin federation, pointed out, is all the more grave because the voters could wonder "Is a force that is associated with decay and stagnation where it governs on the local level credible as a force at the level of national government?" (6)

All of these analyses more or less explicitly involved self-criticism. The left governments were said to have been unable to respond, to launch initiative, to base themselves on the active support of the masses, and they tried to maintain themselves by means of maneuvers and compromises at the top that forced them to go more and more on the defensive, and in the last instance aggravated the contradictions.

Even in the PCI's bastion of Emilia-Romagna, according to the regional chairperson, Turci, himself, there have been "delays and resistance to concretizing adequate plans for governing and carrying out transformation, other than the

1. One of the Speakers, Rosario Villari, said outright: "The problem is how to manage coexistence within the party of such diverse positions." Another speaker, Lanfranco Turci, for his part, alluded to the dangers to the unity of the party if a series of political difficulties were not overcome.
2. The 'cassa integrazione', the unemployment system, provides for paying laid-off workers part of their wages for an extended time. The unions have demanded that lay-offs be rotated, which protects workers against being consigned to long-term unemployment, but also has the effect of maintaining a high rate of turn-over on the job.
3. Spriano talked more generally about an "unfavorable evolution of the relationship of forces and among the classes."
4. The terms used to describe the phenomenon were "fading," "dimming," and "attrition."
5. The Comitato Interministeriale Programmazione Economica, the authority that oversees prices and economic policy.
6. Fassino was the speaker who drew the harshest balance sheet. According to him, in fact the Turin city government had suffered from "attrition" on all four of the "aspects" that the PCI had focussed on in the 1980 election campaign, that is, "stability, clean hands, extension of the welfare state, and participation."

traditional policy of services." The consequence of all this has been that "citizens' participation in city government" has, to use the words of some of the speakers, "gone into a nose dive."

Another point stressed by several speakers is that the disintegrating processes produced by the crisis and the problems of the unions and the workers parties are opening the way for a revival of the policy of paternalism, hand-outs and patronage that has been one of the traditional pillars of the Christian Democracy. In the absence of other prospects, the victims of the crisis are clutching at what seems to be a life preserver.

This phenomenon was pointed to, for example, in Ingrao's speech. He argued that even Catholic communalism could find new openings "in an ever more differentiated civil society" and in the context of "devastating processes of fragmentation, division into special-interest groups and atomization."

For his part, Santostasi, secretary of the PCI federation in Bari, a city where the party suffered a particularly hard blow, went on, after pointing to the ebb of the mass movements and the fact that the PCI limited itself to propaganda and did not advance "a real project for development," to conclude: "It is a bitter thing, but it is not surprising that up till now the world of the southern cities has preferred the paths of deals, adjustments and trading with the existing system." (7)

### "The 'Democratic Alternative' lacks substance"

In the course of the debate, various assessments were expressed about tactical errors that might have been made during the election campaign. Several speakers — Pajetta, Parisi and from another standpoint Cossutta — questioned the advisability of advancing the theme of consolidating "il sorpasso" [the PCI's lead over the Christian Democrats] and still more of talking about the consequences the election could have on national parliamentary politics. (E.g., the legitimacy of demanding that Communists have the right to form a government). But others considered this criticism unfounded.

Secondly, the tone and some positions in the PCI's polemics with the PSI [Partito Socialista Italiano] came in for criticism, in particular the terms of the polemics against the PSI secretary and present premier. (See, for example, Spriano.) Finally Pajetta denounced more generally a "wrong, aggressive tone," and an exaggeration of the political significance of the May 12 election.

Others argued that the poor electoral results reflected to some extent uncertainties, ambiguous positions or outright errors by the leadership of the party and the unions. For example, the positions adopted by various leadership bodies of the party on the building of a nuclear power station at Trino Vercellese came in for criticism, as did the fiscal measures



Communist Party leader Alessandro Natta addresses a party rally in Bologna.

instituted by the minister Visentini and the unions' positions on tax evasion, which were seen as hostile to merchants. There was also criticism of the party's reticence about denouncing the notorious case of the sale to private interests of the public industrial trust SME. Behind such differences, there were sometimes more general disagreements.

However, above and beyond the tactical aspects of specific questions, two other factors were mentioned that were much more significant. In the first place, there was unanimous agreement about the decline of the mass movements in the second half of 1984 and in 1985, even though the assessments and stresses of course differed. (8) It should be noted, however, that this ebb of the mass movements was presented essentially as an objective fact, and the question of how much the leaders of the unions and workers' parties contributed to this by the options they took was minimized. (9)

The second factor was indicated already by Natta in an interview that appeared right after the elections. (10) "In the immediate and as a political solution, the Democratic Alternative appeared to lack substance and concrete possibilities." In the CC, he repeated the same idea, adding that the Alternative appeared "weakened" also "on the level of local government solutions."

A series of speeches took up the same question, not infrequently in still clearer terms, stressing the scant credibility of the Alternative in the short run (Morelli) or a failure to translate it into "concrete initiatives" (Melchiorre). At the same time, criticisms were raised about the Alternative being restricted to a short-term parliamentary objective (Magri) or denouncing its "ambiguity" and "contradictory character." For example, according to Barca, there were three "versions" of the Alternative.

The secretary of one of the traditionally strongest federations, Bertolini, for his part, lamented that the PCI had appeared as "the part of the red city governments and the unions" and that its "general image" had been "obscured." Leaving aside the cautious language he used, he raised a substantive point: The PCI went down to defeat because it was unable to advance an overall political perspective.

At the beginning, I pointed to the "diverse and clashing" views expressed at this CC, and then I indicated the differences that emerged on some points. In fact, from a more general angle, a series of speeches expressed orientations and criticisms that might be termed "right-wing." The burden of them can be summed up as follows: Not only the party's line in the most recent period is being challenged but more generally the policy followed since the turn from the National Unity to the Democratic Alternative policy in 1979.

### Back to "National Unity"?

This attitude was concretized on two levels. In the first place, there was a more or less explicit critique of the Democratic Alternative project from a standpoint harking back to the era of "National Unity." In the last years, there have been "steps backward," Perna said, explaining at the same time

7. See the speech of Politano. The secretary of the Molise federation, Lombardi, called attention to the spread of the "political network involved in patronage operations."

8. See, for example, the speeches of Barca and Ingrao.

9. Barca stressed the crisis of the unions, but included among the objective factors, although here the subjective factor is all the greater.

10. "L'Unita," 23 May.

## DEFEAT OF THE REFERENDUM TO SAVE THE SLIDING SCALE

We publish below the statement of the LCR (Italian section of the Fourth International) on the outcome of the June 9 referendum in Italy. The referendum was initiated by the PCI and was intended to challenge the governmental decree of February, 1984 which introduced a temporary reduction in the points on the sliding scale of wages.

The outcome was a victory for the government coalition of five parties; 54.3% registered a 'no' vote indicating that they were in favour of the government's measure, and 45.7% voted 'yes' indicating that they supported the position of the PCI which was also supported by the DP and the MSI (Movimento Sociale Italiano). The fact that two of the three main trade union federations — the CISL and the UIL called for a 'no' vote and that the socialist component of the CGIL also took the same position undoubtedly contributed to this defeat. Two aspects must be emphasised. First, those parties calling for a 'no' vote in the referendum did fail to mobilise the total 60 per cent of the votes that they had mustered in the May 12 local elections. There was therefore a shift on the part of the electorate who did not vote along party lines as they had before.

According to some observers, an important section of the socialist electorate voted 'yes' to the referendum on the sliding scale but on the other hand, an overwhelming majority of the MSI electorate must have voted 'no'.

Furthermore, the results in working class areas show a large majority in favour of a 'yes' vote, along with the poor, peasants and the petty bourgeoisie in the South of the country.

The victory of the 'no' votes in the June 9 referendum constitutes a serious defeat for the workers movement and the forces of the opposition. This defeat is all the more serious following as it does on the May 12 elections which favoured the bosses and the government and will give legitimacy to the methods put forward by the prime minister, Bettino Craxi which involve forcing through decisions at any price and which open up the way for a series of new attacks. This was confirmed by the denunciation by the president of the employers'

organisation of the 1975 agreement on the sliding scale even though this was not the issue in the referendum itself. The victory of the 'no' vote was not a foregone conclusion, even taking into consideration the outcome of the May 12 elections. It only became inevitable as a result of a combination of factors, one of which was the political inertia of the PCI, who were, after all, the initiators of the referendum.

The supporters of a 'no' vote were very determined and led a forceful political and ideological campaign. They used their monopoly of the television and had recourse to all manner of blackmail and political intimidation. The support for them of a reasonably large section of the trade unions undoubtedly aided their project of sowing division and confusion amongst the working class electorate and aided the negative result of the referendum. This determined action on the part of the supporters of a 'no' vote was not matched by an adequate mobilisation of the 'yes' supporters. From the beginning there was no organisation, there was no clear expression of a willingness to use any eventual victory in the referendum to map out a way forward for the workers. The PCI, having set up the referendum then disassociated from it in practice, and was looking for mediation up until ten days before the vote. In the end they very half-heartedly led a campaign for a 'yes' vote.

Following the June 9 defeat it is necessary to have a debate inside the workers and trade-union movement. But it is also necessary to organise straight away a strategy for defending the movement against the new attacks of which the denunciation by the employers of the 1975 agreement on the sliding scale is a first step. Such a task must be accomplished above all through factory councils and left-wing caucuses in the unions which can organise at the base unitary action by all workers, without waiting for decisions which are anyway unlikely to arrive from the trade union federations.

*Statement of the Political Secretariat of the LCR, Milan, June 10, 1985.*

that "democratic unity is an historic process of advance by the entire body of the nation, which opens up opportunities of a fundamental importance for those who are working for a change in the framework of civic and human progress for the entire society." (11)

Perna argued that this perspective had been blocked by "unexpected clashes with unforeseeable consequences" and by "flareups of sectarianism that threaten to put a lot of things in discussion."

The subject of sectarianism — with respect to program and alliances — was also touched on by Napolitano, the chair of the party's parliamentary fraction, who stressed, moreover, that the Alternative should not be relegated to "a vague future" and came out for "a new government alliance for reform."

As I noted before, Barca criticized the rubberiness of the "alternative" concept (in principle, you cannot fault him for that!). For his part, he recommended adopting the version of the "Alternative as an alternative to the Christian Democratic system of rule and to the policy of a certain bloc of alliances." This suggests that in the framework of a different "system of rule" and a "different bloc of alliances," you could have a new agreement with the Christian

Democracy, that is, a new version of the historic compromise.

However, Quercioli, the deputy mayor of Milan, did not hesitate to draw the conclusion that others were unable or unwilling, for tactical reasons, to draw: "The abrupt turn in 1979 was provoked and desired by other people, while the need remained, in order to get the country out of the tunnel, for unity agreements among all the democratic forces. Instead of proposing the Alternative, we should have stuck firmly to the proposal of solidarity that was inspired by the problems of the nation." That is what you call clear!

Moreover, the "right-wing" positions that emerged at the CC were expressed in the criticism of the attitude taken toward the PSI, which was considered sectarian, and the proposal for a change of direction. The first to raise this problem was the historian Paolo Spriano (and Perna agreed): "The gravest error was to intimate to the voters that the precondition for a resumption of understanding and mutual collaboration was a stinging defeat of the present leading group and its leader in person."

Now, this position might be defended in the abstract, from the standpoint of method, but it does not make much sense

in the concrete context of the policy the PSI is following and of its present function, to say nothing of the conduct of the Craxi government.

The question was posed in more concrete terms by other speakers. For example, Bufalini criticized "a harmful negative notion of the PSI leadership of the government, which on one hand does present negative aspects and threats that we have denounced, but that at the same time reflects a shift to the left."

What Bufalini was proposing appeared, moreover, from his denunciation of another "wrong perspective": "A notion has started going round of a decisive push rather than the democratic way that advances through mass movements, parliamentary battles, and a constant effort to build political relationships on the left and with democratic, progressive, lay and Catholic forces." In other words, the PCI had sinned again by lack of sufficient dedication to gradualism.

As for Napolitano, he returned to the question of the PSI in an interview fol-

11. On international questions, Perna criticized "L'Unita's" account of the discussions between Cervetti and Gorbachev, which concluded with the statement: "There are no unresolvable problems between Italian and Soviet Communists."

lowing the CC, in which he renewed the PCI's overtures and spoke more explicitly about the PCI's "errors and responsibility" for the problems. In particular, the PCI was supposed to have been "late in understanding that the PSI had grasped real problems of renewing the left, its ideological and programmatic baggage, and its social base." (*L'Unita*, June 16, 1985.)

If you consider the direction that the PSI charted for this "renewal" of the left in its congresses and conferences in these last years and how it has operated concretely in the government and the local authorities, then the enormity of the sort of self-criticism Bufalini made becomes glaring. And its objective becomes equally obvious — to shift the PCI further over to Social Democratic positions in order to get it out of "isolation"!

Finally, it is worth mentioning the speech by Napoleone Colajanni, who in the wake of the elections raised a trial balloon about replacing Natta with Luciano Lama. On this point, Colajanni reversed engines. But he confirmed his intentions by launching the formula of "renewal outside of continuity." And so, more clearly than Napolitano, he was saying that in order for the PCI to integrate itself better into the political game it should break its last links with its past.

### The "left wing"

"Left-wing" positions and sensitivity were again expressed at this CC, especially by Ingrao, who resumed his traditional themes, stressing in particular the importance of the mass movement at various levels. It is worth noting, however, that he opposed the offensive of the "renewers" on two fundamental points. In the first place on the analysis of the defeat:

"We lost votes, not because we criticized the leadership of the PSI and the five-party coalition too much, but to the contrary, because our *real criticism* and our *concrete struggle* against the policies conducted by the five-party coalition and the PSI leadership were weak."

In the second place, Ingrao defended — in his own way of course — the PCI's distinctness, arguing that it should act in "exactly the opposite way" to the "homogenization that is demanded of us with so much furor (and also with visible anxiety) by the apologists of the present system."

It might be added that, although with a different tone and different terms, the PCI's specificity was also defended by Cossutta: "We must be what we have always been, but which we have been less and in a confused way for too long." (12)

Among the positions that emerged, in a manner of speaking, on the right and Ingrao and Cossutta's positions, a center again took form, although with very vague outlines. (In fact, the classification attempted here is approximate and as re-



PCI demonstration on May 1st (DR)

gards the placing of some personalities might be debated.)

This center defines itself largely in a negative way. In this respect, Occhetto's formula of refusing to choose between "continuists" and "renovators" is symbolic. In substance, it harks back to the Berlinguer tradition. In this spirit, it tries to defend the party's identity in the style of the late national secretary. This involves reaffirming the reformist conception of gradual transformations moving in the direction of socialism and renewing the overtures to European Social Democratic parties (in the present phase, especially the West German and Swedish ones). But at the same time, it means rejecting homogenization, with the Social Democracy.

This is the drift, for example, of a recent interview in *Critica Marxista*, in which Natta got out of a tight spot by saying: "If you like, we are an anomalous party, but in the sense that we are a party that is because of its strength is in a class of its own in the European political panorama." His followers are free to choose whatever interpretation they like of this delphic utterance.

More concretely, the center, worried that the counterpositions may create a dynamic dangerous to the unity of the party, maintain the general formula of the Democratic Alternative. "From the debate," Natta said in his reply, "the consciousness emerges that for us the Alternative is a process. And so it requires gradualness, stages, successive gains. The Alternative is a perspective that we do not consider either immediate or as something to be relegated to the heaven of strategies and to the historic time scales of the socialist transformation." After such clarification, it is to be expected that after a time, the unfortunate Barca will be obliged to list more than "three versions" of the Alternative!

And it was up to other leaders of the "center" to specify more to this CC, as they had already done in innumerable articles and interviews, the direction in which they thought the party should move. Whether they did so remains, to say the least, doubtful.

For example, after absolutely empty declarations (13), Occhetto explained that it was necessary "to have the courage to discuss the limitations of our social bloc" and that "the left must renew itself, but without abandoning its role of representing the interests and ideals that are under attack by the opposing forces." He raised a trial balloon for "a great programmatic convention" (in which, we might suppose, "specialists" and wool merchants could have a field day!). Obviously, what this all contributed to clarity was not much. Nor have the rehashing of sociological analyses by Peter Glotz, executive secretary of the West German Social Democratic Party, which for some time have been showing up in the PCI press, helped much to clarify ideas.

As for another of the more prolific leaders, Alfredo Reichlin, he did not have much to offer either. He noted that "the heart of a reform program" is "re-launching development, cleaning up state finances and redistribution of income." The condition for putting it into practice, he said, was "to break the profit-rent alliance," that is, to achieve an al-

12. Cossutta denounced the lack of a full-fledged party program." But the weight of this denunciation is reduced by the positive assessment he continues to make of the program Togliatti presented to the Eighth Congress in 1956, and which in fact was one of the bases of the PCI's theoretical and political regression.

13. One pearl is enough to give an idea of this: "The objective problem is the capacity of the left to guide and direct on another level of social awareness, the innovating process that is underway."

liance between wage earners and the "modern" "reforming" entrepreneurs (as Reichlin has argued frequently in other places).

On the political level, the solution has now been found ("the conclusion I have come to," Reichlin announced): "We can break out of destructive competition between ourselves and the PSI by going beyond the confines of the left." Unfortunately for Reichlin, the "confines of the left" have something to do with social reality and the interests of classes, and you cannot get around this fact simply by terminological and conceptual juggling.

It might be noted that the ideas expressed in the final session of the CC, after all, were not exactly new, and that the differences that emerged were already outlined in past years, to say nothing of those that appeared as far back as the mid-1960s (for example, with respect to center-left governments). It is true that we should not let ourselves be dazzled by the declarations of the protagonists (it has become traditional for a lot of PCI leaders to come up with something "new" every ten seconds or to proclaim or call for "qualitative leaps").

A similar caution should be made about the differentiations that I have tried to take stock of. The personnel has changed to some extent, for biological reasons, but in a general way, Ingrao continues to dominate the left, while the right, with Amendola dead, continues to identify explicitly with his legacy.

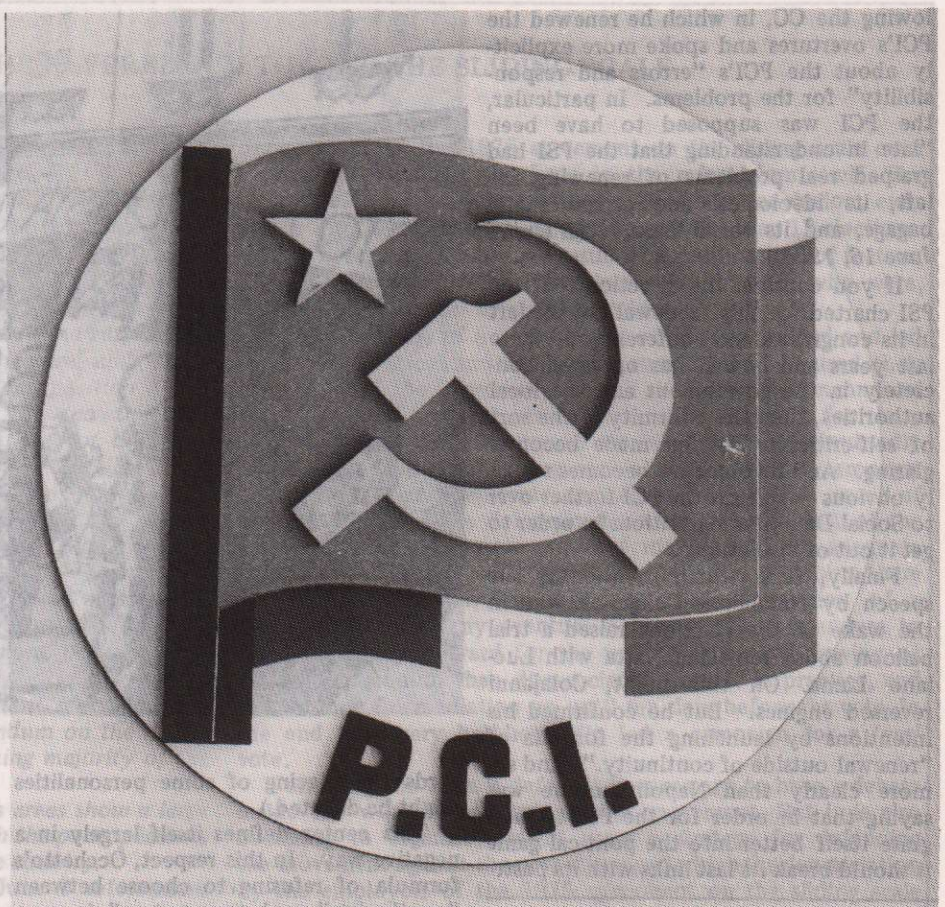
#### Failure of "Eurocommunism"

It would, however, be an error to see in the present events only a repetition of the past. As I stressed at the beginning, differences may never have emerged so clearly on both tactical and strategic questions. There were also some quite polemical remarks on the party's internal regime, which is an unmistakable sign of tension. (14)

In the second place, although with their traditional concern for preserving continuity, the party leaders undoubtedly continued their long march toward total integration into the framework of bourgeois democracy, that is, not only toward a practice but also conceptions that are more and more organically Social Democratic. The process has already reached the stage of an identity crisis incomparably graver than any other crisis in the past.

However, what is more important is the context in which all this is happening. The contradiction between the PCI's political scheme and the dynamic of social and political forces, between a reformist or neoreformist project and the difficulty of putting it into practice, is certainly not new. However, it has never been so acute.

The PCI experienced a strong advance — especially in the electoral sphere, which is the decisive thing for its leaders — al-



ready in the mid-1970s. In the 1976 elections it hit its peak, which it reached again in the 1984 European elections. In the ten years since 1975, it has tried out two different policies, the policy of National Unity and that of the Democratic Alternative. Both have led to failure. On May 12, the PCI paid the price for this in electoral terms. The working class began already five years ago to pay the price in social and economic terms.

After May 12 and its success in the June 9 referendum on the sliding scale, the bourgeoisie and the center coalition — in its present form or similar ones — can look forward with some assurance to greater political stability, however relative it may be in a general sense, and to dealing new blows to a new working class that has been further weakened. This cannot fail to have grave consequences for the PCI.

In fact, from the end of the 1960s up to the onset of the economic crisis, the working class managed to win a series of substantial economic, political and organizational gains, and the PCI was able to appear to be the principal political instrument for achieving them (and to grow). Now there is much less room, although it has not entirely disappeared, for this sort of thing, and the fundamental sterility of neoreformist gradualism is bound to emerge more glaringly.

On the international level, moreover, the Eurocommunist project has failed miserably, with the fragmentation and chronic crisis of the Spanish Communist Party and the repeated defeats of the

French CP. The opening toward some Social Democratic parties cannot offer more than a very partial compensation, in particular since what is involved here is just vague projects and some incipient tendencies and not successful experiences. The dreary balance sheet of the left government in France has become, more or less directly, another blow to the PCI's strategy of gradual transformations. And it cannot look to a better one on the part of Gonzalez's Social Democratic government in the Spanish state.

The PCI leaders realize the impasse in which they have ended up and the dangers inherent in a course aimed only at preserving past gains. In an editorial published after the referendum, *l'Unita* wrote: "The fact has not escaped the Communists that the very possibility of the working class taking the leadership of the country and thus the perspectives for Italian democracy are at stake." (June 23, 1985.)

That statement may be overdramatized, but it reflects a justified concern. In the coming period, the party will find itself having to operate in more difficult conditions. So, the internal conflicts seem bound to continue and to deepen. ■

14. For example, while Natta defended the method of seeking consensus, others — Novelli, Villari — declared for a clear delimitation of majorities and minorities. There were denunciations, moreover, of the lack of participation by the ranks in decision making and the method of presenting the party with faits accomplis. (Perna, Colajanni). Libertini bemoaned what he called "a chaotic polycentrism."

# Revolution and an oppressed nationality: the Sandinistas learn from experience

In Poland, the bureaucracy's official support for the Sandinista government in Nicaragua aroused suspicion and allergic reactions among the antibureaucratic fighters. The Polish oppositionists are particularly sensitive, because of their own experience and East European history in general, to charges of national oppression of minorities. The following article is being published in the 1985 summer issue of *Inprekor*, the Polish magazine of the Fourth International, to answer the questions about the Sandinista's attitude to the Indian question, which were fueled by the Western broadcasts. The material has been somewhat condensed for space reasons. All the quotes in it have been retranslated and the wording may differ slightly from the original versions.

Jacqueline ALLIO

Since the victory of the Sandinistas, the Western press and the "free radio" stations that broadcast to Eastern Europe have continually accused the FSLN of having become a new colonial power and of massacring the Atlantic Coast Indians, the Miskitos. To understand what is going on in this region, you have to realize that when Somoza fell, some 6,000 Somozista National Guards took refuge in Honduras in camps financed by the USA, where they enjoyed the connivance of the Honduran army. The US president, Ronald Reagan, has not concealed the fact that he envisages using the former Somoza troops to invade the Atlantic coast, in the context of a broad scheme for destabilizing the Sandinista revolution.

Since 1979, the Contra troops have kept up constant pressure on the northern part of the country, which is inhabited mainly by the Miskitos. The native populations have been the first victims of the armed clashes taking place along the Rio Coco, the river marking the frontier between Nicaragua and Honduras.

Why have the problems arising in this region become the Achilles heel of the Sandinista government? It has to be understood that the Atlantic coast was colonized by the English and was only ceded to Nicaragua in 1894, against the will of the population, which is largely made up of Indians (60,000 Miskitos, 10,000 Sumos, and 1,000 Ramas) and of Black Creoles, who are descendants of slaves imported from Jamaica. All of these groups have always looked with distrust or even hostility on the inhabitants of the Pacific coast, whom they call the "Spanish."

On top of this, the Indian and Black population was entirely converted to the Protestant, Moravian church in the nineteenth century, while the rest of the Nicaraguan population are Catholics. Little by little, the Moravian pastors

became the real leaders of the Indian and Black communities, often supplanting the traditional hierarchies.

Moreover, at the end of the nineteenth century, the economy of the region came under the control of US-dominated multinationals, thereby acquiring features distinct from the rest of the Nicaraguan economy. In the twenty years during which US troops occupied the country — from 1912 to 1933 — the Americans did not hesitate to reinforce their economic and political domination of the region by playing on the divisions between the ethnic groups and promoting racial prejudice among the minorities.

However, at the same time, while they exploited the Indians savagely in the gold mines, it was the big US companies that developed what little social services existed in the region, and this enabled them without too much trouble to convince the local people of the superiority of US institutions over Nicaraguan ones. This task was made easier by the division between this region and the rest of the country, a division that was not only economic and cultural but geographic (there was no highway linking the Atlantic and Pacific coasts).

## The Miskitos and the revolution

All these factors explain why the people of the Atlantic coast did not take part in any of the political struggles that have convulsed the country over the past century. They played no role in the Sandinista struggle in the 1930s, nor in the long guerrilla struggle led by the FSLN, even if a section of them did decide to support the Front when Somoza was toppled. In 1973, Miskito intellectuals had founded an organization to defend the rights of the native people against the Somoza dictatorship, and in November 1979 they decided to support the revolution.

At that time, the group decided to call itself "MISURASATA" (the Sandinista Alliance of Miskitos, Sumos, and Ramas), and it was to become the most influential organization in the region.

However, the population was in no way prepared for the drastic changes that followed the Sandinista victory in 1979. While under Somoza, the Miskitos saw very few Nicaraguans from the Pacific coast, they found cadres and technicians coming in in growing numbers as economic and social projects devised in Managua were put into operation. Then, as tensions increased on the frontier, there was a swelling inflow of military personnel. And the Miskitos had not been used to the sight of soldiers since the departure of the US troops in 1933. The Somozista repression had not been very visible, except in the mining area. So, the growing influx of armed Sandinistas seemed to them to be an invasion of their country. This was all the more so, because the "Spanish" were not familiar with the culture and traditions of the Atlantic coast peoples. Between the tendency of a lot of insufficiently trained Sandinista activists to suspect that anyone who opposed them was a counter-revolutionist and the tendency of the Atlantic coast people to see colonialism in every step taken by the "Spanish," the situation became explosive.

In their anxiety to unify the country around the revolutionary objectives put forward by the Front, the Sandinista leaders made a series of errors, sometimes very grave ones, as they recognise today. To start with, there were repeated declarations by the Front that "there is only one Nicaraguan nation," "the Atlantic coast Indians are Nicaraguans like the rest," or that one of MISURASTA's main objectives should be to "help forge a national consciousness, to promote patriotic feeling."

Posing the question in these terms meant not making a distinction between state and nation, it meant an impasse as regards the demands of the Miskitos and other minorities on the Atlantic coast for self-determination. It meant not seeing the importance of the stress the Miskitos put in their own documents on the need to take their own fate in their own hands, to recover their cultural identity, to be able to use their own language.

The FSLN's first documents accepted a series of these demands. But their practice unfortunately was something else again. At the start, for example, the literacy campaign, which was seen as an essential means of emancipating the Nicaraguan people, was projected only in Spanish. It required the insistence of MISURASATA to get this work done in the native languages. As for self-organization, despite the Front's assurances that what had to be done was to respect and "support the specific forms of organization of the various native communities," its

representatives often limited themselves in practice to setting up organs directly linked to the FSLN, such as the CDS, AMNLAE, etc. The results were disastrous.

The economic and political difficulties the Front encountered in the country as a whole, obviously explain why it could not respond immediately to all the aspirations of the native people. But they by no means justify the paternalism that is to be found in many official statements stressing the "backwardness" of the Miskitos and their "very low level of consciousness." Thomas Borge, the minister of the interior, said, "we are decolonizing them." William Ramirez talked about "our Indians."

How could it be overlooked that the very fact that the native people referred to the Sandinistas as the "Spanish" — because that is how they always referred to the central government, whether it was Somocista or Sandinista — indicated an underlying problem? An indication that the FSLN was not collectively and fully convinced of the specific oppression of the native minorities is the way that some leaders approached the question of the native languages. The one responsible for the Atlantic coast, Luis Carrion, went so far as to doubt that Miskito "constitutes a real language." He stressed that a whole part of the Atlantic coast population was of mixed blood, and so the national question should not be exaggerated.

It is striking to see how often in their analyses the Front leaders stressed the racial divisions among the various ethnic minorities — which are a real problem — as if that justified a centralizing and normative approach to the problems arising. "They have a race consciousness," one such leader said. If that were true, did it not indicate that the revolution did not necessarily have the same significance for the native peoples as for the rest of the masses oppressed under Somoza? The Sandinistas seemed convinced that the material gains brought by the revolution would essentially solve these problems. They had to learn from experience that things were a little more complicated than that, that the customs, communal way of life, and system of values of the Indians were decisive elements that they had completely underestimated.

### Conflicts begin

So, disagreements quickly arose between the FSLN, which sought to unite the entire Nicaraguan people, and the MISURASATA that considered itself the organization of the native peoples freely associated with the Nicaraguan revolution. And the reactionary forces at work in the country had already moved to penetrate the MISURASATA and manipulate some of its leaders, did not fail to take advantage of these differences to whip up feelings in the native communities by spreading horror

stories about the Sandinista leaders.

In the beginning, MISURASATA's demands did not seem to conflict with those of the Front. In a 1980 platform, the Indians said that recognition of the native language would make possible "real integration of the Indians," as opposed to a policy of assimilation. At the time it took up the land question in general terms, saying that "the agrarian reform should enable the Indians to become the legitimate owners of their lands." It demanded that the lands on which the Indian communities had always lived should henceforth be recognized as their legal property. It was only with the sharpening of local conflicts between natives and representatives of the Sandinista government, conflicts systematically whipped up by contra provocations, that the MISURASATA changed its positions and widened its demands.

In a plan drawn up in 1981, at the peak of the conflicts, MISURASATA invoked the ancestral right of the Indian communities to all the lands in the region, demanding their restoration and the right to run the entire Atlantic coast area on all levels. It specified that the riches of the area should be exploited for the sole benefit of the coast population and not of Nicaragua as a whole.

The Front responded immediately that such demands were unacceptable for several reasons. The MISURASATA claimed to speak for all the people of the coast, whereas the majority of the population were of mixed blood and did not share its views, any more than did the Black Creoles. Moreover, it was unfair to demand at the same time more aid in every sphere (the 1981 Sandinista plan called for investments of 250 million cordobas, while the region produced less than 100 million cordobas worth of goods) and refuse to let the rest of the country get any profit from the wealth of the region.

However, to immediately accuse MISURASATA of separatist, or even racist designs, as several FSLN leaders did in the discussions around MISURASATA's 1981 plan, was certainly not the way to convince the native people that it was necessary to find a common economic and social framework in order to solve the problems of developing the Atlantic coast. A separatist current undoubtedly existed within the MISURASATA, but the FSLN's policy helped to provoke unanimous opposition to it rather than to persuade the coast minorities that forming a separate state was a utopian idea and would not make it possible to achieve their aspirations.

This is the context for understanding the evolution of a lot of Miskitos who supported the Sandinista policy at the beginning and have since turned up leading opposition groups. A notable example are the young people who conducted the literacy campaign on the Atlantic coast, and who at the start of 1981 staged demonstrations of force in some big nationalized agricultural

enterprises in the area demanding that they pay a tax on their profits to the native communities. The Front decided at the time to arrest some of these people, and it arrested several MISURASATA leaders.

After two weeks of demonstrations by the Miskitos demanding the release of their people, the FSLN relented, and started looking for a political solution. In August 1981, the FSLN published its "Statement of Principles" on the Atlantic coast. On the one hand, it reaffirmed the principle of the unity of the nation and of Nicaraguan territory, as well as the ownership of the entire Nicaraguan people of all natural resources on the territory governed by the revolutionary state. Moreover, it stressed necessary connection between improving living standards and economic development. But on the other hand, it recognized the right of the native communities to maintain their languages, their culture, and their traditions; their right to community ownership of the lands on which they live; their right to get a share of the profits from the forest industry; and their right to self-organization and to participate in the administration of the coast and of Nicaragua as a whole.

### Mass emigration of the Miskitos

However, despite the FSLN's efforts to correct its previous errors, the adoption of the measures provided for in the Statement of Principles and the beginning of their application were not enough to reestablish confidence, and several thousand Miskitos decided to emigrate to Honduras over 1981. In November of the same year, parallel to the escalation of American threats, the Somocistas stepped up their incursions in order to create a climate of permanent insecurity in the border area.

Fearing that a military escalation might lead to a war with Honduras and be a pretext for an invasion of the Atlantic coast, the Front decided to evacuate all the population from the border area in order to create a no man's land that the Somocistas would not be able to cross. That was the starting point for the whole anti-Sandinista campaign in the Western media accusing the Front of having perpetrated massacres against the Miskitos and the other minorities in the region.

One of the Miskito leaders living in exile, Staedman Fagoth, reported to the US Congress that thousands of Miskitos were tortured, buried alive, and murdered. Is there any truth in this? In January 1982, ten thousand Miskitos were in fact taken on foot, in trucks, and in helicopters to a new economic development zone a hundred kilometers to the south. It is clear that for most of the population, this transfer represented a real trauma, despite the efforts that



were made to make the trip easier.

"This precipitous transfer led to the burning of a lot of houses and the slaughter of livestock," the deputy of the Zelaya region on the Atlantic coast said. "There are reasons for this. This way, the counterrevolutionists established in Honduras, the National Guardsmen, could not use the houses or find food. That is understandable. But there was a psychological effect. The people saw several years of work reduced to ashes in a few minutes. They wondered if it wasn't possible to take the time to salvage the zinc roofing sheets (because for them a zinc roof represents a lot of effort)."

However, a creole priest interviewed specified: "I was in the region then. You had to choose between taking them away or letting them die there. At the time, the attacks were already quite heavy in those places, and the Miskito population was caught between the Nicaraguan armed forces and those of the Somocistas. I estimate, when you consider the character of the Miskitos, that it would have taken a year or two to convince them of the need for moving ... and there really was no time." (1)

As regards the rumors of massacre, it quickly turned out that they came mainly from the Mokoron camp in Honduras, where the Miskitos who had left Nicaragua in 1981 took refuge. When the Inter-American Human Rights Commission came to do an on-the-spot inquiry in May 1982, only two persons out of 300 questioned claimed to have witnessed a massacre.

A certain number of foreigners (journalists, US congressmen, as well as the Social Democratic former president of Costa Rica, Jose Figueres), as well as Moravian pastors, Catholic priests, and a Baptist minister were able to visit the new encampments in Nicaragua. They were able to discuss freely with the population and confirmed that no one complained of mistreatment during the transfer. An American section of the international Helsinki Watch group that had sent a delegation to Nicaragua reported that the government's explanation that the population had to be moved for security reasons was not unreasonable.

The International Indian Treaty Council, representing the American Indian movement, testified to a UN session in Geneva in 1982 that many Miskitos living along the border had asked to be moved in order to escape the forces operating from Honduran territory. Finally, a specialist on Indian minority problems in Latin America, Roxanna Dunbar Ortiz, a professor of international law, declared recently:

"I have never found anywhere the slightest evidence that the Sandinistas committed any massacres or any other crime ... It can never be pointed out too often how much Western public opinion has been the victim of a gigantic hoax. I have visited the prisons, and the

conditions under which the prisoners were arrested as well as those in which they are being held were perfectly legal and humane." (2)

The local creole priest previously cited added: "This is a historic problem — a social, cultural, and economic problem. It is an ethnic problem. The counterrevolution made it a political and military one ... You have to realize that the Miskito people don't understand what the National Guard was, what Somocismo was, what the insurrection and revolution represent, anymore than they understand what the counterrevolution is. The Miskitos have never counted in Nicaraguan national life. They have lived for years and years the life of an isolated group, used by the English, used by the Americans, used by Somoza. The revolution has approached this group as if they were Nicaraguans, telling them: We are all alike and we are all going to participate in the movement. That is the nub of the problem."

However this person also said that he was convinced that the revolution had brought enormous gains for the Miskitos:

"The most important thing is to get where they feel like human beings. About ten thousand Miskitos were born with the revolution ... That is, they were born to the word. They are starting speaking in their own language, when they were ashamed to before ... It was the revolution that opened up this breach, and the people poured through it. The first thing was the language, which meant dignity, organization was the second step. At this point, the counterrevolution came forward and occupied the political space that had been opened up by the revolution ...

"A Lot of people learned to read, but we think that from the time of the literacy campaign the seeds of distrust of the revolution began to be sown among the Miskitos ... The great difficulties the revolution had in dealing correctly with these problems, some errors, and above all the manipulation of the situation by the US government, led to their sympathizing with the counterrevolution, and this became almost a matter of identity for the Miskito people." (3)

### Sandinistas rectify their policies

Since the time when this interview was done, a certain confidence has been reestablished between the Miskito community in Nicaragua and the FSLN. In particular, this is because the Sandinista leaders have acknowledged their errors: "We are paying for a lot of mistakes we made," Sergio Ramirez said in an interview in *Le Monde* in January 1984.

The FSLN government has taken concrete steps to respond to the aspirations of the native populations. The

stationing of too many troops on the Atlantic coast has been publicly denounced, and more than forty soldiers and officers have been sentenced to prison terms for their racist attitude and their repressive behaviour toward the native populations.

An effort has been made to assure that the local security forces are made up mainly of people native to the region. This goal has been achieved. In 1984, local people made up 70%. Moreover, recruits coming from the Pacific coast are systematically briefed before being sent to the Atlantic coast. There is now a militia battalion made up entirely of Miskitos and English-speaking Blacks from the region.

On the social, economic, and political levels, the government has granted pensions to 5,000 former miners on the Atlantic coast who suffer from lung disease as a result of the exploitation they were subjected to under Somoza. The number of clinics has risen from 26 to 44. Some 480 new schools have been established, and industrial projects are underway to improve the economic situation of the region. Finally, the participation of the various minorities in the governmental bodies — regional as well as national — has greatly increased. In June 1984, for example, a Miskito woman was elected governor of the North Zelaya region.

### Autonomy for the Miskitos

But above all, the 1981 Statement of Principles has been made into a Bill of Rights for Ethnic Groups. It is sometimes called the Autonomy Statute for the Atlantic Coast. In this respect Luis Carrion said at the beginning of 1985: "All the steps accomplished show the recognition of the linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic specificity of these groups. The autonomy bill is the culminating point of this entire process." (4)

For his part, William Ramirez said: "We have gone from total ignorance to a more or less serious knowledge of the Atlantic coast ... We think that we have matured a bit. Experience has led us to think, to take cognizance of the concrete reality, and to realize that before 1981 it was impossible to take up certain questions; they were a taboo for us. We were terrified of the idea of talking about autonomy, because we did not understand this problem." (5)

The FSLN's determination to take as liberal as possible an approach led concretely to the release in April 1985 of all the Miskito Indians still imprisoned, including those who worked in the contra groups supported by the US. This decision was in the context of

1. 'Envio', No 31, December 1983.

2. 'Nicaragua aujourd'hui', Nos 9-10.

3. 'Envio' No 31, December 1983.

4. 'Pensamiento Propio', No 20, January 1985.

5. 'Barricada', December 8, 1984.

the negotiations begun between the Front and the representatives in exile of the Miskito armed opposition to the Sandinista government and of a non-aggression pact on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast that was recently signed.

Both sides are seeking an accord concerning the thousands of Miskitos who are still living in dreadful conditions in the Honduran refugee camp, cut off from their families and their homeland. Recognizing that there are serious dangers of an epidemic at the Mokoron camp, the Red Cross has tried to relocate the refugees in small villages where they could resume their traditional way of life. The population hesitated. Under the

influence of some Miskito chiefs, it finally refused.

It is obvious that those who are warring against the Sandinista revolution with every possible weapon have an interest in keeping these people crowded together, in bad housing and hygienic conditions, prey to rumours of massacres. If the Miskito question remains a burning problem, it is because the heart of the region in which they live is a war zone. Over and above the negotiations underway, there can be no real solution to the difficulties on the Atlantic coast as long as the US supported *contras* continue their aggression against Nicaragua. ■

oughgoing solution, we are working together on this autonomy plan. And, based on a "popular consultation," we will formulate a provisional plan that the government is ready to accept. Our organization is also working for this and we believe that the support from the people will grow.

We think that in a year or two, all Miskitos will be organized, and that will help a great deal to concretize the autonomy plan.

*Q. What is the position of MISATAN toward the Miskito organizations in Honduras and Costa Rica?*

A. First it should be said that MISATAN is really trying to fight for the interests of all Miskitos, and by that I mean the interests also of the Miskitos in Honduras, Costa Rica, and the interior of Nicaragua. Naturally, there are also other organizations — MISURA and MISURASATA.

We support MISURASATA's dialogue with the government, because we think that the reuniting of our families is the most important thing, and that autonomy on their lands is the right of all Miskitos.

*Q. But both these organizations remain in arms.*

A. They have gotten these arms from the US government and with them they have in fact murdered their Miskito brothers and sisters in Nicaragua. It is not in our interests for our brothers and sisters to kill each other. Above all, we condemn the US government that has given arms to MISURA and MISURASATA, and we think that this has to be stopped. We are against the proposal for the US government to give money to carry on the war. We say strongly that that will lead to more bloodshed, more sorrow and tears for the people of Nicaragua and most of all for the Miskitos. We are against the behavior of the people who are following Reagan's policy.

*Q. Before, you talked about the need for creating a climate of peace, and you also mentioned the amnesty that was declared by the government. What is the significance of this for the Miskitos?*

A. We would have to see a climate of peace created for all Miskitos. In this respect, the amnesty decree meant that people who were outside the country fighting against the government got the possibility to return to Nicaragua, and we got the opportunity to work together with them to find a solution.

The national amnesty also gives us the possibility to concentrate, along with those returning, on solving the problem inside the country. War forced on us from outside means death for our brothers and sisters. Because of the amnesty, people who have a political position can return to the country and discuss with all the people of Nicaragua and the people of the Atlantic Coast how best to solve the problems of the country.

This is also a chance to bring all these people closer to the revolution. ■

## An organisation that supports the revolution and defends the Miskito people

In July of last year, a new Miskito organization was founded in Nicaragua, the MISATAN, which seeks to solve the problem of autonomy and of those who lack title to the land they work, through negotiations with the government.

Oscar Hodgson, MISATAN's secretary for international relations, toured West Germany in January of this year. After a forum of the Nicaragua Committee in Hamburg, he gave the following interview to *Was Tun*, the paper of the German section of the Fourth International.

*Question. Can you tell us something about yourself and your political functions?*

*Answer.* I come from Waspam on the Rio Coco. At the time of the victory of the revolution, I was a student. I realized then that there was a need for work on the Atlantic Coast. So, I decided to do work there in the Ministry of Health. As a representative of the Indian communities, I began working for the FSLN.

Then, as a representative of the eastern regions, I entered the government and started working on the problems of the Miskitos. The obvious question is why I specifically represent the Miskitos now. The reason is that the Indian communities on the Atlantic Coast elected me as their representative in an assembly, because they saw me as some one who really defended the interests of the Miskitos. So, at the moment I am MISATAN's secretary for international affairs.

As an organization, we take a critical attitude to the government, but we also defend the revolution, we defend the rights of the native people, we defend everything that leads to the extension of these rights.

*Q. Why did you form a new Miskito organization, and who took the initiative in this process?*

A. The initiative came from the Miskitos in Nicaragua. Today, 45,000 Miskitos live in Nicaragua and they have to face a lot of problems, the war and the fact that they are now living away from their home territory, in the interior of

Nicaragua.

We also believe that this organization had to be founded at the demand of the Miskito people in order to solve the problems of health, education and the land.

So, on July 22, 1984, at an assembly of 63 Indian communities from Zelaya Norte the organization was set up. Its primary demand was to reunite the Miskito families. You have to understand that we Miskitos are now split up. There are 18,000 Miskitos in Honduras and 3,000 in Costa Rica. That is a problem for our people, and we think that it is one of the first things that has to be solved. So, at the moment it is also an important part of our work to publicize this problem internationally and bring pressure on the government of Honduras and its armed forces to make it possible for those Miskitos who so wish to return home.

Another task of our organization today is to press the demand that our government give us title to our tribal lands. Another difficulty here is that these lands are not suited to agricultural production. But there are some minerals, and we are working out conditions for exploiting them in accordance with a policy corresponding to the needs of the native people.

So, the organization is concerned to an extent with the land and with a plan for autonomy, a project for a general settlement of the Atlantic Coast question. By a "general" solution, I mean that the Atlantic Coast is not inhabited only by native people but also by Creoles and Latinos, who have their own special problems. In order to come up with a thor-



# AROUND THE WORLD



## NETHERLANDS

### Full rights for Tamil refugees

*The communalist warfare waged against the Tamil population on Sri Lanka by a chauvinist Sinhalese government has led to an influx of Tamil refugees into a number of European countries, in particular France, Britain, and the Netherlands. The governments have begun showing an anxiety to get rid of the Tamils. The fact that a lot of them are highly political and radicalized people is undoubtedly a factor. In Britain and the Netherlands in particular, Tamil refugees are threatened with being sent back to the tender mercies of the Sri Lankan government.*

*In the Netherlands, this question has become an issue, with the small left parties in parliament opposing expulsion, the Labour Party (PvdA) divided and even the Christian Democrats showing hesitations. In a speech to the PvdA Council on June 15, the chairperson of the party, Max van den Berg, compared the attitude of the government to the Tamils with the attitude of prewar Dutch governments to German Jewish refugees. In both Britain and the Netherlands, Fourth Internationalists are actively defending the Tamils. The following article is from the June 5 issue of *Klassenstrijd*, the paper of the Dutch section of the Fourth International.*

The West European governments are doing everything possible to restrict the number of Sri Lankan Tamils taking refuge here. Against the background of this attitude on the part of the government, the Wijnaendts parliamentary commission came to the conclusion in four days that the south of Sri Lanka is safe enough for the refugees.

In the meantime, too many newspapers and human rights organizations to list have said that there is no security for the Tamils, and that they are fleeing because the slaughter in the Sri Lankan civil war is continuing.

Despite the refutation of the argument that there is no real threat to the Tamils, other bad arguments, some of them racist, continue to muddy the waters. You hear that the Tamils are "economic refugees," whatever that may mean.

In the first place, that is not true, and in the second, if it were, so what? The capitalists keep a free hand for exploiting the underdeveloped countries, and they have set up border police in order to be able to maintain control of

the international working class. These are not our borders.

You also hear the argument that the economic situation does not permit us to accommodate a large number of refugees. That depends on what you consider important. In West Germany over the years, they have let in a lot of East Europeans. The Vietnamese "boat people" are practically invited to come to Europe. Israel is able to bring in a large number of Africans.

Another argument is that the Tamils could be better "accommodated" in a camp in Sri Lanka or India than in Apeldoorn. That costs less and "they remain in their own culture." But putting people in a camp is no solution. That is temporary. The problem is to assure a decent life for the refugees, and everyone knows that is nearly impossible in an under-developed country.

The government has created a special rule for the Tamil refugees denying them the right to social welfare. This slides over an important point. The law guarantees the right to social assistance to all those who need it. The decision of the minister excludes an ethnic group from benefitting from the social assistance law. Thus, the parliament has opened the way for discrimination against all sorts of groups. This is not only an attack on the right of asylum but

a breach in the social security system that we have won.

So, what do the "refugee benefits" the government offers amount to? It does not take long to list them:

- shelter in a residence center where they can sleep, wash, sit, and cook.
- food.
- "pocket money" (20 guilders [about US 4 dollars] a week)
- insurance against the costs of illness and legal liability.
- Payment of special expenses that in the minister's judgement are necessary and cannot be met by other means can be made after the filling out of detailed forms.

What is not permitted by the ruling is visitors to the residence centers. Moreover, instruction in the Dutch language is not considered "a special expense in the opinion of the minister," nor is the cost of telephone calls.

In the view of the minister, the Tamils are an alien element in Dutch society and should remain so, so that they can be expelled. In fact, everything is being done to make it impossible for the Tamils as a group to defend their interests. But this tactic has been only partially successful.

In Apeldoorn, an association of Tamil refugees has been founded. Organizations such as the Vereniging Vluchtelingenwerk Nederland, the Tamil Dutch Solidarity Association, and the support committees are playing an important role in building the first contacts with the Dutch people.

by Arend de Poel

## BRITAIN

### FULL AMNESTY NOW FOR SACKED AND IMPRISONED MINERS

The campaign for amnesty for miners sacked and imprisoned during the 1984-1985 strike is now well underway and messages of support and donations from the Labour movement internationally are urgently requested. There are still 671 miners who have not been reinstated and eighty miners are serving their prison sentences.

The left-wing Campaign Group of Labour Party MPs (members of parliament) has decided to introduce an Amnesty bill into the House of Commons under which all those who were fined or imprisoned as a result of their activities during the strike will be given a pardon which will wipe out all their sentences. The bill has no chance of being passed at the moment, but the MPs

hope it can be the focus for a campaign throughout the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Meanwhile an all-Party committee of MPs has recently come out with an implied criticism of the employers, the National Coal Board, for its intransigent and blanket stand against reinstatement. It recommends that each case should be looked at on its merits.

In most areas the NUM is working jointly with support groups campaigning for amnesty and Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) groups are making this their main campaign.

*Donations can be sent to Miners' Solidarity Fund, Account No 30000009 at the Co-op Bank plc, West Street, Sheffield, Great Britain.*

## Fourth Internationalist wins in local elections

Joe Harrington, a member of People's Democracy, the Irish section of the Fourth International, was elected to the Limerick City Council in the June 20 Irish local elections. This is the first time PD has elected anyone to local government in the formally independent part of Ireland. Harrington ran in a three-seat district, winning the second highest number of first preference votes (all figures here from the June 24 *Irish Times*). He got 589 votes, being out-distanced only by Jim Kemmy, a right-wing Social Democratic politician with a local machine and a national profile, who got 1,281 votes. There were

twelve candidates and the total number of valid votes cast was 4,870.

The highest polling candidate of Fianna Fail, the bourgeois opposition party, got 489 votes. The top candidate of the ruling Fine Gael party got 448. The Labour Party candidate got 452, and the Sinn Fein candidate got 177. Harrington received many of the Sinn Fein candidate's transfer votes. (The Irish proportional representation system allows voters to cast ranked preference votes, which are distributed as the higher preference vote candidates are elected or eliminated.)

Gerry FOLEY

Joe Harrington is a well-known and respected community activist in the South Hill area of Limerick city, a former union organizer, a member of the Trades Council, and a leader of the fight against the government's attempt to impose a water tax. He received an impressive vote of confidence from his neighbors. But he did not wage a fight centered on local issues. The opening statement of his campaign (*Socialist Action*, No. 7, April) said:

"The local elections take place on June 20 against a background of growing attacks on democratic rights, living standards and increased collaboration with Britain's oppression of the Northern minority. Working class people are under severe attack from the rich and powerful. The unjust PAYE [pay as you earn] system, the Water Tax, the cuts in Health and other services, the massive unemployment are all aimed at inflicting a decisive defeat on the working class.

"In this context, these are not ordinary elections. Many people intend using them to hit back at the government and we agree with this. However, more than this is required. We say these elections must be used to boost the working class fightback already underway.

"All over Ireland workers are fighting back. Factory occupations like Atari are common. Community groups have mushroomed in the campaign against Service Charges. There was strong opposition to the repressive Criminal Justice Bill and the campaign against plastic bullets [used by British troops in the North for "crowd control"] and strip searches in Armagh jail [where women political prisoners are held in the North] have gained wide support. The northern minority continues to spearhead the struggle against British imperialism in Ireland."

The statement ended: "The election of Joe Harrington, a revolutionary socialist, to the City Council would be a major breakthrough for working class people, not because of anything he could achieve in what is, after all, a fairly powerless body but because it would signal a fighting response to the attacks of the rich and powerful and away from dependence on capitalist politicians ... Joe asks not just for your votes but for a commitment to fight for a better life in a Workers Republic."

### The national question

The raising of the Irish national question by the PD campaign was a particularly important contribution in the context of Limerick politics. This is one of the areas in Ireland where consciousness of the national struggle is the lowest. Left politics in Limerick has traditionally been dominated by workerists and economists who reject the national struggle, or outright oppose it, as in the case of Kemmy.

In fact, Irish politics in general has been afflicted by a cleavage between social and national fighters, since the national question has been identified historically with a military struggle and the prospects for winning that, let alone producing concrete gains for the working people, seemed remote. At the same time, because of the dominance of imperialism all attempts to achieve economic improvements by going around the national question have failed.

The result of this unresolved contradiction is that rather large right-wing sects have developed in Ireland that seek to avoid the national question by talking about "socialism" and "working-class independence." The biggest one on the national level is the Workers Party, which had its origin

in a current in the Republican movement that turned in a right, economist direction.

Unfortunately, in general, these elections did little to remove these cadavers from around the neck of the Irish left. But Harrington's victory was a small but important gain in this respect. In Dublin, the Workers Party increased its vote from 3.1% in the 1979 local elections and 6.7% in the 1982 general elections to 7.3%.

Sinn Fein got a significant vote in Dublin, 4.7% for the Dublin Corporation. That indicates that it is a major contender for the protest vote, since there is little tradition of voting Republican in Dublin. In the more strongly Republican border counties, it got 11% in Leithrim and 12% in Monaghan. But there was no indication of real momentum, let alone a breakthrough. These results show how far Sinn Fein is from offering an electoral alternative in the South.

On the other hand, Harrington's results show what can be achieved in the present conditions by leaders of local struggles. Politically, he is the most advanced. But there are many such fighters emerging across Ireland. In the present situation, a united slate of such fighters is probably the only thing that could offer a real alternative. (On this and other questions related to the local government elections, see the interview with John McAnulty in the inside pages.)

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