

International VIEWPOINT

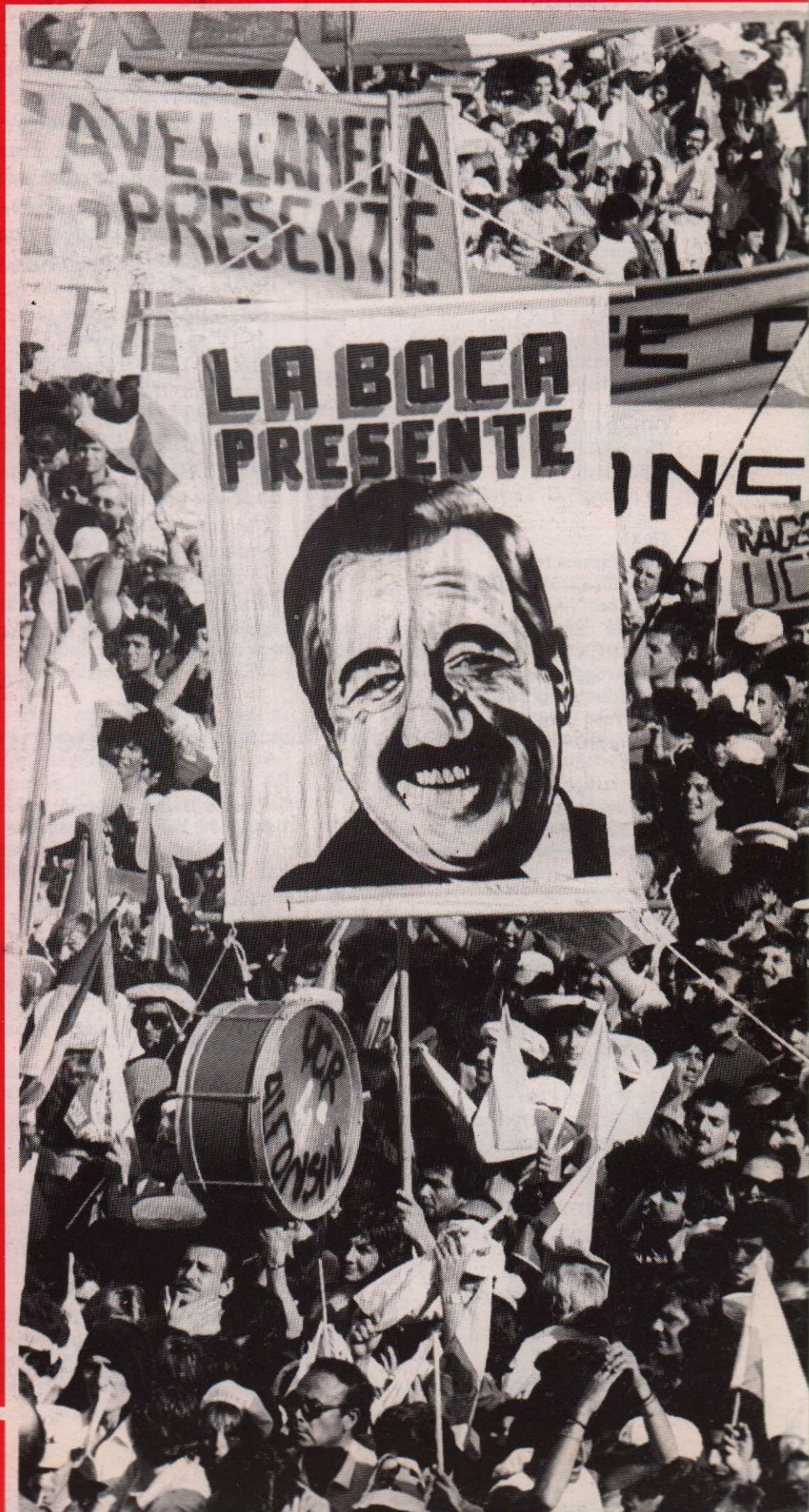
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**Legacy of the
dictatorship
grows heavier
on Alfonsín's
shoulders**

**Salvador unions
venture open
congress**

**Unity for
South Africa's
nonracial unions**



INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

Fortnightly review of news and analysis published under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, in conjunction with the French language *Inprecor*, which appears on alternate fortnights.

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Editorial

IRELAND

IT WOULD be hard to find a better example of the proverbial British hypocrisy and its purposes than the oh-so-earnest comment on, and celebration of, the Anglo-Irish Accords by a whole spectrum of British politicians, Labour and Tory, as well as by any number of BBC «documentaries.»

The object has been to portray the problem in Northern Ireland simply as a «misunderstanding» and building «trust,» which of course requires assuring the status quo.

This is what the agreement does. It gives Dublin an institutional means for expressing its opinions about Northern Irish affairs in return for concrete collaboration in suppressing the rebellion of the population Dublin claims to represent.

The British commentators and politicians have indeed been at such pains to explain that the purpose of the agreement is to give the neocolonial regime «cover» for closer cooperation with the military and police in Northern Ireland that they risk leaving their Irish bourgeois collaborators even more scantily draped than before.

The eruption of Protestant paranoia was, of course, predictable. It does lend the accords some credibility as a compromise, suggesting that the Unionists lost something and therefore the nationalists must have gained accordingly.

But, as always, the problem for Britain is that when the Orange watchdog is aroused, it shows the savagery that is inherent in its function and its inability to learn any new tricks. Move a muscle, and it starts howling and raging.

In fact, the Unionist «community» was built up specifically to defend British domination. It is entirely identified with the subjugation of the majority of the population of the island and particularly that section delivered into its hands directly by partition. A good part of it even lives immediately from employment in the repressive forces. Northern Ireland is no march land of warring tribes. It is a prisonhouse society. The guards did not make it, but the gates will not be opened until the function of the guards is eliminated.

Gerry Foley

Unions stand up to repression

THE FOLLOWING is a report on the FENASTRAS convention, which was held in San Salvador on November 5-9. FENASTRAS is one of three major union federations in El Salvador. It has 23 affiliated unions and a membership estimated at 100,000 workers.

The author was a member of the San Francisco Bay Area trade-union delegation and represented the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union local 1-326 as an observer at the FENASTRAS convention.

North American unionists escorted Hector Bernabe Recinos from Mexico City to the San Salvador convention site. Recinos is the exiled general secretary of FENASTRAS who had been imprisoned from 1980 to 1984 for his role in the electrical workers' strike of 1980, which shut off power to the city. Recinos' wife and daughter have been disappeared since 1980.

CARL FINAMORE

SAN SALVADOR — This capital city has a population of two million in a country of slightly over five million people.

The city streets are in serious disrepair, lined by old, single-story stucco buildings cracking from age, and teeming with street vendors, who are among the 40 percent unemployed barely living off the sales from their small stands.

In the finer section of town, the wealthy vainly attempt to shield themselves from the desperation, poverty, and squalor common to most of El Salvador. Here, sprawling haciendas are obscured by 12-foot-high walls of concrete and stone, often guarded by heavily armed private security guards.

At first glance, infrequent visitors to El Salvador may consider the accusations of government human and civil rights violations to be exaggerated. The regime in El Salvador has attempted to revamp its image through a US-sponsored public relations campaign.

A recently leaked confidential memo of a meeting of the Chiefs of Mission of the US Armed Forces in Central America held in Panama on September 8-10, 1985, states: «We have finally gotten people to believe that El Salvador is a reforming society and that the guerrillas do not rep-

resent the Salvadoran people. We need to continue to encourage this belief.»

Certain steps have been taken, therefore, to create the impression that the Duarte regime has largely eliminated the abuses openly practised during the 1980-83 reign of the Death Squads.

For example, though large numbers of troops are stationed around government buildings and even occupy others, the military is remarkably absent from the city streets and market places.

And, it is true, public events like the four-day FENASTRAS convention,



The FENASTRAS platform

FENASTRAS' platform of struggle, adopted by the federation's national convention, includes the following points.

- The fight for a sliding scale of wages;
- The holding of a national parliament of the workers to debate the current situation in the country;
- For trade-union freedom, dialogue, and negotiations to attain peace;
- For the right to strike and the demilitarization of all work places;
- The abrogation of all anti-labor legislation and decrees;
- The respect of all democratic freedoms, such as the right to assembly, organization, and expression.
- The release of all political and trade-union leaders;
- The return of the exiled Salvadorans;
- The punishment of all those found guilty of crimes against the people;
- An end to US intervention in El Salvador and the respect of national sovereignty.

which was attended by 400 delegates and held in a mid-city hotel, would have been unthinkable a few years ago. There is also a growing number of union demonstrations, with 85 strikes and job actions this year.

Faced with growing inflation and unemployment: with 20 percent of the population receiving only 2 percent of the country's income; and with an average wage of 4.50 dollars a day, the working class in El Salvador is fighting back as a matter of survival.

The next stage in the struggle will be the contest between the working class, which is recovering from the bloody repression to rebuild its organizations and leadership, and the ruling class, which is torn by the dilemma of how to halt this development without resorting to the destabilizing reign of terror that eroded its domestic and foreign support.

Attending the FENASTRAS convention turned out to be an excellent way to determine the real extent of repression faced by unionists in El Salvador.

Last year, 200 delegates attended FENASTRAS' first public convention in several years. At that time, five international guests attended, including only one from the United States.

Since that convention, three leaders of FENASTRAS have been assassinated, with 38 other documented cases of unionists being captured, disappeared, or killed. FENASTRAS therefore invited a large number of international guests this year, hoping a security screen would be provided by the foreign observers.

Over 50 international guests, including 35 from the United States, attended this convention. It proceeded without disruption and even included major singing, dancing, and "teatro" performances.

It would be a big error, however, to mistake the new openings, which have been won by the unions in strikes and through international public-opinion campaigns, as a sign of a reversal of the

government repression.

None of our FENASTRAS guides, for example, would take us outside the San Salvador city limits. None would accompany us to escort Recinos back to the heavily guarded airport for his flight to Mexico City, where he had to opt for another period of exile.

We were also told that the major leaders of FENASTRAS move from their living quarters frequently and go underground for several weeks after every major union public action.

We also spoke with the financial secretary of the water works union, which has been on strike since May. This unionist was just released from eight days in prison. He had been forced to stand in a cell with six inches of water and to go four days without food. He was accused of obtaining supplies for the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) because he was gathering food and clothes from the church and union for the strikers.

Sons of union leader in danger

In a Sunday visit to a large textile union hall, the newly elected executive committee described the company-union mentality of the previous leadership. Yet, despite that conservative stance of the union, its officers had been bombed twice in the last two years.

And as we were leaving El Salvador, our hosts informed us that two members of a national human rights commission had been captured and disappeared just prior to our arrival.

But probably the most dramatic episode disproving the myth of democracy and trade-union rights in El Salvador was the capture of Humberto Centeno and his two sons at 6.00 am on the morning of our arrival. Humberto Centeno is the national and inter-

national secretary of the telecommunications union, ASTTEL, an affiliate of FENASTRAS. His sons, Jaime and Jose, are 15 and 20 years old respectively.

The unionists in El Salvador often use the word captured to describe these incidents because, as in the Centeno case, they involve illegal kidnappings by unidentified men.

Centeno was almost immediately released but his sons were charged with supplying food and supplies for the rebels of the FMLN. The two young men are, in fact, Boy Scout leaders who were involved in a food drive.

We were told that it was urgent that immediate action be taken before confessions could be extracted through torture. Forced confessions are used to keep people in prison indefinitely without the right to due process.

These repressive circumstances often lead to spontaneous responses from the unions to win early release of captured unionists. Seven hours after the Centeno incident, 6,000 communication workers answered the call of their executive committee for a strike.

The workers reported to work but they did not perform their duties. This is often the strike tactic in El Salvador because picket lines are vulnerable to police attack. Phone, telex, and telegraph services were all affected.

The North American delegates informed the US Embassy of the capture of the two Boy Scouts, but the public affairs office just repeated the unfounded charges made by the police. The US delegation then told the local papers that it was going directly to the prison to determine the physical condition of the two young men.

We arrived at a fortress guarded by a tank and dozens of nervous teen-aged troops armed to the teeth. We spoke with their superiors, who refused to allow us to see the Centeno sons but gave the father a certificate indicating they were in good health.

Not reassured, we went to the press and obtained widespread attention. As a result, the archbishop of San Salvador stated he was beginning an investigation. But, the next day, the father and mother saw their two sons and reported that they had obviously been drugged because they did not recognize their parents.

As we left San Salvador, the strike was still in progress and the Centeno youths still in prison. We promised to tell their story far and wide, hoping to help mobilize public opinion to stop US funding for the crimes of the government in El Salvador. □

Towards unity of the nonracial unions

LANGA, AUGUST 8, 1981 - Durban, November 30, 1985. In the four years between these two congresses, a lot of things have changed in South Africa. There have been the new labor laws, the rebellions and the imposition of the state of emergency, to say nothing of the founding of the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Forum, or the deep economic recession into which the country has plunged. But these two dates are the milestones of the transformation of the trade-union movement in South Africa.

NATHAN PALMER

The first unity conference of the independent unions was held in August 1981. The gathering on November 30, 1985, will mark the formation of an independent "superfederation," with a half a million members.

The road between these two markers has not been a straight one. Not all of the differences that have arisen have been smoothed. Some independent unions have remained outside the fusion. However, it was possible to achieve an accord among forces with different political sensibilities around the most dynamic pole of attraction, the "Unity Unions," even if this brought on some splits.

One such split occurred, for example, in the case of the rapidly growing National Union of Mineworkers. It disaffiliated from the Council of Unions of South Africa (CUSA) when the latter proved too reticent about the fusion.

The last four years have seen the growth of the independent unions. Sometimes, this has taken on spectacular proportions, as in the case of the NUM. It was founded in 1982 in an industry that up till then had kept out noncollaborationist unions. Today, it claims 230,000 members out of a total national workforce of 400,000 miners. In this period, there has also been an evolution as regards the questions under debate, around which differentiations took place.

One of the first questions posed for the independent unions was that of registering. This was required by the new laws passed after the work of the Wiehahn Commission concerning recognition of unions.

Through this change in the law, the government sought to exercise a tight control over the young trade-union movement. Moreover, the legislation

denied immigrant workers the right to join trade unions and provided for registration on a racial basis. All the unions condemned together this law and its constraints.

But a division then developed at the Langa conference between unions such as SAAWU and the GWU, which were opposed to accepting these conditions; and FOSATU, most of whose affiliated unions complied with the formalities of registration. For the latter, the tactical advantages of registering, that is, the dues checkoff and negotiating rights, outweighed the disadvantages, which could be combated. In fact a victory was won with respect to the principle and the government finally agreed to register the FOSATU as a nonracial union in 1981, which did represent a significant problem for the union. In fact, today, this question has receded into the background.

The next question to arise was that of the Industrial Councils, the national framework for negotiating by industry that combined representatives of the employers, the workers, and the state. Several FOSATU unions managed to get representation in it. This was the case notably of the auto workers union, NAAWU; the metalworkers union, MAWU; as well as of the textile workers union, NUTW. This option was indicated by the strength of these unions in their respective industries. But FOSATU posed the condition that the workers should retain democratic control of their representatives.

The growing pressure of the recession, with its panoply of layoffs and restructurations, called for waging national battles in the industries affected. The result has been that while the tactical question of participating in the

Industrial Councils remains open, it no longer represents a Rubicon.

The appearance of differences over these two questions gave the first union summit meeting the character primarily of a demonstration of a common will to struggle against the oppressive apartheid system, without this involving any organizational choices in the plants or regions.

The second and third summits pointed up this impasse. In April 1982, several small unions left the second conference on the question of nonregistration. The discussion at the following meeting in July of the same year ran into the same stumbling blocks.

Despite the unity achieved in the protest after the death in detention of Neil Aggett in February 1982, fusion of the unions seemed in that year to be relegated to an indefinite future.

A gap widened between one pole represented by FOSATU, the FCWU [Food and Canning Workers Union], the GWU, and the CTMWA [Cape Town Municipal Workers Association]; and another where the unions put as much stress on building a base in the communities as in the plants. The latter group evolved toward an outlook close to that of SACTU/ the South African Confederation of Trade Unions, which is influenced by the African National Congress (ANC).

The question of relations with the community organizations was not one of whether or not the unions should have ties to these groups or not. It involved a debate on the tactics for construction and mobilization.

The unions and the communities

The pole represented by FOSATU put primary stress on organizing the working class in the workplaces. This did not exclude broader actions involving other sectors of the population, in particular in boycotts in solidarity with strikes. Examples of this are the Colgate-Palmolive action in which FOSATU was involved in 1980-1981 (a 14-month boycott) or the Fattis and Monis action in the Cape in 1979, in which the FCWU was involved.

Quite recently, the long strike that the FOSATU fought this year in the British firm SARMCOL-BTR illustrates the linkup between workers struggles and mobilizing the community.

The opposing pole in the trade-union movement considers that the independent unions would act on all of the problems of the Black communities. Thus, the SAAWU was very active in opposing the proclamation of the independence of Ciskei a bantustan in which this union has the bulk of its forces.

On this level also, the situation and

Unions supporting unity

ACCORDING to the *South Africa Labour Bulletin*, the unions involved in the "superfederation" are the following:

- The nine affiliates of the FOSATU, with 130,000 members.
- The National Union of Mineworkers, with 100,000 members.
- The commerce workers union CCAWUSA, with 50,000 members.
- The food and canning-workers union, the FCWU, with 25,000 members.
- The Cape Town municipal workers union, CMTA, with 12,000 members.
- The General Workers Union (based mainly in transport) with 12,000 members.

These unions, which are called "unity unions," have been joined by the unions affiliated to the UDF, which have 40,000 members. Notable among the latter are South Africa Amalgamated Workers Union (SAAWU) and the National Federation of Workers (NFW) with 12,000 members in nine unions.

In total, the superfederation will start out with 380,000 regular dues paying members and 500,000 adherents.

The five basic principles of the superfederation are the following:

- Nonracialism
- One union per industry.
- Workers Control
- Representation on the basis of the number of regular dues payers.
- Cooperation on the national level in the framework of the new federation.

positions are going to evolve. A union like the SAAWU, which has been hard hit by repression, retained its organization as a general workers union, rather than being structured on an industrial basis. This question is going to assume more and more weight as the fusion comes closer.

On the other hand, the unity unions, which did not suffer repression on such a massive scale owing to their superior organization in the plants, were also to commit themselves on openly political questions. Their opposition on the local level to the expulsion of camps of squatters and above all the national campaign that FOSATU waged against Botha's constitutional reforms indicate the incorrectness of schematic analysis of the positions of the two union blocs on this question.

The regime fears workers' unity (DR)

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to think that the tensions between some community organizations and the unions have disappeared. While the November 1984 "stay-away" in Transvaal province was a united action, we have not always seen the same unity when similar calls have been issued in one or another township without real prior discussion or collaborative preparation.

For example, in the Port Elizabeth region unionists, essentially FOSATU members, were attacked by elements claiming to represent the UDF simply because they did not heed a unilateral call for a strike.

The present situation has not opened up any clear road forward to combining the strengthening of the union base in the factories and taking up the inter-

ests of the population in the townships. This is one of the major questions that the unified federation will have to resolve.

The new major questions arose in 1983 that had not been posed before. At the time of the fourth summit meeting held in Athlone on April 9 and 10, 1983, a fresh optimism appeared. The "united" unions and the "community" unions agreed to set up a parity commission, like that which was established at the time of the formation of the FOSATU. Its brief will be to prepare the founding documents of the future federation and organize the discussions. The principle of industrial unionism is under discussion.

The various unions were invited to provide information on their activists, members, and dues payers, and on their base.

The community unions, as well as the CUSA, did not meet these requirements during the various parity meetings. Moreover, the transformation of general workers unions into industrial unions did not proceed fast enough to suit everybody. Once again, the process of unity seemed to bog down.

Another development that was to transform the political scene was the formation in 1983 of two groupings in opposition to the regime, one of which, the UDF, was rapidly to gain a commanding lead over its rival the National Forum.

Thus, the debate that had arisen over relations with the community was raised to the national level, becoming a debate over the general conception of the struggle to bring down apartheid.



Although the UDF does not simply represent the ANC, it does pose the problems of relations with the latter organization, which considers itself a framework for uniting the liberation movement.

The force that the independent unions have built will obviously weigh heavily in the balance against the regime. Thus, at the time of its founding the UDF appealed to the unions to join it. Most of the community unions did so immediately.

But the unity unions refused to take this step in order not to divide their supporters, who have very diverse political sympathies. In order to avoid this pitfall, the CUSA chose to affiliate both to the UDF and to the National Forum. In the case of the media workers union, this question was at the center of a split between the various provincial branches of the organization.

In March 1984, the unity unions stepped up the pace. At the fifth summit meeting, the principle of industrial unionism was adopted. Those unions that could not, or did not want to, organize immediately on industrial lines were offered the status of observers. The community unions then left the conference.

In addition to these two poles, a third grouping of unions has emerged, the AZACTU (the Azania Confederation of Trade Unions), which is affiliated to the National Forum. This grouping of general workers unions is opposed to the principle of nonracialism supported by the other unions. It advances the principle of a Black leadership. This is one of the reasons for its refusal to participate in the preparatory meetings for the November 30 congress.

Finally, after some people thought that the community unions were going to reactivate SACTU, at the beginning of 1985, they took the decision to rejoin the unity unions. So, it is not hard to predict that the political problems that existed will remain inside the superfederation.

The historic portent of the founding of this federation, must, however, be stressed. First of all, it will be the biggest trade-union federation in the history of South Africa. In 1927, the Industry and Commerce Workers Union had up to 100,000 members, and the SACTU reached its peak in 1961, with 53,000 members.

Secondly, no one any longer challenges the role that the working class must play in transforming the apartheid capitalist society. The creation of the superfederation does not solve all the problems of political action for the working class, but it cannot be said to be an event that is without importance for the South African revolution. □

The reasons for the bloodbath

WHEN THE Colombian army's Cascabel tank shot down the high iron and cedar gate of the Palace of Justice in Bogota, it marked the start of one of the bloodiest and most ruthless actions carried out by the Colombian armed forces in the last thirty years.

Twenty-seven hours after the tank opened fire, under the eye of the television cameras, the cost of this act of war left Colombians shocked. More than a hundred persons were killed, including 35 civilians (clerks, lawyers, etc.) and 11 judges.

RODRIGO O' FARRELL

Moreover, the new building housing the Supreme Court of Justice, the Council of State, and the extensive libraries maintained by these highest judicial bodies of the country was reduced to ashes and twisted steel.

The day's losses also include some "disappeared" persons, the precise number of whom is not yet known.

The responsibility for the operation that led to the massacre was assumed by the Conservative president Belisario Betancur who in the first years of his term had managed to gain the aura of a populist leader and "peace maker" in Colombia and internationally. He had begun discussions with the Colombian guerrilla groups, signed an agreement for a ceasefire with most of them, and played a central role in founding the Contadora Group.

The assault on the Palace of Justice, however, recalled in the minds of many Colombians an event that has marked the political life of the country since 1948, another slaughter carried out under another Conservative government on April 9-10, 1948.

Aroused by the murder of the Liberal leader Jorge Eliecer Gaitan, the Colombian people rose up spontaneously to try to topple the regime of Mariano Ospina Perez. Government soldiers, sheltered in their tanks, opened fire indiscriminately on the masses, who had only machetes and pistols.

The government was saved by the complicity of the Liberal Party leaders who refused to lead the uprising. April 9 has gone down in Colombian history as one of the main episodes of the so-called period of "la violencia,"

a full-fledged civil war launched by the reactionary political forces two years before, and whose end in 1957 represented a strategic defeat for the democratic aspirations of the masses. It gave rise to the era of restricted democracy that continues today.

Despite the change in the relationship of forces in favor of the proletariat and its allies in recent years, the massacre at the Palace of Justice seems to represent the opening of a similar period of trauma.

The confrontation opened at 11:40 pm, November 6, when 31 well-armed guerrillas alighted from two trucks. After some skirmishes with guards in the parking lot of the building, the guerrillas occupied the basement and four floors of the Palace, and began to face a team of police secret agents that came in to mount a counter-attack.

The guerrillas had not finished putting the hostages in order, when six Brazilian army Cascabel and Ururutu tanks, with 50-millimeter cannon, entered the Plaza de Bolivar. Two of them tried to enter the building, one through the main door and the other through the blocked parking area in the back.

At almost the same time, four police helicopters dropped specially trained "antiterrorist" troops on Terrace No. 16.

The Casa del Florero museum alongside the Palace of Justice was taken by the police and army and converted into a military operations headquarters. This is where the hostages who managed later to escape were taken. Some of the "rescued" civilians taken there disappeared with-

out trace, and without the authorities offering the slightest explanation.

Carlos Martinez Saenz, the director of Socorro Nacional (National Aid), who risked his life to take a message to the guerrillas, revealed that he saw three live guerrillas in the Casa del Florero taken prisoner by the military.

The armed forces, however, deny that they took any prisoners. At least one lawyer who was in the court on legal business at the time of the events and who got out alive has been declared missing by his colleagues.

In the meantime, in the Plaza de Bolivar, the armed forces rained bullets indiscriminately on the Palace without any consideration for the hundreds of civilians trapped there. The most well known of them, the presiding judge of the Supreme Court, Alfonso Reyes Echandia, made an urgent public appeal at 5:00 in the afternoon through a radio station that reached him by telephone.

"We are hostages of M-19. Our lives are in danger. Please tell the army to stop shooting. We all have guns pointed at us." He added; "The occupiers are ready to negotiate a solution to the situation on the basis of a concrete proposal, but for that they demand the withdrawal of the troops."

The military take over

The government did not respond. Reyes Echandia tried desperately to talk to President Betancur over the telephone. The president refused to take his call. Five minutes later, three judges left the building safe and sound. Among them was the president's brother, Jaime Betancur Cuartas. A few days later in Mexico, a leader of M-19, Evert Busamante, said that Betancur was released to take a message to the president. But this version has not been confirmed.

By noon of Wednesday, Belisario Betancur knew of the guerrillas' demands, because they had sent a cassette through a Conservative journalist. Surrounded by four ministers, the president listened to the demands. They were to publish a declaration of M-19, as well as the minutes of the Committee to Oversee the Application of the Truce, to make public the deal the government had made with the International Monetary Fund, and to have time made available in the media "so that the nation can judge the government for its failure to carry out its promises of peace and its violation of the accords signed a year ago in Hobo, Corinto, and

Medellin." Betancur rejected all these demands out of hand.

The military operations were coordinated personally by the minister of defense, General Vega Uribe. When he was called to the president's palace, he demonstrated his lack of respect for Betancur's authority by taking an hour and a half to show up.

At 8:00 pm, Betancur convened the Council of Ministers. He proposed a line of action. The guerrillas were to be called upon to surrender unconditionally in exchange for a guarantee of their lives and an assurance that they would be tried before an ordinary court.

The ministers were still offering ideas about how to get this proposal to the guerrillas, when General Vega Uribe said that this plan was "inappropriate" because if the military siege were stopped, the guerrillas would interpret this as a victory and might even strengthen their defensive positions.

"All aspects of the operation are underway. If the Council agrees, we will continue." The ministers and the president indicated their assent.

The cathedral clock was striking 10:00 pm, when the army launched its second attack. A series of heavy bazooka missiles were aimed at the third floor. They exploded, shaking the neighboring buildings. Then flames began to devour the eastern wing of the building, causing the deaths of many hostages who were held there. Some of them tried to escape from the smoke, but were cut down by the hail of bullets.

The government propagandists tried to attribute this fire, which burned thousands of legal records, to the occupiers. They claimed that the M-19 had a deal with cocaine traffickers, who had threatened the judges considering extradition requests from the US. In a clandestine news conference in Bogota on November 9, the M-19 rejected these charges.

Colombian public opinion could not understand what justified the carnage. The vengeful nature of this operation becomes clear if you take into consideration the traditional hatred of the professional armed forces for the judicial branch. Hundreds of judgements by military courts have been modified or overturned by the Supreme Court or the Council of State.

For example, the Council of State convicted General Miguel Vega Uribe in July of practising torture during the repressive campaigns of 1979 and 1982, when he was director of the Brigade of the Military Institutions. The army's appeal against this verdict was underway at the time of the November 6-7 events, and

very likely the legal records of the investigation against Vega Uribe went up in smoke.

In the final phase of the assault, the troops took the second and third floors with the help of rocket and artillery fire. Monica, a guerilla who had held off several attacks with her machinegun, fell. A rocket knocked in the wall of a bathroom where the last group of hostages had found refuge, killing several of them.

The guerrillas' second in command, Andres Almarales, tried to get the civilians out. When they got to the first floor, the soldiers opened fire, killing almost all of them. The guerrillas left inside were overwhelmed and liquidated.

This was not the first time that Belisario Betancur had been implicated in a massacre. In the 1960s, when he was minister of labor, the Santa Barbara strikers got the same treatment. But this incident was quickly forgotten. He came to be seen as a "progressive" figure in the Conservative Party, and when he was elected president in 1982, his popularity went beyond his own party.

It was Betancur's stand for "peace" that won him this prestige, despite his economic policies, which were disastrous from the outset. His position was that the guerrillas could not be eliminated militarily.

He was met with suspicion by the more reactionary sectors and the army. The undercover struggle of these elements against Betancur became clear after March 28, 1984, when truce agreements were signed with the Communist Party-influenced guerrilla group, the FARC, which had the longest tradition and the most fire power. On August 24, after violent battles, the M-19 and the Maoist EPL signed similar accords with the government.

While the pact with the FARC was observed the one with the M-19 was not. The latter raised a hue and cry that the army was continuing major offensives against it, despite the accords. This led to a war of position in the mountains and the small towns of the sugar-growing province of the Valle Del Cauca, where the guerrilla group took heavy blows.

Reorganizing, the M-19 attacked the Armenia counterinsurgency forces base early in October, killing 32 soldiers and capturing 12, who were later released to a group of journalists. On October 23, it attempted unsuccessfully to kidnap General Rafael Samudio, commanding general of the armed forces.

Already before the holocaust of November 7-8, the president's popularity had reached a low point (only 18% supported him, according to the polls). The massacre dealt it a final

blow. Today, every politician is trying to avoid responsibility for the assault. The military showed from the outset that they were in control.

"Belisario is a prisoner of Vega Uribe," is what people are saying in Bogota, "since he did not fire the general when he was found guilty of practising torture."

In this context, the officers are stepping up their military and political activity. A few days after the slaughter, Ricardo Lara Parada, an opposition councillor with a guerilla past, was shot down in Barrancaberema. A week after that, the EPL leader, William Calvo, was killed in a similar way. The main CP headquarters has been bombed.

In fact, it appears that the government set a trap for the M-19, since it had learned of the plan, which it expected to be carried out when French president Francois Mitterand was in Bogota. Desperate to regain the military and political initiative after the failed kidnapping of Samudio, the M-19 went ahead with the plan that they knew was no longer secret. They acted as soon as the authorities withdrew the security force from the building, an action that seems to have been a lure.

The episode has closed the stage of the "truce." Raids and other attacks on the legal left parties, which had begun before the battle in the Palace of Justice, seem certain to be stepped up now under the pretext of fighting "terrorism." New violations of human rights can be expected. By killing the judges the army showed that no one has immunity from its attacks.

What seems to lie ahead is a resumption of the sort of "violencia" that started in 1946. But this time, there is an extensive armed movement in the country, although it is divided in accordance with various political positions. Moreover, the workers organizations are now more experienced.

On the military level, what the FARC does now will be crucial. If they reach an accord with the other guerrilla groups, the armed confrontation will reach unprecedented levels in the country.

Betancur promised that not a single drop of blood would be shed during his term. Now he is dripping with it. The day after the massacre, he boasted that the messages of support it got from Latin heads of state, as well as from Reagan, had shown "Colombia has the admiration of the hemisphere." That is mutual self-deception. Ordering this massacre and letting himself be pulled in the tow of the generals has wiped out his political credibility. □

The workers resist

(May 1982 - May 1983)

THE FOLLOWING is the second in a series of three articles on the working class movement and the Khomeini regime. The first, in the last issue of *International Viewpoint*, described the onslaught of "Islamic" repression in the period June 1981 through May 1982. The article below describes how the workers fought back and prepared the way for a new rise of opposition to the clericalist bourgeois regime.

SABER NIKBEEN

By May 1982 there were a number of indications of growing resistance by the workers to the regime's offensive. For example, a substantial increase in the number of industrial actions could be noted between May 1982 and May 1983 (over thirty strikes and many more go-slows and sit-ins).

The forms of the workers' protests were more militant than in the previous year, when the dominant methods were writing letters to the authorities or collecting signatures on petitions. There were even attacks on the Islamic anjomans. (1) Moreover, in this period, many new layers were brought into the strikes.

The effect of the workers' protests can be measured by the fact that in September 1982, in a seminar of managers to study the problems of Iranian industry, it was acknowledged that 50% of cuts in production were owing to industrial actions, as opposed to the general problems of the economic crisis, shortages of raw materials, and the war.

The president, Khamenehi, warned that "if this situation continues, the government will be forced to take some drastic measures against these go-slows." (*Etela'at*, November 8, 1982.)

Despite the fact that in this period, the repression indeed increased and that the armed forces of the regime (mainly, the pasdaran) intervened in almost every industrial dispute, the workers won victories in many cases.

At the same time, there was a sharp decline in the fortunes of the Islamic Anjomans. They became very isolated and lost a lot of their members. A boycott of all Islamic insti-

tutions within the factories became widespread.

Most protests in this period were against attempts to lower wages in all sorts of ways, to increase working hours, and to lay-off workers. There were also many protests against the Islamic Anjomans or their members.

The first major strike in this period came in late May in the steel industry in Esfahan. Thousands of construction workers occupied the main building of the steel complex, protesting plans to push them out of the industry.

The strike began on May 17, and went on for two days, despite constant attacks by hezbollahis. On May 19, the management was forced to organize an assembly to explain its plans. In this meeting, the workers protests became so violent that the chief manager (Mr Neely) was obliged to flee. The workers passed a resolution including demands for the resignation of the management, the minister of labour, and the governor of the province.

In Fulad Shahr, there was widespread support for the construction workers. Many steelworkers organized solidarity actions. On May 21, the regional TV had to devote two hours to explaining the government's plans and at the same time to an attempt to intimidate the workers. One of the speakers, for example, was Foroutan, the representative of the pasdaran!

The next day, however, about 8 thousand workers demonstrated. The

1. The word means "society." The anjomans were set up by the Islamic forces to replace the shoras, or councils, which were the first bodies to arise in the factories. — IV.



Burning the US, Israeli and Soviet flags on Woman's Day in Tehran April 10, 1984 (DR)

pasdaran attacked the demonstration, arresting many workers (three were later executed). They dispersed the crowd. The regime was, nevertheless, forced to back down and withdraw its plans.

This dispute had a major impact on the working class as a whole. Because of the scale of the conflict, it got wide publicity (including national coverage on radio and TV).

Only a few months before, the regime claimed that the workers were completely behind the Islamic Republic, and all "conspiracies" and "subversions" had been crushed. Now, it felt obliged to say that there were still "Communist troublemakers" around, and that they had a considerable influence on workers.

After this incident, there was a definite increase in the number of industrial actions. In many factories over this period, a number of actions took place.

Battle after battle, workers go on resisting

In the Chit-e-Momtaz textile factory, for example, workers organized a sit-in protest against embezzlement in the workers' cooperative. The yellow shora (2) brought in the pasdaran to force the workers back to work. Four workers were sacked.

A few months later, in July, there was a dispute with the management over the annual holidays. The workers also raised the demand for reinstatement of their sacked mates. The manager went into hiding to avoid the violent protests.

Pasdaran were brought in once again. This time, a member of the

pro-regime shora was also arrested. The minister of labour announced subsequently that the shora was illegal, and disbanded it.

On November 6, the workers were on the move again over the question of the cooperative. The management was obliged to hold elections for its executive without the participation of the workers.

In early March 1983, the workers in the Chit-e-Momtaz factory were again involved in a struggle, this time against the government's proposed labour code.

In the Renault factory (now called Saypa), workers went on strike late in May 1982 to protest against the cancelling of Thursday closings. The manager's attempt to explain the measure so angered the workers that he was beaten up. The pasdaran came in and arrested a lot of workers.

On July 2, when the management announced its plans to cut annual vacations, the workers organized a go-slow. After one week, the manager was forced to back down.

In February 1983, workers organized a committee in this factory to draw up a list of the workers' grievances concerning the proposed labour laws. In April, they organized a go-slow¹ the question of over-time pay.

In the summer of 1981, the railway workers had faced terrible repression. But by the spring of 1982, the struggles on the railroads recommenced. In May, there was a strike against the minister of transport. He was forced to apologize for his insulting remarks, which had sparked the protest.

Later on in the spring of 1982,

a plan was introduced in rail to increase working hours. The workers did not accept this, and left work at the previous quitting time. The next day, pasdaran were brought in. There was even some shooting. But the management backed down.

In June, the workers instituted a ban on over-time work because the management refused to pay over-time rates for work over the New Year holidays (the Iranian New Year comes on March 21).

In July, the workers brought in five of their colleagues who had been sacked previously by the management. The pasdaran came in and arrested the five.

In August, a representative of the Ministry of Labour came to organize an Islamic Anjoman. But nobody, except a few reactionary pro-regime thugs, put up any candidates.

By September, the Islamic Anjoman was more or less integrated into the management. The workers were forced to attend weekly ideological classes, but turned them into discussions of many grievances. In October, the anjoman suspended the classes.

In Pars Metal, where the workers lost five militant leaders in July 1981, there were at least four go-slows in this period. In August, a major confrontation took place between the workers and the Islamic Anjoman and some of the foremen belonging to it.

On October 25, there was an assembly to hear the management's plan to increase production. As soon as the leaders of the Anjoman began to speak, almost all the workers walked out.

On February 14, the workers went on strike over payments for productivity deals. They were forced to abandon the strike, but continued their protest with a go-slow. At the beginning of March, the management backed down.

In General Motors, where the anjoman had been responsible for many arrests and lay-offs, a group of workers calling themselves "the Committee to Revenge the Militant Workers" executed the leader of the anjoman on June 23. A few weeks later, the homes of three other members of the anjoman were burnt down. In February, 1983, the factory went on strike.

In August, September, and January 1983, there were three strikes in the Monso food-processing factory. In the Gherghereh Ziba textile factory in May, there was a go-slow. In June there was a short strike. In August,

2. The word means "council." These were the first bodies to arise in the factories in the heat of the revolutionary upsurge. In the process of breaking them, the Khomeini forces moved to set up anjomans. (See previous note.) -IV.

there was a call for the boycott of the Islamic Anjoman.

In September, there was a boycott of the canteens. In these same three months, there was a total ban on doing the compulsory over-time work for the "war effort." All these actions ended with partial victories for the workers.

In Pars Elektrik, where 300 workers were sacked in 1981, workers beat up anjoman members in October 1982. The pasdaran arrested over a hundred workers. In the Tolidaru chemical works on January 24, 1983, workers downed tools over productivity pay. Over 400 workers demanded the expulsion of one of the managers (a member of the Islamic anjoman).

Other major strikes in this period were by Tehran's taxi drivers in August, the Tehran Bus Company workers in September, the National Airlines technical workers in January 1983, the Shisheh Ghazvin glass factory in March 1983, the Bridgeston tire factory in Shiraz in February 1983.

New labour code touches off major battle

The most important struggle in this period, however, was the one against the proposed labour laws. The *maktabi* (Islamic fundamentalist) minister of labour, Mr Tavakoli, who is in fact a supporter of the Hojatieh faction (rightists who use religious arguments to defend the prerogatives of private property), had indicated during the celebrations of the Third Anniversary of the Revolution that a commission had been set up under his authority to draft an Islamic Labour Law to replace the Taghooti (pagan) law of 1970-1971 much hated by the workers. There had, for example, been many protests against the retention of Clause 33 of the shah's law, which permitted arbitrary sackings.

On May Day 1982, Tavakoli indicated that the draft was ready but was still being studied by the *Faghihs* (experts on Islamic law). Along with a delegation from the Ministry of Labour, he visited Imam Khomeini, who approved the main principle of the proposed law, and sent them on to Ayatollah Montazeri, Khomeini's crown prince.

Montazeri also approved the main principles, and sent them on to the Qom theological school, which also approved the draft. It was then discussed and approved by the cabinet and presented to the parliament, or Majles.

So, at the end of 1982, it was announced that the draft was ready. The government refused, however, to publish the text. In the words

of the minister of heavy industry, Nabavi, "this bill is still in its draft stage ... It is not helpful to make it public ... We must not allow the counter-revolution, especially the left, to utilize this draft and the discussions around it for their own purposes." (*Keyhan*, November 24, 1982.)

When, later on, the draft was published the reasons for this reticence became clear. It is hard to imagine how they could have made it any more reactionary. The sole purpose of this bill was to encourage and legalize super-exploitation, and to entice the rich away from hoarding and speculation toward making investments.

Islamic capitalism in Iran meant simply increasing the working day as much as possible, cutting wages to the minimum, and spending as little as possible on machinery, etc.

In any case, investment in new machinery and the rationalization of production were impossible because of the shortage of foreign exchange and the lack of interest on the part of the capitalists in making any long-term investments.

In order, therefore, to promote an increase in the production of absolute surplus value, the new proposals were to allow the capitalist (called "the owner of work"!) to "hire out" the workers (called the "acceptors of work"!) on the basis of a "labour contract" between the individual worker and the individual capitalist (all forms of collective bargaining were considered un-Islamic).

The hours of work, wages, benefits, retirement age, pensions, etc. were all to be set by the contract, and no legal safeguards (even those accepted in the shah's labour laws) were deemed to be Islamic.

The premier, Musavi, said: "It is only natural that support for the farmers or workers or any *mostazaf* [disinherited] layer, must be within the framework of Islamic principles. We cannot ask the *Karfarma* [literally, the person who orders work, i.e. the capitalist] to guarantee his workers to give such and such a number of holidays or to pay such and such minimum wages." (*Keyhan*, November 9, 1982.)

In response to protest that the law favoured the rich, the deputy minister of labour proudly proclaimed, "In Islam there is no contradiction between wealth and poverty. But there is a contradiction between Islam and paganism." (*Keyhan*, November 9 1982.)

In reply to charges that the law was based on antiquated conceptions, the minister himself, said: "Work relations have not changed in essence

since the time Imam Ali [who lived in the seventh century AD] hired himself out to a Jew and [the situation of] today's Iran National workers. They have simply broadened." (*Keyhan*, December 22, 1982)

The protests against the new law, however, were so widespread that all of these gentlemen and their retainers had to eat their words a few months later. Even many of the Islamic Anjomans had to denounce the Islamic labour laws.

Many petitions were signed and sent to the authorities. (For example, the steel workers in Esfahan collected 20 thousand signatures.) In many factories, commissions were set up to study the proposed bill and prepare a list of criticisms (we know of at least 75).

Victory

In a lot of cases, leading figures in the regime were forced to go to the factories to try to explain the "virtues" of the new bill. The protests continued, nonetheless, to mount.

The heat became so intense that the Islamic Anjomans were obliged to organize a national seminar to discuss the bill and to propose amendments. It was held on March 2 and 3, 1983.

The esteemed ayatollahs, such as Montazeri, who had all certified the Islamic orthodoxy of the bill were obliged to say that they had had nothing to do with it. Some even went so far as to say that it might not, after all, be that Islamic (for example, Ardabili).

The government, for its part, said that it would consider all proposals to amend the bill. Before the Iranian New Year (on March 19), they announced that the bill was being withdrawn. (And later, the minister of labour, Tavakoli, himself lost his job.)

Once again, the government of the bourgeois mullahs had underestimated the working class. A year and a half of butchery had not cowed the workers to the extent that they could be forced to accept such draconian labour laws. The defeat of the regime over this bill had important results.

Not only did the regime lose its last vestiges of popular support among the working class but the workers themselves become more confident of their ability to resist the capitalist regime despite the repression. Thus, the following period, which I will take up in my next article, saw a sharp rise in workers struggles. □

The struggle for national liberation in its twenty - fifth year

IN THE midst of the barrage of media reporting on the appalling drought and famine in Ethiopia, one aspect of the region's politics has been almost totally ignored - that of the wars being waged against the Ethiopian regime by the Sidamo and Oromo ethnic groupings inside Ethiopia, by the Tigreans in Tigre province, and by the Eritreans in what is currently the province of Eritrea. (1) The latter war is now in its twenty-fifth year, making it the longest running war on the continent. The Eritrean revolution has, against all odds, been developing rapidly, a fact which probably accounts for the continued wall of silence from most of the world press. The author of the following article has recently returned from working on an education project in the country.

PAUL WORCESTER

The Eritrean fight for the right to self-determination goes back a long way and involved a struggle against both Italian and British imperialism. Economically and socially, Eritrea developed in a radically different direction from the rest of Ethiopia after Italian colonisation of this former Ethiopian territory had been formally recognised in 1889.

The British defeated the Italians in 1941 and administered Eritrea until 1952. They were supposed to administer the territory on behalf of the allied powers, but they pushed their own plan forward - partition between the Sudan, which they ruled, and Ethiopia. Britain was in the powerful position of controlling Egypt, the Sudan, and Aden [now South Yemen], plus being a power in Ethiopia. Control of the Suez Canal, the Red Sea and thereby the trade routes to India and the Far East were British imperialism's main concern. Given that Eritrea occupied such a strategic position on the Red Sea, with a 1,500 kilometre coastline, plus the only two ports between Sudan and present day Djibouti, imperialism could not afford the luxury of Eritrean independence.

All the Eritrean political parties favoured a unified Eritrea and were opposed to partition even though some wanted union with Ethiopia, others independence and others an international trusteeship. Since the four powers (Britain, the USSR,

the USA and France) could not agree among themselves on Eritrea's future, the issue finally went to the United Nations.

The eventual outcome of the United Nations discussion was for federation. Nevertheless according to the final resolution the Eritreans were supposed to get 'the fullest respect and safeguards for their institutions, tradition, religions, and languages, as well as the widest possible measure of self-government'. What actually happened was that by 1962 Eritrea was annexed to Ethiopia.

The Eritrean Liberation Movement began their activity in late 1958. Severe repression led many Eritrean workers to emigrate to the Sudan and Saudi Arabia. These exiles founded the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF). Egypt's Nasser welcomed the Muslim-dominated front, and provided military training. The ELF's political line was unclear, and discipline very weak. No attempts were made to develop a programme on such crucial issues as land reform, and there was no internal democracy under Idris Mohammed Adem's dictatorial leadership. New members from among the young educated Eritreans of the urban centres reacted against this, and they were persecuted and expelled but not before the Ethiopian army had launched a devastating military offensive which drove tens of thousands of Eritrean peasants into exile in the

Sudan. Out of three groups which split away from the ELF in 1969, two joined together in April 1970 to form the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF).

To begin with the EPLF was very small and had to contend, not only with the Ethiopian army, but also the ELF (whose leadership named itself the ELF-Revolutionary Council), which launched the first of two civil wars against it in 1972. The conservative Arab states which backed the ELF (RC) were terrified of the increasingly revolutionary policies of the EPLF.

Tensions developed within the EPLF itself, and an opposition group was expelled in 1975. Following this the EPLF's foreign bureau head, Osman Salih Sabbe, signed an unauthorised unity agreement with the ELF in 1976, and was expelled. He set up the Eritrean Liberation Front - People's Liberation Forces (ELF-PLF). The rift was over an important issue; Sabbe was worried that the EPLF's Marxist policies would alienate support from the West and the conservative Arab states. The EPLF, on the other hand, did not trust the ELF and its backers, and wanted full political independence, even if that meant losing the support of countries such as Saudi Arabia who might have otherwise supported it.

Until 1981 the ELF (RC) and the ELF-PLF had considerable influence with the former having substantial presence in the field. There was great concern from the Arab states at the increasing Soviet, and Cuban, involvement in Ethiopia. They pressurised the EPLF, ELF and ELF-PLF to unite in considering an autonomous Eritrea as part of a federal arrangement with Ethiopia.

EPLF refuse to compromise

The EPLF could not agree with their framework for this. Their conditions for negotiations were that the Dergue [the military body ruling Ethiopia] must agree to "resolve the Eritrean question peacefully and begin negotiations without pre-conditions." They opposed regional autonomy and demanded that negotiations should be held with the "joint supreme leadership" of the ELF and EPLF.

It became clear to all that the EPLF would not compromise its political line, and since 1981 intense efforts have been made by the conservative Arab states to unify the non-

1. Tigre is in the North of Ethiopia. In 1983/4 the Tigrean People's Liberation Front has made some important advances. Other liberation movements include the Oromos, the Afars and the Somalis.

EPLF factions. Early this year a Unity conference was held in Khartoum, without much success. It remains the case that the various factions receive large funds from their shifting backers [in the region] to continue their diplomatic activities, and, in the case of the ELF, their harassment of the EPLF, where possible. A positive development took place in 1982 when oppositionists among the ELF who had been driven into the Sudan by the EPLF in 1981 formed a new body, the ELF (Central Command), with the name meaning "We shall return". After discussions with the EPLF, they returned to Eritrea and carried out joint activities with the EPLF, whilst maintaining their own organisation. At the time of writing, further talks have taken place between the two bodies and a complete merger seems likely.

The EPLF acknowledges unspecified support from the Somali government, at war with the Dergue over the huge disputed Ogaden region of southern Ethiopia. The Sudanese government tolerate EPLF presence in the Sudan and use of Sudanese territory to transport supplies from Port Sudan into Eritrea, although there have been talks between the Dergue and the new Sudanese regime. The Dergue would like to see Sudan close Port Sudan to the Eritrean Relief Association for the importing of food aid; this would be a big blow, and could only be overcome by expensive camel trains across the extensive border. In return, the Dergue has hinted that it would stop supplying the Sudan People's Liberation Army led by Colonel John Garang in the South, which is fighting for some form of independence from Khartoum.

The EPLA, the military wing of the EPLF, now operates at division level, and in terms of experience and strategy is somewhat exceptional for a non professional army. The EPLF now controls about 75-80% of Eritrean territory. In February 1984, the EPLA defeated 20,000 Ethiopian troops in a 49-hour battle on the Red Sea coast, taking 3,000 prisoners, and followed this up in April of that year with a commando raid on the Dergue's air force at Asmara airport, destroying 33 planes and helicopters. In its current new offensive, the Dergue has withdrawn troops from Tigre and the East and, as well as attacking the EPLA, has carried out large scale bombings against the local peasantry, maintaining its scorched earth policy of driving the peasantry off the land in terror and thus trying to weaken the EPLF's support base. The recent retaking by Ethiopian forces of Tessenei also constitutes a big, hopefully temporary, setback.

However the almost totally conscript Ethiopian army, with its many unwilling and demoralised recruits, will find it extremely difficult to inflict a long term defeat on the highly motivated and disciplined EPLA forces. Recent very large shipments of weaponry, artillery and aircraft from the Soviet Union have probably replaced those lost to EPLA forces over the past 18 months. One third of the Dergue's budget is spent on arms, and it owes the Eastern bloc three billion dollars. This spending ratio is one of the highest in the world in a country whose national income per head is only 111 dollars, making it one of the world's poorest.

Strategic interests are behind the Soviet Union's blank cheque policy toward the Dergue. It has no other ally in this key area. Its massive naval bases on the Eritrean Red Sea islands are crucial for its Indian Ocean fleet, with the Red Sea also providing access to the Indian Ocean and beyond for all Soviet ships based at the Black Sea bases. The Soviet Union has switched from actively supporting the Somali government against the Ethiopians up till 1977, (and supporting Eritrean independence in the 1950s and 1960s) to being the Dergue's principal backer, and ruthlessly supporting it against the Eritreans.

The position of Cuba is that until 1975 the Cubans provided training facilities for the Eritrean liberation movements. This support for Eritrean self determination changed, however,

after 1977, when Cuba sent several thousand troops to Ethiopia to assist in the Ogaden war, once the USSR had switched sides away from Somalia. Castro refused to commit Cuban troops to Eritrea, saying that Eritrea was an internal Ethiopian problem which needed a political solution, not a military one. However, this position contains grave problems. Cuban troops are highly trained and disciplined; by stationing several thousand in Ethiopia, this released the equivalent number of crack Ethiopian troops (a rare commodity) to fight against the Eritreans. This is why the EPLF, whilst acknowledging the domestic gains of the Cuban revolution, are highly critical of their presence in Ethiopia.

The programme of the EPLF

The EPLF's programme has concentrated on land reform; women's rights; literacy and education; and health care. Land reform efforts are aimed at redistributing land from landlords and the rich peasantry. In one area captured from the ELF in 1981, all previously landless people have received land with areas set aside for communal cultivation. However, the drought and famine have wreaked havoc, and many peasants in the drought areas have been put in temporary displacement camps, with the Eritrean Relief Association (linked



with the EPLF) distributing food aid. Current plans have led to large areas in the fertile South West river zones, being planted with new seed, with dykes and irrigation canals constructed, in a big collective programme. EPLF policy towards nomads is to resettle them where possible and teach them peasant farming methods.

The drive for women's rights is a high priority; about 35% of EPLF members are women, and on the adult literacy campaign 45% of participants are women. Of these one third are nomadic women, an extremely oppressed sector. Sections of the campaign deal with the importance of integrating women, aimed at both the women themselves and also at the traditionally hostile male peasantry and nomadic sector. There are also courses on discrimination and women's rights within the EPLF's political education programme, with cadres having the right to openly criticise any member at any time.

Up until now, the EPLF's emphasis has been that women can free themselves by being involved in the productive process, with a low role being assigned to the importance of ideology in women's oppression. This seems to have led to some criticism, as has the fact that there are as yet no women members of the EPLF Central Committee; and within the Department of Mass Administration only three members out of twenty were assigned to the question of women's oppression. However, the Department did carry out an extensive study throughout the liberated areas on the ways in which women are oppressed.

In spite of incredible hardships and lack of materials, the EPLF education programme has made very impressive strides in the past few years. There are now 104 schools teaching 15,000 students — a figure which sounds low, but large areas of the countryside were until recently not under EPLF control. The first ever technical school has just opened, and all curricula are developed from scratch by the Education Department.

The literacy campaign has suffered from displacement caused by the drought and famine. However, plans are underway for the extension of the campaign to the displaced people's camps. Meanwhile, shortages of real basics like paper, pens etc. is a big barrier to development. All classrooms are camouflaged to protect against air raids. In one attack last November [1984] five children were killed. Students help build their own rooms, as well as help in major projects in some areas. Their commitment to the revolution is strong; six to eight year olds have left home to join the EPLF, and the ones I met were delighted to receive education for the

first time. Youth are organised in Youth Assemblies, as are women, peasants and traders. There are also Village Assemblies, which decide on local policy, including justice. EPLF members can be members of the relevant association, but not leaders of the village assembly.

Transport is another area which needs a great deal of organisation; the route from Port Sudan into Eritrea is across a fearsome desert, with no road. Inside Eritrea roads have been hand built, including across mountains. Fuel is transported in tankers from the Sudan and distributed to camouflaged storage areas, which dispense it to the food aid trucks and EPLF vehicles. Most travel takes place at night, as the slow moving trucks with their trail of dust are easily spotted by roving MIG aircraft. It is painfully slow. Aid convoys take five days for a round trip from Port Sudan to the border, a distance of only about 200-250 kilometres one way. Inside Eritrea it can take another four days to reach some of the displaced camps. Until recently this whole operation was done with only 100 trucks, but new purchases and belated gifts by the West have doubled that number.

Eritrea starved of aid

Aid is still nowhere near the required level. In February the ERA got only 4.8% of the emergency aid it requested. It was recently disclosed in Washington that in May 1984 a confidential White House report was drawn up, saying that a disaster situation existed in Ethiopia — but that aid was deliberately withheld for political reasons. Most aid from governments since then has gone to Ethiopia, and not to Eritrea or Tigre, which have been the worst affected famine areas. This is part of a conspiracy to make Ethiopia dependent on Western food aid (this is why the US and British governments refuse to give any development aid to Ethiopia), while at the same time denying meaningful food aid to EPLF and TPLF areas. The USSR and Eastern bloc have provided transport facilities for Ethiopian food aid.

Up until recently, moreover, most of the major aid agencies, with notable exceptions like War on Want, have done very little in Eritrea for fear of losing their programmes in Ethiopia. This is beginning to slowly change. Band Aid is pledged to provide substantial support to Eritrea. In many places the drought has broken, and some planting of seeds has taken place (although seed shortages has been a major problem), and harvest-

ing will begin around November. It is then that the EPLF expects further massive attacks from the Dergue, with the Air Force attempting to destroy the year's harvest.

In the capital Asmara, the two ports of Assab and Mitsiwa, and other smaller towns which the Dergue controls, EPLF activity is carried out underground, a highly dangerous activity as there are many informers. Nevertheless, the EPLF does have a fair number of members in all the towns, but given the massive presence of the Ethiopian military their activities are limited. Mobile EPLF units operate within a few kilometres of the towns in some circumstances.

In the event of an outright EPLF victory, or a political settlement, current policy is for a referendum to establish whether or not full independence is wanted (there can not be much doubt about the outcome), then the setting up of a constituent assembly, with full rights for the other Eritrean factions, to discuss the country's future. There is little industry left in Eritrea, most of it having been dismantled by the Ethiopians and transported to Addis Ababa — and there seems to be a consensus in the EPLF not to rely on large scale economic development, or get heavily in overseas debt; they do not trust imperialism one bit. Much aid will be needed, though, and this is likely to generate debate when the time comes. Another thorny issue will be that of the huge Eritrean diaspora (displaced Eritreans living abroad), and the measures adopted to persuade those with much needed skills to return — should they be paid more? And given that there is no money economy within the EPLF, what form will payment take — will a new currency be established and will workers and peasants be paid in money?

At the moment, these issues obviously take second place to the task of winning the war. It is not possible to tell what debates are taking place on this issue, if any, although there may be a small number in favour of discussions with the Dergue.

What is clear is that imperialism will continue its cynical manipulation of the famine, with the interests of the Eritrean and Ethiopian masses very firmly at the bottom of their priorities. What is also clear is that the Soviet Union is firmly determined to help in the attempted genocide of the Eritrean people if their strategic interests are threatened. Unfortunately, it's also the case that internationally, the working class and its allies have failed to publicise and support the Eritrean revolution. If effective solidarity work is to be done, then that failure must be rapidly overcome. □

" The struggle had to take on both a national and a class character "

Interview with EPLF leader

THE FOLLOWING is an interview with Andebrhan W. Giorgis, the representative of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front in France. Giorgis is a member of the Central Committee of the EPLF.

Question. How was the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) formed?

Answer. The Eritrean question is first and foremost a question of decolonisation in Africa because Eritrea like Libya and others was a former Italian colony during the partition of Africa by the various European colonial powers.

Then in 1941 the Italian forces were defeated by the allied forces headed by the British in East Africa. Then Eritrea fell under British military occupation for about 11 years until 1952. In the late 1940s, after the Treaty of Paris, when the question of the disposal of the former Italian colonies was discussed by the four powers — France, the United States, the USSR and Great Britain, they agreed on the granting of independence to Libya and Somalia. But when it came to Eritrea, they disagreed because of its tremendous strategic importance. Because of the failure to agree, the problem was referred to the United Nations (UN). In the United Nations, of course, the United States, which became the new neo-colonial master of Haile Selassie's Ethiopia, had signed an agreement with Haile Selassie, to extend him military assistance in return for a military base in the Eritrean capital, Asmara.

In return for this the US would push for a federal association of Eritrea with Ethiopia, with the provision that eventually Ethiopia could annex Eritrea. Because of this agreement and despite, at that time, the opposition of various Third World and socialist countries led by the Soviet Union, demanding immediate independence for Eritrea, the US resolution was carried and Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia. In 1962 Haile Selassie unilaterally abrogated the federal resolution and annexed Eritrea, making it the fourth province of Ethiopia.

So, when you look at the Eritrean question from the historical and legal

point of view, it's very clear that the question is one of completing the process of decolonisation in Africa. Since the 1940s and 1950s, the Eritrean people, through various organs, tried to win their right to self-determination by peaceful political means.

In 1958 Eritrean workers, students and intellectuals participated in a demonstration led by the Syndicate of Eritrean Labour, and the Ethiopian army opened fire, wounding over 500 people. At that time it became clear that there was no possibility of regaining the right of self-determination by peaceful means, so the Eritrean Liberation Movement was created with the aim of making preparations to pursue armed struggle.

In 1961 when the armed struggle began, it broke out in Western Eritrea. The leadership of the Eritrean Liberation Front was feudal-bourgeois, unable to correctly understand the nature of Eritrean society and devise a programme of struggle which would group around it the various social forces. In other words the national liberation war must, at least in form, encompass and bring in all nationalist forces. In content it must be democratic. For the vast majority of Eritreans, who are workers and peasants, the question of independence does not mean replacement of an Ethiopian flag by an Eritrean flag, but a fundamental transformation of Eritrean society. So the struggle must be national and democratic at the same time. There should be a programme which would appeal to these forces, which would implement these aims.

In the beginning there was no such clear political line, either a national programme or a democratic programme. So there was internal conflict within the Front and this internal conflict, after many years, led to a split in 1970. So in 1970 you had the establishment of the Eritrean People's Liberation Front as

opposed to the Eritrean Liberation Front.

For 11 years there was virtually civil war. It was a question of political line; whether or not to pursue a clear national democratic strategy with a socialist orientation, waging the armed struggle but carrying out fundamental social changes at the same time in the liberated areas. The problem of land reform for example was not just a question of parcelling out the land but also of encouraging cooperative farming. There was the question of building schools, hospitals, the expansion of medical care, the fight against illiteracy and in a sense laying the groundwork for a new society.

So there were two forms of struggle; firstly armed struggle to liberate territory, to liberate more areas, more people, and at the same time a social, political and economic struggle to transform the old society into a new one. So the struggle had to take both a national and a class character. The ELF's position was; 'let's fight now, let's drive Ethiopian colonialism out first and then we'll think about class struggle, after independence.' This was a very classic stages theory. For us the whole thing had to go together. This in general is our basic policy.

Q. Could you elaborate on the nature of Eritrean society? Also could you give more information on the type of organisation built up in the liberated areas?

A. To understand Eritrean society today one should also go back a little to the period of Italian domination, especially under the fascists after the rise of Mussolini. He had a design to create a huge East African, Italian empire, and Eritrea would serve as a springboard. So there began a process of rapid industrialisation; railroads, highways were constructed, ports were expanded, cities created, factories established. With the result that in a relatively short period of time, from 1925 till 1940, there took place a rapid industrialisation, to the extent that by the 1940s the Eritrean population was about 20 per cent urbanised. This was one of the highest rates of urbanisation in the Third World.

There developed this process of economic integration. Various parts of Eritrea were brought together, through communications, urbanisation and industrialisation. People from different walks of life, from the different parts and the different nationalities were brought together. This created the nucleus of Eritrean nationalism.

So there you have the basis for Eritrean nationalism with a new

social force as its vanguard. But this means that 80% of the population are peasants. About 60-70% of those are workers, then petty bourgeois, etc. So you can describe Eritrean society basically as feudal-capitalist. In the countryside there are feudal relations of production.

In our national democratic programme we try to ensure the leading role of the proletariat. The consolidation of the leading role of the working class can be guaranteed only if there is strong worker-peasant alliance, in which, of course, revolutionary intellectuals also play an important role. So in a sense when we speak of the national democratic revolution in Eritrea, it's a revolution which seeks to liberate Eritrea from Ethiopian colonialism but simultaneously seeks to liberate the Eritrean people from backwardness — not only feudalism, but also capitalism. We describe our front as a national democratic front with socialist tendencies.

Q. Would you say then that the liberated areas represent any kind of prefiguration of a future society?

A. What I can say to you now is that the liberated areas comprise at least 85% of Eritrea. There exists there a government without a state. We have a very well-organised infrastructure that functions throughout the liberated areas. We have a series of schools and hospitals. We have what we would regard as the future industrial base of Eritrea and we manufacture most of the things we need including medical supplies etc. So economically, socially and politically we have the embryo of a functioning state system.

I can give you more detail of how we organise at the village level in the liberated areas. You see, although we believe we represent the people, we are fighting in order that the people themselves can decide their future. So at the village level, there is the People's Assembly which functions autonomously. It elects its own leaders. The general assembly as a whole elects its own executive committee with sub-committees responsible for security, for land, for administration, for the militia etc, etc. So you have that at the village level, which goes down to the street level, and then up to the nationwide level — the assembly, the legislative body, which also elects the executive of the government.

In terms of land reform the peasantry are divided into three types; the poor, the middle and the rich peasants. For our political education programme, and for our guiding work, we work towards the seizure of political power by the poorest sections of the peasantry, in alliance with the middle peasantry. Of course the rich



«There are now 104 schools with 15,000 students ...» (DR)

peasants, inasmuch as they accept our programme of land redistribution, they are welcome to participate in the national democratic revolution.

Ours is one of the longest struggles for national liberation in history. From 1961 until say, 1974, the struggle was basically a guerilla struggle. From 1974 until 1976, it was mobile more or less. From 1976 to 1978, or until now, the last nine years it has been conventional warfare. But all the time we waged three kinds of warfare. We waged positional warfare, trench warfare to defend the liberated areas including the liberated towns and we waged mobile warfare, to destroy Ethiopian garrisons in the contested zones and to liberate more territory. And then we kept up also guerilla warfare in different parts of Eritrea, to hamper the enemies' supply and communication lines.

There are no accurate statistics, or at least, I don't have any. But to give you an example of how costly this war is: in 1982, the Ethiopians launched their first official big offensive — the sixth offensive or operation Red Star. During four months of continuous offensives they lost all the battles and they lost 43,000 men killed and missing. From July 7, when we liberated the town of Barentu in 51 days of fighting they lost 11,450 men — of which 4,200 were killed and 1,050 captured and 6,000 injured. There are now about 10,500 Ethiopian officers and men who are captured prisoners of war. To get the overall number of killed and wounded you multiply that at least 15 or twenty times. For our part also, in terms of civilian casualties the liberation war must have cost about 100,000 people. On the Ethiopian side for 1984 the head of the political department of the Ethiopian army gave the figure that from 1978 until 1984 the Ethiopians had

lost about 150,000 to 200,000 men. The war is mostly close hand-to-hand combat. The Ethiopians have superiority in mechanised warfare — they have more tanks, more artillery. We neutralise that by fighting at close range, with mostly hand grenades.

Q. At the end of the 1970s there were Cuban and Soviet officers and advisers engaged. As far as you know, what is the situation now?

A. By October 1977 we had liberated most of Eritrea including most of the major towns except the capital and four other garrisons. At that time the Ethiopian army was completely defeated. Until that time it was supported by the United States and Israel. It was defeated and the fall of Asmara was just a matter of time. But at that juncture, there came about large-scale Soviet intervention. The Cuban army came but it was mainly engaged in the war in Ogaden against Somalia. What came to Eritrea was mechanised units of the South Yemeni army, the East German army and Soviet advisers and about 3,000 military experts. The whole Ethiopian effort was led by Marshall Wassily Petrov, the deputy defence minister of the Soviet Union and commander of the Soviet ground forces, who was coordinating the Ethiopian offensives. At that time the character of the war changed. It was no longer Eritreans and Ethiopians because the Ethiopians were defeated. It was against the intervention of a major power and its allies. We made an assessment of the balance of forces and we made a strategic withdrawal. We withdrew to the North where the terrain would help us neutralise the mechanised advantage. Since then from June/July 1978 until the end of 1983 we were waging a defensive war.

The Ethiopians, supported by the Soviet Union, the Libyans, the South

Yemenis and the East Germans were trying to capture our strategic bases including Naksa, the provincial capital of the second largest province in Eritrea which has become, since its liberation in March 1977 the symbol of Eritrean resistance. They conducted seven large-scale offensives against Naksa and the strategic base in the North West. This all failed. We were able to successfully defend our liberated areas and our strategic base and from January 1984 we entered a new phase. We call it the stage of transition from the defensive to the strategic offensive. In this context we liberated the town of Tessenei in January 1984. We liberated North Eastern Sahel — the coastal strip in March 1984. And in a brilliant operation against the Ethiopian Air Force Base in Asmari we destroyed 33 Ethiopian planes on the ground and we have been pushing on all fronts. Last July we liberated the town of Barentu as well.

So generally, we have been able to bring about a shift in the balance of forces. We are not really on the offensive yet but we are on the verge of the offensive. This stage of transition may take time, may require several engagements: maybe we will liberate towns, withdraw, liberate others or advance, it depends on the relation of forces at any given moment in the particular locality. It means that virtually the whole population is mobilised.

Q. Did the Russians and the East Germans and the South Yemenis and Cubans increase their presence recently?

A. The East Germans and Yemenis, yes. But the Cubans, no. They have refused to participate in the sixth offensive. They said the Eritrean question is something else — 'We can't fight the Eritreans.' They play a role in Somalia which is also indirect participation here because they have thousands of troops in the Ogaden so the Ethiopian army can shift its forces to Eritrea. So you have an indirect intervention. So you can't say the Cubans don't play a role — but not directly in Eritrea.

Q. What kind of role do women play in the struggle?

A. Women play perhaps an extraordinary role. About 30% of our army is made up of women. Women hold positions in the Front at all levels. There is no department in the EPLF in which women do not play a very important role. They are fighters, commanders, they are in the various departments. They are leading cadres etc. Those who have visited areas where national liberation movements have been active — Vietnam, China, Angola, Mozambique, say that the

actual role of women is most advanced in Eritrea. Despite the fact that in some regions of Eritrea there is an extremely feudal tradition — in some areas women cannot even look at their husbands — they are always veiled, despite this in these areas women are now leaders in the People's Assemblies. The changes in the role of women in Eritrean society are really revolutionary. In the Front and in Eritrean society as a whole, we have been able to destroy all legal barriers to equality. We have been able to set up the essential infrastructures that will eventually lead to total liberation. We believe that the guarantee for women's equality is their role in the production process. That lays the essential groundwork. But the struggle has to continue. We cannot be complacent.

Q. What have been the consequences of the famine on the liberation struggle?

A. For the last four years there has been no rain. There has been severe drought. The worst hit has been Northern Ethiopia and Eritrea. In Northern Ethiopia about one million people died. Eritrea has been the worst hit but we have been able to save hundreds of thousands of people through our efforts.

In Eritrea the problem of the famine is not a consequence of natural disaster alone, it is also a product of the Ethiopian war policy. Throughout the liberated areas the Ethiopian Air Force bombards the farms, the schools, the hospitals. The military regime seeks to use famine as a weapon to force the Eritrean people to capitulate and to weaken their resistance. There is a drought but if there had been peace then we have resources which we could harness. All we need is concrete and steel to build dams. To a large extent the disaster in Ethiopia and Eritrea is man-made because all human and material resources are being diverted for war.

We are trying to secure our human and democratic rights as a people and the Ethiopians are trying to deny us this right. We wage a just war and the Ethiopians wage an unjust war but the consequences are disastrous. There is a lot of destruction. The Ethiopians destroy villages in the liberated areas, they destroy storage units, they destroy even the dams we have built to irrigate. So the Ethiopian war effort has contributed tremendously to the famine.

For our part we have tried to minimise its effects. Throughout 1985, for instance, we have been concentrating on providing assistance for people. Our main priority is the war but also a lot of our effort has gone into alleviating the problem of the famine.

We have established 43 feeding centres in the liberated areas. We prevented people from crossing the border in the Sudan and with the help of the Eritrean Relief Association we have been able to provide for these people. But the aid we have been getting has not been enough so we cannot say we have solved the problem.

Q. What kind of international aid have you received?

A. We have received help from the Scandinavian countries and from non-governmental organisations in Europe and North America. Initially the aid was about 5% and it is now 15%. Compared to the need it is virtually nothing. We have also called on the Ethiopian government for a ceasefire. The Ethiopian government has received a lot of humanitarian assistance which it uses to feed its army. We have appealed to non governmental organisations and even to governments who provide assistance to distribute it themselves. We are for a ceasefire so that these organisations can distribute in the Ethiopian controlled areas as well as in the liberated areas. The Ethiopians have refused this offer of a ceasefire. We have also called for a peaceful resolution of the Eritrean question. The problem of famine and drought have been aggravated by the Ethiopian refusal to accept our proposals and by their continuing war policy which seeks to destroy everything in the liberated areas. Their policy is to starve us into submission, to force people to go into the Sudan — this is their policy. □

Famine is not just a national disaster (DR)



Military leaders on trial - the issues at stake

THE TRIAL in the federal court of nine military leaders involved in the three juntas which terrorised Argentinian society from 1976 to 1982 has now been going on since April 22 this year. They are being tried under the December 1983 decree No 158 on charges of serious violation of human rights. This is a new occurrence in Argentina which for the last half century has suffered frequent military coups. (1)

A further 1,700 members of the military are still awaiting trial but thousands more have been let off the hook on the grounds that they were merely 'obeying orders'.

The nine were brought to trial in a civil court after attempts by President Raul Alfonsin to persuade the military to undergo a 'self-purification'. The armed forces refused to condemn its own and a military tribunal found the men not guilty.

Although Alfonsin's Radical Party was re-elected on November 3 this year with an increased majority, the issue of the military will remain a key one for this government.

HORACIO MIGUENS

It is clear that for the present Radical Party government, as for any bourgeois government, the armed forces are a key component of political power. This is especially so in backward societies like Argentina's. But what kind of armed forces does this constitutionally elected government need?

The chaotic situation in which the Argentinian republic found itself following the crisis of the military dictatorship had three basic elements; an unpayable foreign debt of getting on for 45 billion dollars; a bloody and blind repression involving 30,000 disappeared people; thousands of deaths and political prisoners and an embarrassing military defeat in the Malvinas war in 1982. This defeat undermined the prestige of the Argentinian armed forces to such an extent that it was reflected in a popular slogan which declared; 'They're no use to the government, they're no use for war, the murdering military aren't even any use for shit ...'

The motor force of the fight against the dictatorship was undoubtedly the movement for human rights. The fight against the dictatorship always raises the question of the

character of democracy in a backward and dependent country, and, whether consciously or not, goes beyond what bourgeois democracy is prepared to offer the masses in such a situation. The particular form of the repression against popular resistance, involving mass murder and near genocide, is not easily obscured even in the long-term.

The Alfonsin government therefore has a double objective. First it must make the military hierarchy acceptable, not only to the bourgeois institutions but among the whole of the working population and for that it has to dismantle the putschist and reactionary sections of the army which still represent a threat to the actual continuation of constitutional democracy itself. On the other hand it must prevent the demands of the Argentinian people for human rights from going too far and it must channel their democratic aspirations in a certain direction. To do this the government has to grab from the people the legitimate mantle of justice and liberty.

Thus we can see the general framework in which official strategy is operating. It involves protecting the

armed forces as an instrument for defending bourgeois institutions and at the same time preventing the collapse of those institutions in the face of the vast popular hostility towards the armed forces. The government has to simultaneously try to reduce the people's capacity to respond and rebel by integrating the demands of the vanguard into its own projects.

To begin with, therefore, the government was simply demanding a purification of the armed forces, a 'self-cleansing' as the precondition for reintegrating them, with full rights, into their place in the political power structure. At the same time the government could drive a wedge into the movement for human rights, sowing confusion and dividing that movement by getting it to go through the institutions of the bourgeois state. (2)

Hoping for this self purification of the military, the Radical Party government demanded the trial of only those involved in the first three military juntas and of those only nine amongst the thousands of murderers and torturers. The others, it was claimed in an official statement had, 'limited themselves to obeying orders'.

So according to Alfonsin's reasoning, 'those most politically responsible for the excesses' were to be judged for the time being by military law in military courts. This was seen as a first step towards the necessary self-rehabilitation of the armed forces.

The armed forces are used to exercising political power directly and not just defending it; this was how their particular interests developed. And above all at officer and non-commissioned officer level they were involved in savage repression at the time, in what they called the 'pact of blood'.

The armed forces therefore have no interest in this self-punishment, because to condemn individual leaders is to blame the entire military institution. Equally they have no interest in even recognising their faults: 'A victorious army is not accountable', military leaders point out.

So the different sections of the military reacted very negatively to the government's initiatives: they justified 'what was done against subversion'; they criticised and insulted the work of the National Commission on Missing Persons (CONADEP). This body was created by presidential decree to enquire into and get information on the

1. *The first coup d'etat was in 1930 and then in 1943, 1955, 1962, 1966 and 1976. Since 1952, the date when the first presidency of General Juan Peron ended, no president has finished a term of office.*

2. See 'International Viewpoint' No 75 May 6, 1985.

character of the repression. The military demanded that a larger part of the budget should be allocated to military spending. Furthermore, on the rare occasions when open trials against members of the military took place in the civil courts, they set up obstacles. In the face of outright hostility from society as a whole and signs of intense dismay from political circles, especially the government, the armed forces closed ranks and the military judges finally declared the members of the three juntas innocent.

The case for the defence

So Alfonsín's first initiative turned out badly; the military proved allergic to self-purification and would have to be cleaned up by force. The obstinate refusal of the military left no choice for the Radical Party administration; the Federal Chamber would have to take on the judiciary procedure.

The clever official attempt to establish an alternative conception of human rights was to succeed for a time in sowing confusion and demobilising the leadership of the masses. However, CONADEP's report went a lot further than the government had anticipated and stimulated more awareness among large sections of the population. The first three editions of a print run of several thousand copies of the report, entitled *Nunca Mas* (Never Again), ran out in only two weeks last December. To date 170,000 copies have been distributed.

The provocative character of the absolution of the juntas by the military court and the permanent and persistent attempts of the security services have brought to light the continuing existence of a repressive apparatus. This coincides with a reactivation of the human rights movement following the opening of the civil trial in April 1985. Sections of the population were also beginning to understand Alfonsín's game. The danger of this was written into the whole strategy he adopted since it was inevitably carried out under conditions of relative democracy. The recent exposure of his actions to public scrutiny created a new awareness which saw through to the true character of the 'fight against subversion' and the trials.

The prosecutor general, Strassera 'will first of all try to show how the accused tried to hide the facts; then he will try to show the facts; and then he will try to show that the accused, even if they deny having given the relevant orders, cannot protest their ignorance and therefore cannot justify the fact that they

took no measures to prevent such conduct.' (3) To express it in the rarefied language of the chief assassins, the public ministry will try to prove that those who committed this repression 'made war because of a doctrine and under written orders from a superior command.'

'We never needed a paramilitary organisation which some people accuse us of,' stated General S. Rivero to the Interamerican Junta for Defense in Washington on January 24, 1980, adding straight away that the repression 'was conducted by the generals, admirals and brigadiers-generals in each force. It was not conducted by such and such a dictator or such and such a dictatorship, as we try to make international public opinion believe ... the war was conducted by the military junta in the country through their commanders in chief'. (4)

The military leaders' defence counsel is made up of 21 lawyers for nine accused and it does not act as a bloc because each lawyer is only concerned with saving his own client and not the military dictatorship as a whole. As there is obviously no margin of manoeuvre for a global political defence, they realise that it is a matter of every man for himself. And with this search for an individual strategy has appeared acrimony and personal and political differences between the ex-commanders. There is Massera who swears that Videla is 'a son of a bitch', there is Harguindeguy, Videla's minister of the interior who replies in the same vein that 'This is the work of that ... son of a bitch, Massera.'

The enormous weight of evidence and the import of the statements of prosecution witnesses which are never contradicted and which show a great memory and precision, contrast starkly with the faltering and forgetfulness, the contradiction and the refusal to answer of most of the witnesses for the defence. All this has forced the defence counsel to change tactics and go for attempts to challenge the conduct of the trial.

During the hearing several protests have been made, claims of violation of the rights of the defence and even a demand for the suspension of the trial. These are the only real arguments being used by the counsel defending these torturers. In the face of this, the tremendous power of the testimonies presented by prosecution witnesses has unmasked the premeditated and organised terror that the people (and even some leaders of the bourgeoisie) were subjected to by the most cruel and reactionary dictatorship Argentina has ever seen.

Orgeira, the defence counsel for General Viola, one of the most compromised of the military leaders,

served as an example to his colleagues through his methods of defence which aimed to influence public opinion. The defence asserted that in Argentina a 'war had opened up' and that in times of war 'anything is justified.' He backed up this argument by the, at times, barely disguised allegation that all the disappeared were subversive terrorists, or that such and such a prosecution witness was involved in 'political or trade-union activity'.

The accused were forced to use such methods in order to try and defend such crimes as kidnapping, rape, assassination, pillage and theft from the homes of the disappeared; and even to defend the kidnapping and handing over to the military (sometimes in the form of commercial traffic) of some 200 children of 'subversives'.

All these horrifying details have come out in the last 16 and a half weeks of witnesses' evidence in the 282 cases presented by the prosecutor Strassera. No one would have any doubt in Argentina today that these delinquents should be condemned to prison in perpetuity without further ado, if it were not for the political notoriety of the accused with all that that implies in terms of compromising wide government circles and the danger of creating precedents for future judiciary action.

Several statements have come forward confirming the accusations of torture. 'Videla knew what was going on' asserted Robert Cox, the ex-director of the *Buenos Aires Herald* in his evidence on April 29. 'Camps and Etchecolatz were the first to interrogate me' affirmed Jacobo Timmermann, a former head of the newspaper *La Opinion*, in the witness stand on May 3, 1985. 'I was able to recognise General Camps', declared Alfredo Bravo a former trade-union leader and currently working for Alfonsín's administration, on May 8. Some military staff confirmed these testimonies. Carlos Hours, a former officer and deputy police inspector in the province of Buenos Aires, recalled that 'Haroldo Conti, the journalist and writer, was dragged along the floor till his arms were raw'. A previous military ruler between 1971 and 1973, General Lanusse confessed on May 13 that 'Massera said that what happened to Sajon (press representative from 1971 to 1972) was done in full recognition of the consequences and with the authorisation of the junta.' (5)

3. 'Diario del Juicio', a bourgeois commercial weekly, Buenos Aires, 27 May 1985.

4. Quoted in 'Nueva Presencia', a democratic weekly of the Jewish community in Argentina, No 412, May 24, 1985.

5. All the quotations are from the 'Diario del Juicio', Nos 1 to 16.

Testimonies of this nature are legion. They represent just one aspect of the terrifying repression exercised by the military dictatorship as a means of crushing the population and imposing an economic model which would serve the interests of the financial oligarchy and, to a lesser extent, of the whole of the Argentinian bourgeoisie. The testimonies allow us to have at least a slight appreciation of the impact which these revelations along with those which appeared in the CONADEP report, had on the Argentinian people.

The broad awareness of the masses, amplified by a rejection of repressive measures which constitute a real crime against humanity, are linked to a wider understanding. For sections of the masses the 'fight against subversion'; the economic plans of Martinez de Hoz, Videla's minister of finance; or the irresponsible adventure in the Malvinas are all part and parcel of a huge lie and represent an attack against the entire Argentinian people. This has been one of the most immediate effects of the trial.

At the same time the witnesses have been able to show that it was not a matter of errors or excesses and that there were not just nine or 12 people responsible. In the opinion of the former chief superintendant of Federal Security (the training service of the federal police force), Armando Luchin 'there were no excesses as some try to argue. Everything was ordered from above, by the state itself. So torture was premeditated and under orders, it was not the action of subordinates going too far.' (6)

The government changes tack

The trial has demonstrated to the Argentinian people that the repression was carefully planned and that it was implemented against all oppositionists or dissidents whether they were workers, housewives, intellectuals, artists etc. It has shown that it was not just the higher echelons of the system but whole sections of the military who were involved and that the vast majority of officers and non-commissioned officers were implicated at the time. Basically the armed forces constituted a virtual apparatus of extermination, a legitimised terrorist state.

And it was here that the government itself became ensnared in its own trap. In contrast to the escape route which Alfonsin originally hoped for in order to ensure the effectiveness and continuity of the repressive apparatus, the trial, which was con-

ceived of as being the end of the matter for the government, has sparked off wide discussion and has brought about a certain clarification in the minds of the people.

Furthermore, this clarification does not just concern the role played by the military because the Church hierarchy, the trade union bureaucracy, bourgeois politicians and judges have also appeared as accomplices according to evidence at the trial. 'Thus we saw the apostolic nuncio playing tennis with Massera whilst French nuns and catechists were being tortured and assassinated in the ESMA (the Naval Engineering School). We were able to see Monsignor Grasselli handling the file of disappeared persons as if it was a shopping list; or Lopez Rega preventing Suarez Mason from being put into retirement. We saw politicians who, in other circumstances, had been prepared to give their blessing to genocide now seeking to become champions of the cause of human rights; or trade union bureaucrats suddenly amnesic and ignorant of the crimes committed against the working class and its leaders; judges who delayed people seeking a writ of *habeas corpus* in their offices -- people who later found themselves among the missing; ambassadors who closed their doors to those being persecuted in order not to get in bad standing with the dictatorship and many other things as well.' (7)

The government's objective was two-fold; on the one hand to get the armed forces to purify themselves and at the same time to control the movement for human rights. This double goal contained an internal contradiction between the need to reach an understanding with the military high-ups and the need to take on board democratic interests. It was this contradiction that made it impossible for the government to keep the situation developing around the trial totally under its control. For instance the CONADEP report largely contradicted, not only the arguments put forward by the dictatorship but also even Alfonsin's statements.

It has therefore become necessary for the administration to change tack in two parallel directions. It must put a stop to the debate which is animating the population by reaching some kind of consensus, if that is still possible. In order to save the necks of the middle ranks in the army who are implicated through the evidence at the trial, the whole concept of the duty to obey must be reformulated in order to adapt it to the latest revelations. This formula initially acted as a safety

valve but following the revelations of the extent and nature of the crimes committed by subordinate military personnel, the concept has now become inadequate.

At the same time Alfonsin's government is also looking for a second option in developing the idea of a possible future exchange of prisoners between the two parties. There remain 14 political prisoners inherited from the dictatorship plus three added by Alfonsin, who have still not been released, doubtless to safeguard the possibility of a future amnesty which would apply to those currently in gaol and to those condemned military men who were not part of any group of former commanders. The implementation of one or other of these measures will depend on the development of the situation and on the government's margin for manoeuvre.

'Within our armed forces an emotional turmoil was created which affected, in a negative way, the ability to analyse the legality of an order received by a subordinate,' Senator A. Berongaray, in charge of the defence commission of the Radical Party recently stated. And he added that 'the concept of the duty of obedience will free from responsibility the vast majority of those who could have been accused' in the repression. (8) These people have not been either judged or sentenced and the Radical Party is already declaring them innocent. How can the limits of the duty of obedience be defined? 'Through a judicial decree which can act as a sort of test case', according to this senator. But what would be the verdict of such a judicial decree?

From the regime's point of view the most important thing is to slow down the trial, to halt the avalanche of revelations which every day place question marks on the role of the armed forces as an institution and to contain the wave of accusations which are unfolding against the whole of the political establishment in

6. 'Nueva Presencia', No 412, May 24, 1985.

7. 'Decimos', the monthly organ of the families of detained and missing persons. Monsignor Grasselli, priest linked to the military high command had in his parish office a list of all the facts surrounding missing persons who were in army hands, with the date of the kidnapping, the probable location of the place of detention etc. He used to 'advise' members of the families of the missing who also came to him as a mediator.

Jose Lopez Rega, known as the *Raspante* of Peronism, was the strong man in the repressive Isabel Peron government of 1974 and 1975. General Suarez Mason, commander of the First Army Corps in the first years of the dictatorship was responsible for setting up several concentration camps. Both were members of the famous Italian lodge, P-2 and have now fled the country.

8. 'Decimos', op. cit., No 4, August, 1985.

Argentina. The so-called separation of the three powers of the bourgeois state (the executive, the legislative and the judiciary) is one of the themes of Alfonsín's government to justify his approach.

The desire to lessen the impact of the trial was illustrated in the attitude of the prosecutor, Strassera, who raised objection to 1151 witnesses and reduced by 427 (from 709 originally to 282) the number of cases presented during the hearing 'because of a super abundance of proof' and because the evidence presented was 'more than sufficient.' At the same time Prosecutor Strassera, who had taken a correct attitude towards the prosecution witnesses, nevertheless had to declare to the press that the indiscriminate character of the repression made it difficult to distinguish 'between the victims, those who were *guerrilleros* and those who were not, thus mistrusting and misrepresenting the efforts of those officers and troops who risked their lives in fighting against subversion.' (9) He also lamented the fate of those who belonged to the task groups and who 'risked their lives, were not given recognition from the rest of society and had to watch subversive delinquents appear as innocent victims'. (10) In the light of these kind of statements we can only repeat with the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo [the organisation of parents of the missing]; 'what is behind such assertions if not an attempt to save thousands of middle ranking soldiers of the armed forces who participated in the savage repression operated against our people from 1976?' (11)

The press coverage of the trials in Argentina, which was very extensive, did not go beyond the limits set by the politicians in this respect. But the succession of evidence gradually raised the question of the responsibility of the armed forces as a whole and the press began to limit and restrict more and more the information coming out on this subject and began to interpret the different testimonies according to its own viewpoint. So, for example, the daily paper of the reactionary oligarchy, the Buenos Aires *La Nación*, attempted to distort the courageous statements of several witnesses who sometimes found themselves being accused of collaboration with their own torturers in such headlines as 'Yet another case of collaboration with subversive elements'. The newspaper *Clarín* which presents the views of the slightly more enlightened bourgeoisie in Buenos Aires stopped publishing anything on the trial after a while and only gave out limited and partial information. There were exceptions to all this, like *El Periodista*, a progressive



Demonstration outside the Argentine embassy in Paris (DR)

independent weekly or *Nueva Presencia* the democratic weekly of the Jewish community of Argentina.

During the trial there was a division between 'the two types of Argentinians who coexisted under the dictatorship: the secret and the conspicuous, there were those who gave in by keeping quiet and those who suffered in flesh and blood the unrelenting repression.' So wrote the monthly publication of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo in August. Hebe P. de Bonafina, president of that organisation, who participated in the first hearing and was asked to remove the white scarf (a symbol of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo) from her head because it was considered a too obvious symbol. But as she herself remarked at the trial 'they did not dare ask the military to take off their uniforms ... If we can't use symbols, then what do they think a uniform is?' (12)

The fact that a missing person might have been a 'terrorist' or a 'subversive' is now becoming a factor of less and less importance in popular thinking and that is true even for the most depoliticised in society. The official line has therefore begun to develop towards transferring the responsibilities for the repression onto

society as a whole; 'it would be simplistic to point the finger at the blows inflicted by the military and only accuse that section of the population,' because such armed coups d'états 'have always been civil and military with a heavy civil responsibility in the ideological back up. We must therefore assume this responsibility.' (13) This is what Alfonsín said when addressing the armed forces last July. Following this line of argument, it is logical that if everyone is responsible then no one person can be blamed; if we were all guilty then no one really is. This immediately abrogates the real political and military responsibilities.

The left parties in Argentina, depending on their political affiliations and their mass base, more or less all consider the trial of the Junta chiefs as inadequate because it is limited to nine officers. At the very most the trial is considered by them to be a 'step in the right direction'.

9. 'La Nación', Buenos Aires, June 13, 1985.

10. *Idem*.

11. *Madres de la Plaza de Mayo (MPM)* the monthly journal of the organisation of the same name, No 8, July 1985.

12. 'Nueva Presencia', *op. cit.*, No 420, July 19, 1985.

13. 'Decimos', *op. cit.* No 4, August 1985.

The Workers Party (PO), which until 1977 described itself as belonging to the international current led by the French PCI of Lambert and has remained sectarian even after its break with this current, sees the trial as merely a smokescreen. According to the statements of its leader, Jorge Altamira, 'the trial is a manoeuvre because its goal is to save the armed forces' even if there have been 'some positive things to come out of it. This was not wanted by the government because of the explosive nature of the subject.' (14) This view is not surprising coming from people who think that, in the present stage of the class struggle, Argentina is 'an instrument of imperialist penetration' because, 'this democracy is like a financial deal'.

The Movement for Socialism (MAS), the former Socialist Workers Party, which also calls itself Trotskyist, believes according to the slogan they use on demonstrations that 'the nine are not enough, we want the lot'. For them the trial is however seen in a positive light since 'only a real Pontius Pilate could prevent hundreds more trials opening up.' For this organisation the fall of the dictatorship meant, within the context of a 'revolutionary situation', a 'virtual democratic revolution'. (15)

For the Communist Party (PCA), the trial is so positive that a few months ago it dropped the slogan 'trial and punishment' of the guilty. For as Carlos Zamorano, the Communist lawyer and leader of the PCA-influenced Argentine League for the Rights of Man (LADH), explained, 'the trial already exists and in any case we are for punishment.' (16) He modified this statement at the same time by admitting that 'we have had problems in formulating our slogan up till now. It is for judgement and punishment of all those guilty, absolutely all those guilty of repression in our country.' (17)

For the 'Humanism and Liberation' current of Christian Democracy, the left and progressive wing of the Christian petty bourgeoisie, 'through the vehicle of the trial of ex-members of the juntas we are going on the right road.' (18)

According to the Peronist Youth, on the other hand, this is a trial whose outcome 'can only be speculated on and [is based on] low political manoeuvres,' according to one of their leaders, Dante Gullo. (19)

In the case of the Partido Intransigente (PI) which has a petty bourgeois, democratic anti-imperialist base, to them the trial is positive, although it does not go far enough. They declare that what is needed is to 'carry on the investigations until the whole truth is established, to punish the

guilty for their unbelievable crimes and to finish definitively with impunity.' (20)

Across this spectrum of positions we can see that the Argentinian left tends to alternate between a purely instrumentalist characterisation of the trial, seen as a straight manoeuvre, as in the case of the PO; and an almost completely non-critical approach to what a government deems to be the best way to judge those responsible for the repression as in the case of the 'Humanism and Liberation' grouping.

In the same way that the economic plans of Martinez de Hoz were eventually exposed as meaning a huge drop in the buying power of the workers and the military adventure in the Malvinas provoked a huge feeling of disillusion and frustration only overcome by the fall of the dictatorship, so the trial of the heads of the military juntas strips away the last laurels which the military caste could rest on; that of the fight 'against subversion.' This was not, as they claimed, a fight against 'armed terrorists' in defence of the population, but a war against the population itself and against all forms of resistance, opposition and organisation against the dictatorship.

The human rights movement revives

The judicial process shows that the disappearance of 30,000 activists, the death and imprisonment of thousands of others and the exiling of tens of thousands of people who were fighting against the dictatorship was linked to an economic plan which aimed at establishing a kind of new economic model in Argentina. This same plan even today prevents the present government from checking in any way Argentina's increasing economic dependence, with all its consequences of unemployment, impoverishment and misery.

It is thus that, slowly but surely, sections of the population who were hitherto indifferent are beginning to discover the real character of the repression and its essential objective. The Argentinian people may not be mobilised in a big way at the moment (for it is not easy to get rid of the yoke of eight years of terror) and it may not have the political advantage for a while. However, the very mention of a possible or eventual amnesty, even if it is disguised, for those rapists, thieves and murderers or those responsible for the kidnappings would illicit a firm and indignant response from the masses.

Sections of the workers movement —

especially the most combative unions and the anti-bureaucratic groupings within the unions — are slowly becoming involved in the fight for democratic rights which is inseparably linked to economic demands. The latter are most deeply felt among the people and can mobilise them in an ongoing way. These demands can enrich and strengthen the movement for human rights which, if it does not yet involve the broad masses, is going slowly in that direction. Such progress has helped to overcome the crisis that the movement suffered last year. Thus the prolonged strike and occupation of the multinational Ford Motor Company, was openly supported by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who in turn, on the occasion of a demonstration for the release of political prisoners, got the support of the Internal Commission of the Struggle in Fords. These types of action show the way forward.

The movement for human rights — most notably the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, the parents of the detained and disappeared, the Centre for Legal and Social Studies — is, to a large extent, a response to the 1984 crisis and constitutes a vanguard of the struggle against the dictatorship and also against the current government. The movement has a long and hard struggle ahead to achieve its demands. This is no less true today when they are confronting an enemy which dispenses with the need for naked repression in order to obtain a consensus around its political initiatives.

On August 2, this year, an action supported by more than 100 organisations and initiated by the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo attracted between 40,000 and 50,000 people, who demonstrated in front of the government palace chanting the slogan 'No to amnesty' and 'Judgement and punishment for all the guilty.' On September 6 more than 50,000 people filed past the congress buildings around the main demand 'No impunity for any of the guilty'.

These are not huge numbers but they mark a reactivation and a relative stabilisation of the human rights movement's capacity to mobilise. Bit by bit this begins to challenge the logic of class rule and of bourgeois democracy.

It is in this context that the class struggle is posed today, around the question of human rights and it is around this that revolutionaries should intervene. □

14. 'El Periodista', No 45, July 19, 1985.

15. 'Decimos', op. cit., No 4, August 1985.

16. MPM, No 9, August 1985.

17. Idem.

18. 'Decimos', No 4.

19. Idem.

20. Idem.

The military juntas on trial

Interview with former political prisoner

WE PUBLISH below an interview with Flavio Koutzii, the Brazilian revolutionary who was detained in Argentina from 1975 to 1979. He is currently working on a book about the trials of the Argentinian military command. He has already published a work on the conditions inside Argentinian gaols. The interview was conducted by Daniel Jebrac in August 1985 in Sao Paulo.

Question. To start with, could you tell us the general stakes in the trial of the nine military chiefs?

Answer. The trial of the military is the result of a basic commitment in Raul Alfonsin's electoral programme. It concerned punishing the violations of human rights — kidnapping, torture, 'disappearances', assassinations — perpetrated under the dictatorship.

One should remember that the objective of this repression was to liquidate a large layer of the vanguard in the trade union and political spheres.

The report of the Sabato commission, published under the title *Nunca Mas* (Never again) estimates that among the victims of the repression 30% were workers, 21% were students, about 11% were from the liberal professions and about 3% were artists and journalists.

As for age, 17% of the victims were between 16 and 20, 34% were between 20 and 25, 26% were between 25 and 30 and 11% between 30 and 35. I also remind you that human rights organisations reckon the number of disappeared people to be 30,000, and the Sabato report recognises 9,000 'documented' cases of disappearances.

All this proves, contrary to the official propaganda of that period, that the objective was not just to finish off the armed organisations of the left, which were held responsible for the quasi insurrection in Buenos Aires in July 1975.

What the military dreaded above all was the possibility of a link-up between these armed organisations and the militant vanguard of the trade union movement. This is why the repression was so widespread.

Q. Certain human rights organisations have strongly criticised

Alfonsin's approach. Why?

A. After his election Alfonsin found himself obliged to carry out his electoral promise and to respond to the demands of a large section of society determined to clear up the question of the missing persons.

The basic strategy of Alfonsin was to bring to justice the nine members of the three juntas, so as to safeguard the military establishment in general. His approach was, therefore, in line with this concern and was radically different from that of the Nuremberg trial of the Nazi leaders, in spite of the too often cited analogy. It was to control and limit the effects of the trial by means of decrees and adjustments to the military code of justice.

This led to the setting up of a rather complex mechanism. As soon as it took office in December 1983 the Alfonsin government laid down that the commanders of the three military juntas, and they alone, must be tried, and that the trial should take place in the supreme military court, and not in front of a civilian tribunal.

By law, he established a "duty of obedience" which played a key role in preventing the judgement from extending to middle-ranking officers, who were the direct agents of the crimes and the repression.

At the same time the human rights organisations — there are eight principal ones in Argentina including the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" and all progressive circles called for the setting up of a bicameral parliamentary commission in order to judge politically the acts of all those who were implicated in the crimes of "disappearing" people.

Alfonsin responded to this demand by constituting a body with less political weight and no legislative

authority; this was the setting up of the National Commission of the Disappeared People (CONADEP).

This body was made up of notables, and presided over by Ernesto Sabato, who gave his name to the report it produced.

The CONADEP had as its objective to inquire into the facts and to summarize them into a report. This is why the first reaction of the human rights organisations was to reject the proposal. Rather than a report destined to collect dust in the archives, they wanted a political judgement first coming from parliament, and then a legal judgement from the civilian courts.

To complete his scheme, Alfonsin then modified, with parliamentary assent, the code of military justice. Notably he laid down that the military tribunal should come to a verdict in six months, failing which it would be replaced by the supreme civilian court.

The last link in this complex strategy consisted of not declaring an amnesty for the victims of the repression. He revoked the military's self-amnesty of 1983, but on the other hand no amnesty was granted to the political prisoners. What he wanted to do was to cover himself with the military, by rejecting the amnesty, and maintaining this false equation, and by a threat — as I will explain later — which has continually hung over the course of the trial.

This procedure was clearly both unjust and untrue and for several reasons. First, there was obviously camouflaged amnesty for the military in the form of the recognition of the 'duty of obedience' which whitewashed their actions.

Second, the lifting of the state of siege for the October 1983 elections brought about the automatic release of all the political prisoners who had been detained but not tried — who made up about half of those in the prisons.

Finally, after these elections, the congress quickly adopted a law which stated that, in view of the particularly rigorous prison conditions under the dictatorship, each day in prison would count as two for political prisoners, and three for ordinary criminals.

This device allowed most of the other prisoners to be freed without having to declare an amnesty. Those who had been sentenced to 12 years imprisonment and had served six were freed, while others who had harsher sentences had their remaining time suspended.

Thus, there now remain 14 political prisoners, whose continued detention is only symbolic. These measures were designed to take the steam off the campaign for the release of the political prisoners, without involving



General Videla and his acolytes, during the period of the dictatorship (DR)

an obligation to grant an amnesty for them, which would have upset the military.

Q. But despite everything, the momentum of the process seems to have led things beyond the initial limits.

A. In spite of the restrictions inherent in the set-up which I have explained, the fact that CONADEP had authority as an institutional body with material resources at its disposal, a computer and a certain moral authority, all went to lend a lot of momentum to its researches into missing persons. The result was not just the publication of a book with a wide circulation.

First of all, it is true that the limited ambit of this commission meant that in practice the army refused to hand over the reports that were asked of it. But CONADEP, as most of the human rights activists now admit, made it possible for the survivors — there were more than was imagined — to be brought together and little by little to piece together the puzzle from their memories and to collate their evidence.

It was a painstaking job: to put together what the disappeared had been able to hear and not see, since they were always blindfolded, and little by little, by approximation, to reassemble the places, to locate a camp, to discover its hierarchy and so on. It was this work which enabled dossiers to be drawn up and accusations to be lodged against military personnel that were so clearly identified.

The publication of CONADEP's report, immediately followed by a television programme, with the same title, *Nunca Mas*, was an important event. More than 300,000 copies of the report have already been sold.

Since then the whole of the Argentinian population has had to face up to what really happened. This was all the more so because the report — and this is its special merit — went beyond the personal testimonies. It organised them, and succeeded in showing that the system of arrests and disappearance was very much a method, and not a succession of accidents and mistakes.

The method reflected a systematic organisation at all levels, like the terrorist state itself, with clearly defined ground rules for each particular area of operation. Thus the hidden face of a state terrorist operation, directed from the centre, was brought out in to the open.

While the population absorbed the report, the procedure of the military court ground on. After the prescribed term of six months, the court threw the case out, stating the opinion that the accused military chiefs had acted within the framework of the fight against subversion.

Alfonsín and the civil courts — (90% of the judges being the same as under the dictatorship) — agreed to give the military court another three months to try to convince them to review their decision.

But the military dug their heels in, and it was only then that the trial was finally transferred to a civilian court.

It is this six months of long-drawn-out procedures that explains why the trial of the army chiefs is only now taking place in these unusual conditions, in a civilian court but in the framework of the military code. It is this that determines both the procedure and the form of the trial, from the absence of the accused during the testimony of the witnesses, even to the arrangement of the public gallery.

Q. What are the first noticeable

effects of this trial?

A. In four months of sessions since April 1985, the court has heard more than 800 witnesses, thousands of others not having been called, it being considered that their testimony would only repeat what had already been said.

Many of the names of particular torturers have been clearly cited in the witness box. The fact that these military personnel cannot be prosecuted as a result of the principle of 'duty of obedience' has created in the public mind a terrible feeling that these people are still above the law.

From this point of view the impact of the trial is enormous. There are three or four pages of coverage in most newspapers every day. It is broadcast on radio, and in a much more limited way on television. A weekly summary of the proceedings of the trial is sold in the kiosks.

In spite of all the limitations, the horrific contents of the testimonies are creating a massive awareness of the scope of state terrorism.

The claim of 'shared responsibility' between the armed organisations of the left and the military has been profoundly shaken. This is one of the factors that are helping to throw out of gear the projects for a coup d'Etat, which without doubt are present here and now within the army.

One could say, making all due allowances, that Argentina resembles postwar Germany. The trial has reinforced in a decisive way the social traumatism built up by the "missing". There is a widespread feeling of responsibility and of bad conscience, for having done nothing, for not having wanted to know.

Today still the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo refuse to go to identify the bodies discovered in the mass graves, until the assassins are exposed and tried.

There has been intimidation of witnesses. Some have been threatened, others came especially out of exile and then left again. One woman was even kidnapped twice. But, for the time being, the military is on the defensive.

With the trial, and in spite of the limits within which he has endeavoured to contain it, Alfonsín has reinforced his legitimacy. Most people have not followed the details or analysed the trial.

They remember one thing; he dared. He dared to bring the military in front of the courts — that is in this continent a big first.

Certainly, the Radical Party government has done its utmost to sacrifice a few of the guilty as scapegoats in order to preserve better the integrity of the military institution as a whole.

The military did not have the

political intelligence to accept the steps proposed by Alfonsín and to pass judgement on themselves, which could have partially reestablished their authority. It was for this reason that Alfonsín held the trial in front of a civilian jurisdiction.

But it mustn't be forgotten that there was not an amnesty law. That means that all offences subsequent to March 1973 (the date of the last amnesty) can be prosecuted.

Consequently, the testimony of an ex-'disappeared' person, convicted of having belonged to the People's Revolutionary Army or to the Montoneros, makes it possible for them to be accused and arrested themselves.

This single element shows how much this trial is intertwined with an extremely unstable social situation, how much it depends on a relationship of forces that is still not entirely clear.

The forces who supported the military assassins continue to operate in the political arena. It is by taking this into consideration that the deep dynamic of this trial has to be interpreted. It is unfolding under the pressure of conservative sectors and 'golpistas' (supporters of a coup) who have been trying hard to limit it, — and at the same time it is slowing down the right and restricting its room for maneuver.

Q. What work have the human rights organisations done during the trial?

A. While the trial has been going on, the human rights organisations, or the families of the victims have brought complaints against the armed forces to civilian tribunals. The mechanism is then the same as for the trial of the three juntas: the judges respond that they must take the trial to the military courts, the military decline to accept responsibility, and so on.

The accumulation of these suspended trials could constitute a time bomb if at least some finally come before civilian courts. Here there is a central political problem that could jam the machinery put in place by Alfonsín. If a single middle-ranking officer of the army were convicted, the whole edifice of the 'duty of obedience' would collapse.

The best example of this and the most explosive case is that of Captain Astiz, accused of having murdered the young Swede Dagmar Hagelin and two French nuns.

There is strong pressure on this subject from the Swedish government, and pressure is growing for Astiz to be tried, after the broadcasting of a witness on the television. International pressure can play a decisive role in this test case. □

The Austral Plan - austerity, unemployment and a wages freeze

FINANCE MINISTER Jean Sourrouille's so-called Austral Plan was implemented on June 15 this year. The plan was named after the new Argentinian currency created for the occasion, which replaces the peso and is worth one thousand times more than the old currency (one austral equals 0.8 dollars.)

This plan is based on three main axes, a radical reduction in the budget deficit, a wage and prices freeze and a reform of the currency. The regime has put forward this economic strategy in the context of a massive economic crisis characterised by galloping inflation (30% per month in the last period), a dramatic recession and a growing external debt. At 43.6 billion dollars in December 1983, the debt payment represented 160% of the excess trade balance per year. In July 1985 the debt stood at 53 billion dollars and that is not counting the 4.2 billion borrowed by the government in August.

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JUAN ROBLES

'The costs of the economic crisis will never come from the workers pay packets'. This was Alfonsín's favourite phrase during the first election campaign which he repeated in the first speeches shortly after his inauguration as president on December 10, 1983. But, on July 29, this Radical Party government agreed a memorandum with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in which it promised that 'wages would be held down as long as necessary.' Government promises had already been definitively forgotten by June 14, when a series of economic measures were adopted, which, amongst other things, introduced an indefinite wage freeze. Subsequently congratulations from the imperialist bankers were not slow in coming, following the adoption of the Austral Plan.

According to official propaganda the Austral Plan represents a radical struggle against inflation, aimed to achieve the second stage of the economic regeneration of the country. In reality, this plan is aimed at a very clear target; the workers. As to its eventual beneficiaries, these will be the

holders of the scandalous Argentinian foreign debt.

The above statement is not an empty assertion but can be proved in an examination of the facts. For example, we read in an independent Argentinian review that 'with the recent drastic measures wages were frozen from May 30 and prices from June 13. In the first two weeks of June, prices went up by between 30 and 40%. This will not be restored to wage-earners, because the readjustment to be introduced at the end of June will only incorporate 90% of the loss in buying power accumulated in May. Thus the two freezes were not equal; wages were frozen without taking into account the massive rise in prices in the first twelve days of June and this difference was carried over to the extent that only 90% of previous buying power was restored. In this way the most significant outcome of the measures currently underway amounted to a decrease in wages of 30 to 40% at least. If you take into account that the gross national product of Argentina is in the order of 75 billion dollars and that wages

represent less than 30%, that is 22 billion dollars, the decrease in wage levels of 30% (on the most optimistic estimates) implies a transfer of revenue to the capitalist class in the order of 6.7 billion dollars in one year.' (1)

Furthermore, this 6.7 billion dollars, which has been stolen from the workers, has already been accounted for. About two billion dollars will be added to the trade balance surplus which is expected to be in the order of three billion dollars and to pay the five billion dollars worth of annual interest on the foreign debt. The remaining 4.7 billion dollars 'will go towards increasing the profits of those firms which are prospering despite the recession, that is those who are exporting; and to beef up state funds, which for the most part will be transferred to private enterprise through the nationalisation of the private debt as in the case of the Bank of Italy. It will also serve towards the interests, not just of the banking system but also of the speculative capital which flows into increasing the high interest rates on money loans. These are in the order of 8% per month in dollars and loans which have been contracted to support the fictional stability of the austral and which will become a further external debt.' (2)

All these policies of 'adjustment' which have been implemented in those countries which are being strangled by the foreign debt have the same content. Leaving aside the technical jargon of monetarism, they are similar in the extent that they lead to an increase of poverty and dependence in each country, to a reduction of income for waged workers and to the growth of pillage of the Latin American peoples who are becoming poorer and poorer. The new variation introduced by Minister of Finance Jean Sourrouille, is the shock tactic. This 'should give a warning light to our country and to the rest of Latin America since the Austral Plan represents a testing ground, insofar as it introduces very deep going readjustments into state policy, which could become a model for other countries in Latin America where such measures were halted half way or were not strong enough.' (3)

It is important to understand that the Argentinian crash programme, and the more gradual Uruguayan plan are not temporary measures to cure the economic ills of underdeveloped economies. The aim of this readjustment is not to plan investment for growth of production machinery, nor to ensure improvements in housing, health and conditions of the mass of the people. The result of the application of such a strong

dose of orthodox monetarism on the part of the local oligarchies is bound to be financial speculation and the payment of the tribute of international finance capital. This is because the crisis is intermittent but continuous and demands new and deeper despoilment in order to maintain the continuing cycle of imperialist exploitation.

In Uruguay, under the dictatorship, more than six million dollars has been wrung from the workers to pay for future 'take-offs' and hopeless attempts at 'renewals of growth'. In Argentina, under the criminal military juntas, workers were robbed to the extent that every three years they lost the equivalent of one year's revenue in comparison with the income that they had before 1976. In these two countries the military left behind a scene of total destruction on the economic, and indeed, on every other level.

The Austral Plan will not, any more than any other plan of a similar ilk, put an end to inflation. For the dependent countries in which we live, the problem is a structural one which is permanently fed by the 'national' bourgeoisies and aggravated by the contribution of the imperialist countries who are trying to offload their own inflation onto the dependent countries. There is talk about reducing the budget deficit in order to avoid inflation. At the moment, however, the debt payments — which will rise with the Austral Plan — constitute the main item of public expenditure at 37% of the total. With annual interest rates at 60% in dollars to attract speculative capital, can one really still talk about controlling inflation? All this is one big swindle which will continue to deepen the crisis in the interests of monopoly finance capital.

Finance ministers from the 11 industrialised countries who dominate the capitalist world met together in Tokyo on June 21. All their monetary analysis led to the conclusion that an increase in unemployment in the metropolitan imperialist countries was the direct result of a 'diversion' of funds towards short-term investments. The 'treasurers of the large firms and the managers of the major private and public financial institutions are shifting from one market to another' and floating capital, which is made up of 'hot money' is avoiding productive investment and going for financial environments which produce high interest rates. (4) Given the reality of the world economic situation, any talk of favouring or promoting capitalist investment in industry and agriculture in terms of 'adjustments' or 'plans to beat inflation' is simply to promote fairy

stories.

Within the vicious circle of world capitalism and under the yoke of finance capital there is no chance of 'development' nor of coming out of this crisis.

The spokespeople of the Industrial Union of Argentina (UIA) announced that the effects of the plan would be 'an industrial recession and a fall in workers' wages'. The prices freeze was not the severest blow to those firms working in the internal market. There was also the 'rapid lowering of sales to the order of 20 to 30% from mid-June to mid-July. This could get worse in August when the supplementary buying power represented by half the bonuses, which, in July masked the real lowering of salaries, will no longer exist. Thus unused industrial capacity stands at an average of 30%.' (5) An expert in work economy, Alvaro Orsatti, predicted that 'the next inquiry into employment will show an increase of 100,000 unemployed on the previous one'. (6)

A programme of massive layoffs was the form chosen by Argentinian capitalists, especially those which are subsidiaries of the big monopolies, to deal with the new situation. In the most important industrial area within Buenos Aires, the Ford motor company gave the signal for layoffs and was met with strong resistance from the workers.

The medium term result of all this will be a greater concentration of capital and those who adapt the best and the quickest to the situation will have the best prospects of survival and of a share of the spoils. It is within this framework that the merger between the Banco Rio and the Banco Gandero Argentino must be seen.

The planned reduction of the budget deficit will possibly herald massive redundancies for state employees. For the moment, as there is no issuing of money from the state, 'the public sector is being financed with loans from abroad'. (7) By the end of July this debt will have already reached 460 million dollars.

In conclusion, recession, massive unemployment, wage cuts, and an increase in the foreign debt will be the only result of a plan which has absolutely nothing to do with economic recovery for Argentina. This demonstrates once again that without a radical break with capitalism, there is no possibility of overcoming exploitation and dependence. □

1. 'El Periodista', Buenos Aires, No 41, Year One.
2. *Idem*.
3. 'El Periodista', No 47.
4. 'Le Monde', June 26, 1985.
5. 'El Periodista', No 47.
6. 'Clarín', March 8, 1985.
7. 'El Periodista', No 47.



AROUND THE WORLD

Brazil

Municipal elections

THE MUNICIPAL elections, on November 15, the first since the country returned to civilian rule in March, were a mixed bag for the ruling Brazilian Democratic Movement Party. (PMDB)

The PMDB won 110 of the 201 municipalities holding elections. It lost, however, in capital cities where over 10 million of the country's 18.5 million registered voters live, that is in Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Porto Alegre, Fortaleza, Recife and Sao Luis.

The biggest surprise in the elections, and an important factor for the left was the victory of the candidate of the Partido de Trabalhadores (PT) Maria Luiza Fontanelle, in Fortaleza.

The PT's vote also grew in several other state capitals. The PT's candidate in Sao Paulo, Eduardo Matarazza Suplicy, for example, polled 20% of the votes. These election results, amongst other things, will be seen as an important step on the road to building a mass workers party in Brazil. □

Austria

Referendum campaign

IN MID-NOVEMBER, the campaign against a purchase of fighter interceptors won more than the 1.6% vote necessary to launch a referendum against the deal. In order to get this "popular consultation," initially 18,000 statements of support had been collected. The Austrian section of the Fourth International, the Revolutionary Marxist Group (GRM) played a spark plug role.

Franz Floss wrote in the November 15 issue of the GRM paper, *Die Linke*:

"It all started a little more than a year ago. Unsatisfied with the reaction of the peace movement, which conducted only a 'normal' petition campaign against the fighter interceptor, the GRM had a sharp discussion on this question. It was decided to take to the peace movement the demand for a referendum on the fighter and to propose a popular consultation..."

"Soon after the peace movement had taken up the demand for a referendum, it became clear that the government was stonewalling. The Communist Party and the Socialist Youth dismissed any possibility of

initiating a discussion in the peace movement of a popular consultation as 'unrealistic,' among other things.

"Among the Alternatives [the Austrian version of the Greens, more or less], in the Tirol Alternative, activists planned a popular consultation, although without demanding or wanting a referendum. The conscientious objectors and the Catholic youth organisations were interested in a discussion of a popular consultation against the interceptor. Left Socialist personalities such as Paul Blau initially showed interest but then dropped out because they did not see a chance of success, others such as Maria Berger dropped out because they were threatened with expulsion ...

In its editorial, *Die Linke* pointed out that this is the first time a popular consultation has been won in Austria without the backing of a big party or newspaper and without big money. (The total budget was only about 700,000 schillings, or US 35,000 dollars.) What is more, the electronic media blacked out the campaign, and there was slight mention of it in the press.

"The CP and Socialist Youth boycotted the popular consultation, the CP because it was supposedly a diversion from the campaign against Star Wars ..." and "the Austrian peace movement announced *very officially* that 'the popular consultation is not an action of the All-Austrian Peace Movement.'"

But "there were 12,000 people in the human chain in the spring of 1985 in Zeltweg against the fighter purchase, 7,000 in the fall at the rally organized by the peace movement in the Vienna Stadthalle, and 121,455 gave their support in the popular consultation.

"These figures don't tell the whole story ... Behind the 121,455 people who supported the popular initiative are discussions with tens of thousands of people, hundreds of rallies, 700,000 leaflets, and 70,000 posters that informed the most remote towns in Austria of the fight against the fighter plane.

"The popular consultation has laid a groundwork, strengthened the fight around a referendum, hopefully together with all those who have stood aside up till now. The popular consultation demands a referendum before April 1986, before another 241 million schillings [12.5 million dollars], the next 10% of the purchase price is due to be paid to Saab-Scania." □

South Africa

Police repression

ON OCTOBER 26, the South African police announced a series of new measures banning one hundred organisations in the West Cape and Boland regions. These measures were essentially of two types.

Firstly, it is now forbidden for a whole series of anti-apartheid organisations to hold meetings in areas reserved for Blacks, Coloureds and Indians. Secondly, severe measures were adopted to combat the schools boycotts in the Black and Coloured townships.

The ban on meetings affects practically all the Black, Coloured and Indian areas in the regions concerned. It applies to most of the organisations affiliated to the two main anti-apartheid groups, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and the National Forum (NF) and to dozens of other groups and associations. Among these are the National Forum Committee, the Cape Action League, the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS), the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), the Federation of South African Women, the Release Mandela Committee, the Western Cape Teachers Union (WECTU), the New Unity Movement and the Athlone and Boland student action committees.

The measures against the schools boycott effectively confine pupils to their homes or class rooms on school days and prohibit activities outside the school curriculum. Once in school they must stay in their classrooms except at the prearranged times for changing lessons. All activity at school which is not part of the school programme and not supervised by a teacher is forbidden. Moreover in the Black and Coloured areas of Paarl or Worcester, it is an offence to be in possession of petrol or any container other than a vehicle petrol tank and or to siphon it off from there in to any other container. Nobody who is not a resident may enter the township of Mbekweni in Paarl or Zweletemba in Worcester without written permission from the security forces.

This wave of repression, which affects one of the most combative regions in the struggle against apartheid cannot be ignored. It is vital that international solidarity against this and any other moves by the Pretoria regime be stepped up. □

Out of the debt trap

IN RESPONSE to the question put by Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel, the following document issues an appeal to "discuss the paths of popular unity for democracy and liberation." This document, entitled, "The Foreign Debt, Human Rights, and the Democracy that we want," has been signed by many personalities in the democratic rights movement, by artists, trade-union leaders, and lawyers.

In response to the disturbing economic situation created by the foreign debt problem, Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Perez Esquivel has called on "all social organizations and political parties to engage in an open discussion on what paths, what projects, what alternatives we want for the country." (*Entre Todos*, May 1985.)

The deepest crisis in this century has engulfed the Argentines, and we are anxiously seeking a way out of it. And this cannot be found only by statesmen or economic experts. Millions of men and women in the popular camp must also participate in this quest. It is worth repeating the historical maxim, "only the people will save the people."

In this appeal, Perez Esquivel argued as follows: "Either we face this historic challenge, or we will miss this very special moment not only in the history of Argentina but also of Latin America as a whole. Argentina today is in the best position on the continent to set in motion a real historic revolutionary process of achieving economic independence."

The main obstacle facing democracy is the foreign debt. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is imposing on us the payment of the usurious interest and the repressive economic measures that have been accepted by the government. In its practical effects, this means a growing impoverishment of the popular sectors and the destruction of the national industry that survived by dictatorship's economic plan applied by Jose Alfredo Martinez de Hoz.

Let us consider the facts. For a debt of 50 billion dollars, the country has to pay nearly 6 billion dollars in interest annually. The surplus of income from exports over the costs of imports is 4 billion dollars. This means that even if we pay out these 4 billion dollars, at the price of starving the majority of the population, this will still not be enough, and we will continue to sink deeper into debt. What the country earns in a year is not even enough to pay the

usurious interest that the big international banks are imposing on us. So, paying the debt is impossible. Our survival as a nation is at stake.

So, what is the alternative? If we chose a solution in line with the national interest, these 4 billion dollars in trade surplus could be used, for example, to finance the construction of forty big factories, creating 80,000 new jobs a year or their equivalent; or 800,000 new low-income housing units, with the effect that would have in reactivating the economy.

The situation that we are going through has its origins in our historic dependence, but it has been dramatically aggravated by the seven years of military dictatorship that ravaged the country. We will continue to pay for its effects as long as we fail to adopt a policy designed to achieve our economic independence.

"War against the IMF"

We Argentines can face up to a "war economy," if the war is against the IMF and to lift the country up, and not a war against the people and to strangle the nation.

Because it has paid the foreign debt and not dismantled the mechanisms of the national capitalists, our country is again experiencing uncontrollable inflation. The government is basing its present economic plan on the need to eliminate this plague. Broad sections of the population also see this as needful and are looking forward to its accomplishment. But what stands in the way of achieving this objective is that this plan has been worked out down to its most minute details in collaboration with the IMF, whose policy has never benefitted any people. The same thing applies to their determination to continue to pay the interest on the debt at the specific times when it falls due.

Those responsible for inflation and the economic crisis are not the small

businesspeople but the big industrial and financial monopolies. It is against the latter that popular and governmental supervision must be exercised.

If this fundamental problem is not resolved, then human rights, in the broader sense, have no meaning, that is the right to a job, to health, to a place to live, to eat, to education, to a decent life.

However, at the same time, it is necessary to continue to fight for the human rights that were crushed by the dictatorship's repression. In this regard, the report of the National Commission on the Missing Persons (CONADEP) and the trial of the military juntas have revealed a part of the atrocities committed by the military dictatorship. But the case on the crimes cannot be closed until all the "missing persons" being held prisoner are produced alive, until the children involved have been restored to their respective families, until all those responsible for this mass murder are tried and punished, until the political prisoners are released, and until the illegal repressive apparatus is dismantled.

Even with limits and imperfections, the democracy that we have won has to be defended against any authoritarian threat. But at the same time, we have to look for ways to deepen it, to make it a democracy in which the people participate, so that all social and economic sectors in the national and people's camp can play a more active role in solving the problems of the people, so that democracy is exercised in all organizations in the country, such as the trade unions, for example, many of which are still led by bureaucrats who were silent accomplices of the dictatorship and today want to hitch the working class to destabilization projects or sectarian interests.

This is the sort of discussion that is necessary today. It is urgent that all political and religious sectors, people's and youth organizations meet to discuss these questions.

It is only through popular unity arising out of a broad debate that we will be able to find ways for deepening democracy and for advancing toward national and social liberation, by building a political alternative that is beyond the capacities of each specific structure and which can only be carried through by all those who seek such liberation working together.

We signers support this appeal and invite you to participate in this project so that together we can build people's unity for democracy and liberation.

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