

International VIEWPOINT

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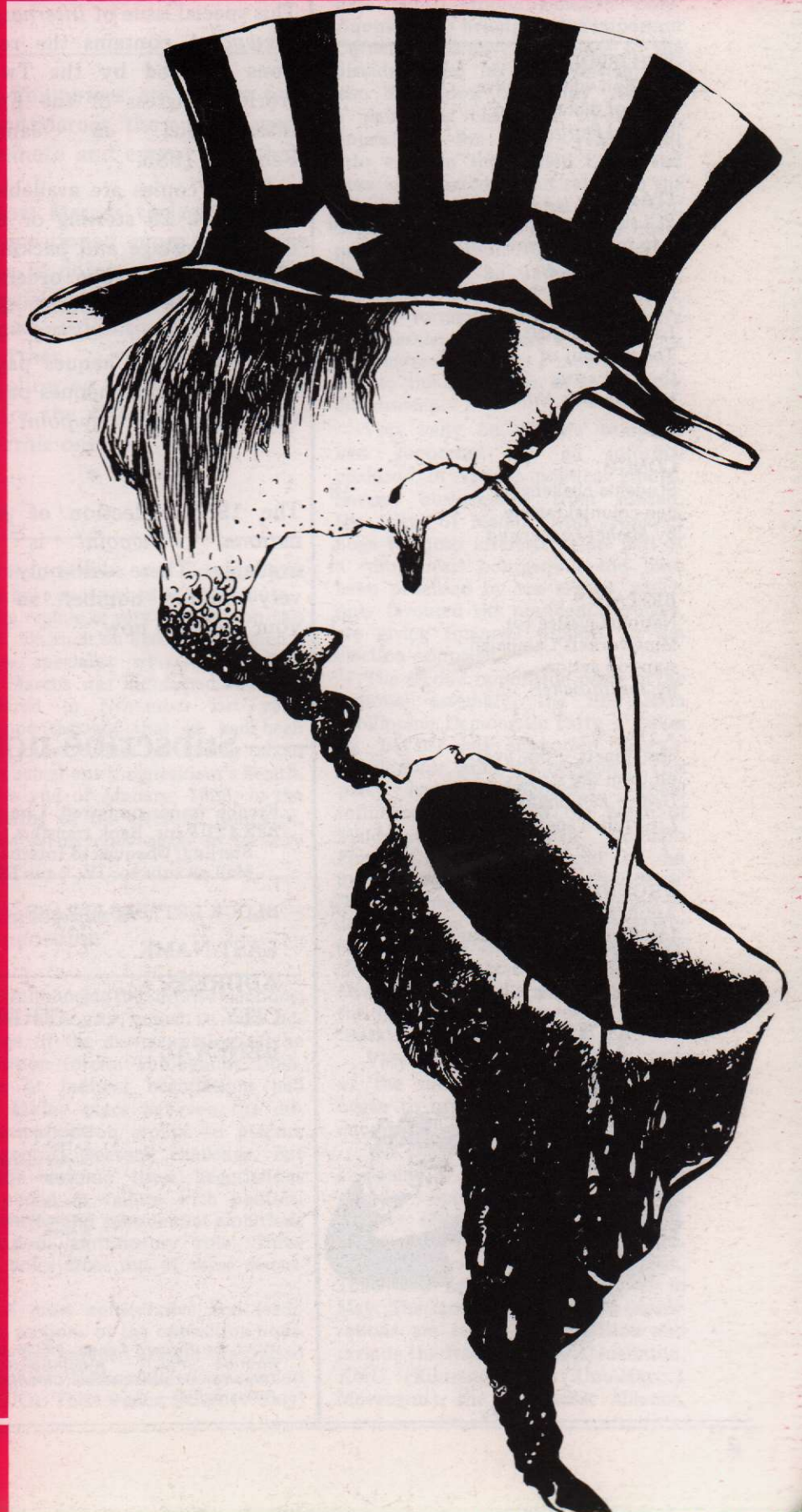
10 February 1986

LATIN AMERICA :

**the imperialist
debt trap**

**Elections in the
Philippines - the
crisis of the regime
continues**

**Student protests
in the Congo**



INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

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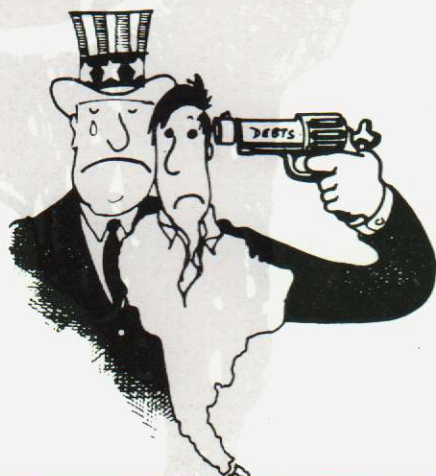
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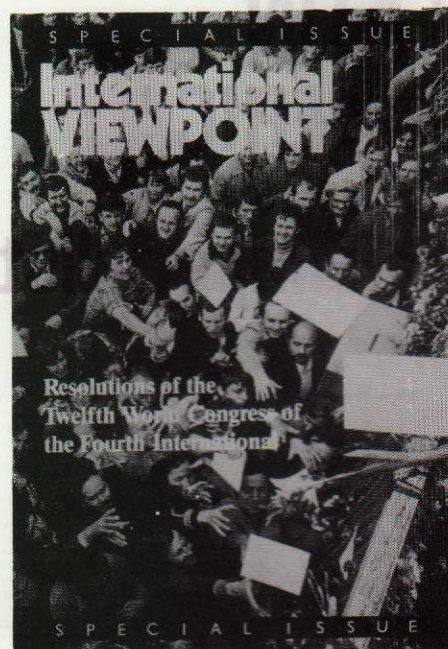


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Election will not solve the crisis of the dictatorship

THE PRESIDENTIAL elections in the Philippines are due to take place on February 7. That is if Ferdinand Marcos, the current president, does not draw back at the last minute and cancel the whole operation.

These elections were intended to allow Marcos to legitimise his dictatorial rule, which is now being questioned more and more inside the country and abroad. Marcos is doing anything to win by using the enormous political, financial and military resources of the state. But this recourse to fraud and intimidation could backfire and undermine the regime still further.

The 'Marcos system' set up in 1972 following the introduction of martial law, is breaking up. A victory for the dictatorship in these elections could very well prove to be a pyrrhic one.

PAUL PETITJEAN

For the mass of the people in the archipelago, 1985 has been a year dominated by a sometimes acute deterioration in the standard of living, as on Negros, the island of sugar.

In the world of politics, the year 1985 has been marked by rumours and counter-rumours about the possibility of presidential elections. According to the electoral calendar, they should have taken place in 1987 and Marcos had, more than once, asserted that they would not be brought forward. However, in November last year, he suddenly announced that the elections would be held in January 1986, then only two months away! They were finally put off to February 7, 1986, in order to calm protests in the Philippines and the United States at such violent haste.

Marcos' objectives are clear. He must recapture the semblance of popular support for his personal and dictatorial regime. With growing pressure on him from the US administration, which is very worried about the lack of response from the regime to the crisis, he knows his days are numbered. This is also true because of his health: he suffers from a recurring kidney disease which periodically threatens his life. It is a taboo subject which punctuates political life in the country. The return of the opposition leader, Benigno 'Ninoy' Aquino, and his assassination in August 1983, could probably be explained by the

fact that Marcos was very ill and could have succumbed at any minute.

The regime is very sensitive on this point. To such an extent that when a kidney specialist who was looking after Marcos was kidnapped and then murdered in November last year, everyone thought that he had been killed under orders for having talked too much about the president's health. At the end of January, 1986, in the full swing of the electoral campaign, Marcos seems once again to be very weak.

The three poles of the opposition

In announcing the surprise elections, Marcos obviously hoped to take advantage of the disorganisation of the opposition forces. Throughout 1985, direct or indirect negotiations had been taking place between the different opposition groups to prepare an eventual electoral challenge. But by the autumn these negotiations had ended in failure with political differences and presidential ambitions playing a contributory role. Three main poles arose out of these discussions.

The most conservative and traditional sections of the opposition bourgeoisie are grouped around the United Nationalist Democratic Organisation (UNIDO). Their leader, Salvador 'Doy'

Laurel, is the head of one of the 'main families' in the country. He was a long-time supporter of Marcos and the regime of martial law, who over the last few years has gone into opposition. He was nominated as presidential candidate for UNIDO in June 1985 and has never tried to hide his overwhelming personal ambition.

Next, a whole number of groups have rallied around Corazon 'Cory' Aquino, who belongs to the important Cofuango family, very close to the president and his wife Imelda, but also the widow of 'Ninoy' Aquino, a dangerous challenger to Marcos, imprisoned for many years, sent into exile in the United States and then assassinated on his return to the country. A traditional politician, Benigno Aquino became the main pro-US opposition figure because of the repression he underwent. After the assassination of her husband, 'Cory', formerly just a politician's wife, suddenly became a moral figure and, more than that, a moral alternative to the corruption of the Marcos dictatorship.

Very early on, 'Cory's' campaign was supported by an informal coalition of various political groups. Several businessmen from Makati, the 'city' of Manila, who represent huge financial interests or are part of a 'modernist' bourgeoisie and have been penalised by the regime, which only favoured the president's cronies, are giving financial support to the election campaign.

The second opposition party in the national assembly, the PDP-Laban (Philippine Democratic Party — Lakas ng Bayan) has supported 'Cory's' candidature from the beginning. This party has an important regional influence especially in the north of Mindanao island with Aquilino Pimentel. It is influenced by an underground movement, the 'soc dems' (Social Democrats) which came out of Jesuit circles and whose leadership is profoundly anti-communist. Since 'Ninoy's' assassination it has been attempting to make some links with the brother of the deceased, Agapito 'Butz' Aquino.

Very early on also, personalities of the independent nationalist left began to organise themselves in defence of 'Cory's' candidature.

The third pole of the opposition is a coalition of three of the mass popular opposition groups, called Bayan (Bagong Alyansang Makabayan — the New Patriotic Federation). It was launched in March, 1985 and held its first congress in May. The most important mass organisations are inside this coalition and include the trade-union confederation, KMU (Kilusang Mayo Uno-May 1 Movement), the Nationalist Alliance,

the peasant movement — KMP, the League of Filipino Students (LFS), etc.

Bayan claims a million supporters who are members of affiliated organisations. Under the influence of the National Democratic Front (NDF), Bayan is the main popular opposition pole.

However, in May of last year and in the weeks that followed, a series of smaller groups supporting Bayan withdrew from it on a national level (it may have been different on a regional level). Sections of the 'modernist' bourgeoisie from Makati left first and then 'Butz' and the 'soc dems' current, who founded a competing organisation, Bandila (Flag).

It must be noted that the 'soc dem' current includes a left-wing element that is involved in mass work. This current, though not in Bayan, did not join Bandila.

In the weeks following the May 1985 congress, independent nationalist leaders, such as ex-Senator Jose Diokno and a movement like Kaakbay (led nationally by Diokno but also including non-party Marxists) also left Bayan without joining Bandila.

On the level of the popular masses, Bayan, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the New People's army (NPA) and the National Democratic Front (NDF) represent a growing pole of attraction without any serious rival. But by the end of 1985, these forces seemed to be more divided than ever on the electoral level. Marcos must have been counting on this disintegration so that he could have an easy victory without too much obvious fraud.

On the eve of the closing date for the declaration of candidates, Salvador Laurel and Corazon Aquino managed to arrive at a last minute agreement: Laurel agreed to give up the candidature for president and to run for the vice-presidency and Aquino agreed to stand under the banner of UNIDO and not under that of the PDP-Laban. Bayan did not present a candidate, instead calling for a boycott. Marcos was faced with a unitary candidate who had popular support and with a not inconsiderable convergence of opposition forces, however transient that convergence might be.

'Cory's' candidature has obvious weaknesses. As a symbol of morality, she has no experience or programme of government. The coalition supporting her is politically heterogeneous. But many observers, including supporters of the regime itself, recognise that if free elections were to take place, Corazon Aquino would win against Marcos. For years now the regime has been increasingly bankrupt. Twenty years of Marcos' personal

rule (he was elected for the first time in 1965) is quite enough!

'Cory's' moral authority could outweigh the disadvantage of her lack of experience. Manila is rife with opposition, and in the provinces 'Cory's' campaign is attracting huge crowds: 200,000 people in Cebu, nearly 300,000 in Davao.

The call for a boycott

The main revolutionary forces in the country (the CPP, the NPA and the NDF) have called for a boycott, as have the principal mass organisations like the KMU, the Nationalist Alliance and Bayan. For them the electoral dice are loaded as long as Marcos is in power, and the 'Cory'-Laurel ticket is bourgeois. Corazon Aquino's programme is opposed to theirs in particular with regard to the former's refusal to reject the expected agreement on the presence of military bases in the country up until 1991. (1)

In 1984, a wide selection of forces from the left called for a boycott of the national assembly elections. The boycott campaign was a success in terms of mass mobilisations. But this was mitigated by the lack of electoral success. Amongst many sections of the population, the aspiration to vote proved very strong.

The supporters of a boycott are today less numerous than in 1984. They do not seem to be mobilising massively and visibly for an active boycott, apparently preferring not to confront directly those sections of the population who want to use their vote 'tactically' in order to get rid of Marcos. However, the boycott advocates remain convinced that once Marcos is re-elected, their refusal to promote electoral illusions will put them in a good position to seize the initiative again in the social and revolutionary struggles.

The left is divided. Most of the nationalist and independent Marxist left have, in effect, decided to situate themselves within 'Cory's' campaign in order to attempt to channel, from the inside, the people's aspiration for change which has consolidated around 'Ninoy's' widow.

This is the position of two trade union affiliates of the KMU — the National Federation of Labour (NFL) and NUHWRAIN (hotels) and also of Kaakbay. This is also the position of four 'ex-senators', nationalists and progressives: Jose Diokno, Jovito Salonga (who came back from exile in the United States in January 1985), Lorenzo Tanada and Ambrosio Padilla.

Tensions are beginning to emerge within Bayan. Lorenzo Tanada,

chairperson of Bayan, and Ambrosio Padilla, the vice-president, have, respectively, taken leave of absence and resigned from the organisation. And it seems that Bayan-Mindanao has got involved in the election campaign in support of 'Cory'.

'Cory' embodies a very deep aspiration for democratic rights including the end of personal rule and the release of political prisoners. Those supporting a boycott insist that free elections are impossible while Marcos is still in power. The supporters of participation believe that the opportunity should be seized to aggravate the regime's crisis and that the electoral terrain must not be left to the bourgeois opposition.

UNIDO is using the opportunity of these elections to make its mark. 'Doy' Laurel might have had to concede the candidature for president to 'Cory' but UNIDO's increased standing has allowed it to drag Corazon Aquino's campaign to the right.

Marcos system running out of steam

Marcos' position has become weaker as his regime disintegrates. The backbone of the regime is the army. The officers of that army are becoming more and more divided between those who are close to Marcos and those who favour a reform of the regime. (2) The Reform AFP Movement (RAM) has launched a campaign entitled Kamalayan '86 (Consciousness '86) in favour of proper electoral procedures.

Of course, Marcos still controls the general staff, but, in order to prepare the elections 'thoroughly' he had to put General Ver back as the head of the armed forces. The latter had been charged with the murder of Benigno Aquino and was finally acquitted after a show trial and despite US pressure. The judicial scandal represented by the acquittal of all those charged with 'Ninoy's' murder helped to undermine the authority of the armed forces. 'Cory' has pledged to reopen the inquiry and has openly accused Marcos of ordering the assassination of her husband.

The mainstay of the Marcos regime has been its support from the United States. This support continued without fail and regardless of the suffering inflicted on the popular masses by an increasingly bloody dictatorship. But the US government

1. On the subject of the US bases, see the interview with Roland Simbulan published in 'International Viewpoint' No 82, September 16, 1985.

2. Ibid.

is today aware of the complete stagnation of the regime and is concerned at the growth of communist forces.

Following Aquino's assassination in August 1983, Washington tried to impose reforms and a democratic opening on Marcos. The US administration was hoping in this way to overcome the crisis of the dictatorship by travelling the thin line of support for Marcos, so as not to be thrown into the deep unknown, whilst at the same time seeking to strengthen the bourgeois opposition so that it could eventually be integrated into the regime. Up until now the president's palace, much to Washington's displeasure, has firmly rejected this plan.

The US administration and Congress is therefore currently divided on this issue. Jeane Kirkpatrick, former US ambassador to the UN and on the right of the right of the Republican Party, still asserts her unstinting support for Marcos. She believes that 'many countries in the world are worse governed than the Philippines. None is more important to the stability of the US, Japan and other independent nations in the Pacific.' (3)

On the other hand, Stephen Solarz, a Democratic Party representative from New York, has been attacking the Marcos regime for several months and has managed to get an inquiry into the extent of the propertied investment of the Marcos family in the United States, thus threatening the Philippine president with the possibility of a huge financial scandal. Where is the international aid given to the Philippines going? The first results of the inquiry show that four properties in Manhattan worth 350 million dollars are connected with the Marcos family — and that is only the beginning!

As if by chance, researcher, Alfred McCoya, on the eve of the election has at last discovered in the archives of the US Army documents concerning Marcos' activities during the Second World War. These documents show that the myth of Marcos as the foremost anti-Japanese fighter, are indeed nothing more than a myth. But Marcos has built up his whole political reputation around his supposed exploits as a guerrilla with widely distributed comic-strip stories singing his courage.

The White House has been preparing itself for all eventualities in order to solve the Philippine crisis, including the possibility of simply ditching this embarrassing president. In the end, however, according to journalist Leslie H Gelb 'the administration has decided, however, not to push Mr Marcos from power by covert means although that was considered by some officials'.

The White House has finally decided to 'distance the United States from its old ally ... "another element of the strategy is waiting," the officials said. "Very soon", they said, they expect that Mr Marcos' health will force him to withdraw from the scene'. (4)

This wait-and-see attitude could be seen as representing paralysis. But, in any case, US support is now ambivalent. The framework of the regime is thus severely weakened.

The Marcos regime works according to a system of patronage made up of thousands of channels through which financial 'manna', controlled by the regime, falls to the advantage of those who support the president and his wife, Imelda. But the economic crisis lies precisely here. The money is running out and the financial institutions which have developed because of support from the state are having to be partially dismantled. Business men in opposition circles have begun to take up the initiative they have so long sought.

The lifeblood of the regime is the support or, at least, the benign tolerance of the Church in a country which is 85% Catholic. However, the hierarchy itself has become exasperated by the intransigence of the president and it is worried about the possibility of power passing into the hands of the army. Through pastoral letters, the conference of bishops has let it be known to the people that in a secret ballot they should vote according to conscience and not according to favours handed out by the regime. They say, accept what you are offered but vote for the candidate you prefer.

Election fraud expected

In this atmosphere of the end of an era, Marcos is trying once more to find the means to win an election. He is doing through control of the media; through threatening a coup d'etat if 'Cory' wins; through red-baiting (Benigno Aquino being suddenly transformed, to fit the bill, into the founder of the CPP); through corruption, electoral fraud and intimidation. For example Corazon Aquino's godchild, who was involved in the opposition campaign was recently killed and mutilated, his thumb and forefinger, which form the 'L' of the Laban (combat group) being cut off. Fifteen days from the election, nine organisers of the 'Cory' campaign were murdered.

To monitor the ballot itself, the opposition is hoping to mobilise the organisation which proved its

worth in the 1984 elections: Namfrel (National Citizens Movement for Free Elections). Nobody believes in the impartiality of the official commission, Comelec, but the regime seems ready to surpass all previous records in relation to ballot-rigging.

This has already been noted in Washington, as journalist Nayan Chanda remarked: 'The possibility that Marcos would resort to large-scale fraud is taken seriously by the Reagan administration and many US congress leaders.' (5) The US administration has decided to send a delegation to observe the ballot, in order to make the right impression. Marcos responded by issuing a decree forbidding any foreigner to go within fifty metres of the 90,000 polling booths across the country.

The regime's customary practice of electoral fraud is well-established: 'election-related violence is certainly not new to the Philippines and has been a perennial problem along with ballot-box stuffing. Switching of boxes after the polls close and pre-arranging official tally sheets before the votes are counted have also been prevalent in previous elections.' (6) The regime has also used the system of 'flying votes', putting one voting slip in several polling booths.

This time, 'school teachers who act as poll clerks have alleged that many of them have been paid several hundred pesos each by officials to "ensure that the count reflects the proper results." Domestic helpers and drivers in Manila also report that they have been offered money to vote for President Ferdinand Marcos.' (7)

Cardinal Sin, the archbishop of Manila, has been forced to publically denounce the fraud, declaring on January 18, in a pastoral letter: 'there is a very sinister plot' to frustrate the elections. 'Already we have seen, heard and read this and black propaganda used by some quarters against opponents who are, on the other hand, deprived of adequate access to the media'. Sin warned that 'if a candidate wins by cheating, he can only be forgiven by God if he renounces the office he has obtained by fraud.' (8)

Unfortunately it seems unlikely that Marcos will be deterred by the prospect of divine retribution. The apparatus of fraud and intimidation is ready to move. But instead of safeguarding the legitimacy of the regime, the elections will only underline the crisis that it is going through. □ See also p 27 for more on the elections.

3. See 'Far Eastern Economic Review', (FEER), of January 23, 1986, p 13.

4. 'International Herald Tribune', January 27, 1986, p 1.

5. 'FEER', January 23, 1986, p 2

6. Guy Sacerdoti, 'FEER', January 30, 1986.

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid. p 12.

PCI sinks deeper into reformist mire

THE DEFEAT it suffered in the May 12, 1985, elections provoked a debate in the Italian Communist Party (PCI) that in its duration, breadth, and the scope of the differences that have been expressed has exceeded the one that took place in 1956 following the denunciation of Stalin's crimes at the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. (1)

The debate was opened by the Central Committee immediately after the elections and continued in two subsequent CC plenums in July and December, and on the occasion of the festival organized for the party paper, *l'Unita* (in September). It has been totally public.

The daily and weekly press of the party has published discussion columns and long accounts of the CC plenums. The bourgeois press — from *la Repubblica* to *Corriere della sera* — has also chimed in, opening its columns to statements, interviews, and articles by various Communist Party leaders, as well as to commentary by leaders of other parties and well-known intellectuals. (2)

LIVIO MAITAN

To start with, let me sum up the main lines of the debate since July. The right wing has sought to gain a clearer profile on the theme of a general solution. Luciano Lama, the main leader of the Confederazione Generale del Lavoro (CGIL, the Italian General Confederation of Labour) has emerged as the leading figure. On May 25, he had already given *la Repubblica* an interview that created a stir among the party members who do not like to see their leaders using the bourgeois press to express particular points of view.

Lama said, among other things, that the PCI should henceforward orient itself toward a struggle to improve the present social system, and drop any abstract conceptual exercises about a "fuoriuscita" ("way out") of capitalism. (3) On July 19, he was back on the attack in the party daily. He sang the praises of the German social democracy, adding "I think that most Italian Communists, if they were in Germany, would be in the SPD."

On October 4, in an interview in *Corriere della sera*, Lama reiterated that there was "no sense, no meaning," in talking about "a way out" of capitalism. "I am established in this society," he said, "and there are values

of this system that I do not want to lose — freedom, democracy, my rights as a person." The average sentiment of an average bourgeois democrat could not have been expressed more faithfully.

Another spokesperson of the right, Guido Fanti, presently vice president of the European parliament, who expresses the concerns of the local elected officials, rejected the criticisms of the left municipal governments that were raised in the July CC. According to him, the reason for the electoral setbacks was that the party had not been able to outline "general orientations on the national government level" corresponding to the conceptions and practices that have become established in the municipalities, provinces, and regions. In other words, he was saying that the PCI had not carried integration into the institutions all the way. (*l'Unita*, July 24).

Also in the July 1985 Central Committee, Sergio Segre, another European deputy, took to task those who advanced the idea of a non-aligned Europe (*l'Unita*, July 25). Italy's membership in NATO and loyalty to the alliance of Western countries must not in any way be put in question.

Coming to the left, Ingrao has focused in particular on criticism of the Socialist Party, whose hostility to the peace movement indicates the extent to which it is a "captive of the American imperial logic." In particular, for that reason it was "subordinate to the moderate forces." (Ingrao has not forgotten that the PCI itself is responsible for the demobilization of the antiwar movement.)

Criticism of the PSI was also the central axis of a letter from the plant cell at Piaggio (Pontedera), which was also very harsh toward the trade-union leaderships. "If we want to offer an alternative to this power system, it should be clear that in many cases and many situations we have also to offer an alternative to the PSI, which is integrated into this system." (*l'Unita*, August 7).

Another representative of the left, Cossutta, has been more active than Ingrao in attempting to stand out as the main adversary of the majority's programmatic dance of the seven veils. For example, at the July CC, in response to "those comrades who explicitly center the debate on the question of whether we should give up any hypothesis of a struggle for a 'way out' of capitalism," he denied that "the contradictions of capitalism have ceased to play a decisive role in social and economic life." Thus, it is not possible to give up the struggle to supercede capitalism in Italy and in the West more generally.

Gradualist line

Cossutta came back to this idea in an article that appeared a month later in *l'Unita* of August 2: "Nothing has become more outmoded than trying to improve society by accepting a role of manipulating the rules of the capitalist game. This is a *deja vu* that has failed."

1. On this subject, see my article "Election defeat sharpens internal conflict in Communist Party," *International Viewpoint*, No. 80, July 15, 1985.

2. At the *l'Unita* festival, which lasted more than two weeks and was attended by hundreds of thousands of people, Italian Socialist Party leaders and those of other government parties (including ministers) were invited, along with trade-union leaders and leaders of the employers organizations, and managers of state enterprises. Foreign political figures and intellectuals also spoke. Among other things, there was a debate between the American Democrat, MacGovern and a spokesperson of the Soviet bureaucracy, Kovalski (an advisor of the Central Committee of the CPSU on international politics).

3. The term "fuoriuscita" is used widely in the PCI. It means literally "coming out." This sort of terminology has been introduced to express the gradualist conceptions.

Unfortunately, in the same article, he confirmed his agreement with the "gradualist line that marks the history of the party," identifying with the ideas both of Togliatti and Berlinguer. Finally, at the *l'Unita* festival, he declared that he was not convinced of the correctness of the "pact among producers" (that is, between the workers and bosses), which remains a leitmotiv of the majority's orientation.

For its part, the majority leading group around the national secretary, Natta, while it denies that the party is suffering from an identity crisis (*l'Unita*, October 8), has, nonetheless, concerned itself with reasserting this identity on three levels. First of all, it has reaffirmed the central role of the working class: "the masses of dependent workers have not ceased to be the protagonists of the struggle for new social relations." (4)

In the second place, the leading group is sharpening the party's present profile. "The PCI is and wants to be a modern democratic reform party and a genuinely socialist force, inseparably linked to the destiny of Italy, to the life and destiny of the European left, to all the forces of liberation, emancipation, and progress throughout the world."

The PCI defends the ideas of "liberty, liberation, justice, equality, and solidarity," as well as "the idea that the relationships of production arising out of capitalist structures do not present the ultimate in human history, or an application of natural laws." (5)

In the third place, it has confirmed the "conception of the alternative" as the party's strategic axis in the medium or even long term.

I will come back to the "alternative" in connection with the debate on the documents for the April 1986 party congress. It should be noted here that in the period I have been talking about, the spokespersons of the "center," conscious of the difficulties they have in explaining their strategy, have taken their stand mainly on this ground.

Unfortunately, most often they have indulged in veritable conceptual and verbal sleight-of-hand tricks. Achille Occhetto, who is the champion in the sport, deserves to be quoted.

In an article that appeared in *Rinascita* (No. 26, July 13, 1985) entitled "New Key Ideas for the European Left," taking as his starting point an essay by the German Social Democrat Peter Glotz, Occhetto came out for a "new appreciation of the market." But, this champion of the slippery phrase specified, this was on condition that "the real question of the age looming over our political options be faced, that is, that of a

collective reconquest of use value, that could go beyond any neo-seigniorial utopia."

I confess that I do not understand quite what he was talking about, but I suspect that I am in good company.

To be sure, the author does his best to give us some hints. He explains a little further on that it is necessary to "surmount the false alternative between statism and neoliberalism" and to "introduce a new liberalism into the great processes of socialization that are underway."

Occhetto concludes: "The solution of the new problems is not at all easy [we suspected as much!], it is not set down in the writings of Marx or those of Keynes either. If we do not want to be defeated by Reagan (and by Friedman), the lessons of Marx and Keynes cannot, as it were, be gotten around." The synthesis that we are offered is of course unbeatable, but the claim that it represents new ideas is another kettle of fish.

In a second article (*Rinascita*, No. 28, July 27, 1985), our author proclaims that we have to "go beyond the old revolutionism [sic!] and the old reformism ... Even the assertion of the need for a way out of capitalism has to be presented in problematic form."

Here, the nub of the question seems clearer. The leading group of the PCI does not want to declare unequivocally that it is for "going beyond" capitalism, because that would create difficulties for its present political projects and the alliances it wants. But it does not want either to say what, for example, Lama has, for fear of overly watering down the party's image and disappointing those activists and cadres who refuse to believe that fighting the capitalist system is only an outworn fad.

Communists or social democrats?

In highlighting the new elements that appeared in the PCI's positions after the establishment of the Jaruzelski regime, I pointed out its decision henceforth to maintain "relations with all the communist parties on the same basis as with any other socialist, revolutionary, and progressive force, without any special links with anybody." (6)

It should be noted now — before an analysis of the theses for the Seventeenth Congress — that the list of partners in the PCI's "new internationalism" has grown longer. It also includes "lay or Christian- and Catholic-inspired democratic forces, the unions, the peace and ecology movements."

The difference between the *links* that should unite workers' parties, and *support* to different sorts of progressive movements is further obscured. But this is not the essential thing. The main thing is that in practice and in the current political and programmatic debate, the PCI is not putting all the workers' parties on the same level. It is much more interested today in having relations with the social democratic parties than with the communist ones (for example, the French and Portuguese CPs).

In fact, a reading of the PCI's daily and weekly press leaves not the slightest doubt. The essential points of reference are the German (SPD) and Swedish social democratic parties. To the former, *Rinascita* devotes, for example, an article by its specialist, Mario Telo, who represents the SPD's new program in an altogether favorable light (we have already seen, more over, that the PCI refers constantly to the theses of the SPD leader Peter Gotz).

This new SPD program is supposed to be characterized mainly by the idea of "a social alliance for jobs financed above all by sacrifice in a spirit of solidarity" and by a broadening of the "great social pact," including not only the "three traditional sectors" (the SPD, the unions, and the bosses) but also the central bank (the concept of *Globalsteuerung*, or overall direction, the author explains).

There is, nonetheless, a difficulty: "The private industries do not argue either with the priority goal [jobs], nor its sources of financing, nor its forms of realization." This is a small detail, whose cause Telo seems unaware of. Despite all the "new features," the German economy, like any capitalist economy, is still governed by profit, and everything else is only the trimmings, as such "social allies" as the bosses and the banks see it.

As regards the Swedish Social Democracy, the PCI press has waxed enthusiastic over its latest electoral exploits. In its September 14, 1985, issue, *l'Unita* devoted a whole page

4. Natta rejects the characterization of the leadership as a "center," both on his own behalf and that of his predecessors: "On the level of historical political analysis," Natta writes, "it is purely arbitrary to define Togliatti's line, then Longo's, and finally Berlinguer's, as if what an inaccurate jargon terms their 'centrism,' and what we correctly define as a constant struggle against extremism and opportunism was in substance a sort of static equilibrium, an absolute of resolute choices." (*l'Unita*, October 8)

5. See Natta's report to the July 1985 CC. (*l'Unita*, July 23, 1985)

6. See the December 30, 1981 declaration of the PCI leadership cited in my article, "Les rapports du PCI avec l'Union soviétique," in *Inprecor* (IV's French-language sister publication), No. 121, March 22, 1982.

to Sweden. Moreover, it entitled the editorial in its September 17 issue, on the Swedish elections "Where they have not lowered their heads."

The September 28 *Rinascita* published an article entitled "The Swedish Example," in which Mario Telo rejected the idea of "Swedish exceptionalism," posing the question whether "the process of renewal that paved the way for Palme's return to power after only six years in opposition did not indicate and prefigure a possible new phase of growth for the European trade-union and socialist movement."

The only reservation Telo voiced was that the Swedish Social Democracy maintains a "national socialist strategy," while "the SPD is more clearly European." Telo does not seem to wonder whether this might have something to do with the different orientations of the two bourgeoisies. (7)

As we have seen, Natta characterizes the PCI as a "reform" party. More generally, the leading group continues to avoid the words "reformist" and "reformism." Likewise, in the recent debates, some of the party's representatives have explained that the difference between classic Social Democracy and the PCI lies in the fact that in the last analysis the Social Democrats have only fought to modify the distribution of income, while the PCI wants to introduce structural reforms.

However, such a reduction of the Social Democratic policy — which is only tactical camouflage, if not a self-delusion — is now being openly challenged.

For his part, Rosario Villari, a member of the Central Committee, has stressed the need for the party to take all the consequences of accepting "political democracy" as a "universal value," that is, to specify explicitly and without any reservations that the party's approach to "the socialist transformation of society" can only be "reformist" and "gradual" (*l'Unita*, October 10).

The same Villari explained to the December CC that instead of "proclaiming" ideal perspectives for definitive solutions and working out abstract projects, it was necessary "to appreciate the conquests, the reforms that the workers' movement has achieved in its history." (*l'Unita*, December 9).

The historian Giuliano Procacci, a member of the Central Control Commission, was still more explicit in his rehabilitation of the reformists. "The reformists," he wrote, "represented the most constructive, the most capable, and even the most effectively militant component of the

Italian workers movement." (*Corriere della Sera*, July 16, 1985).

The theses that the Central Committee adopted at the beginning of December reflect only partially the whole set of problems raised in the debates that have gone on for more than six months. In fact, the theses contain no major new element. They only reformulate — most often in terms used already in recent years and even at the 1983 congress — the party's reformist strategic line, its approach to international problems, and its conception of democratic centralism. The programmatic document, adopted at the same time, reiterates, with minor variations, the specific axes and objectives of other documents of the same character. (8)

Rather than to analyze the documents as such, it is more interesting to look at the debate on the amendments, of which the party daily gave a very detailed account.

First of all, the majority rejected an amendment put by Cossutta which said simply: "The Communists are working for an advance beyond capitalism." The document was left formulated as follows: "Looking at the question from the standpoint of developed countries, the Italian Communists see the advance beyond capitalism not as the result of great traumatic breaks, as has happened in the past (in fact, those came in the wake of two world wars in Russia and China) but through a complex interweaving of economic forms in which one mode of production and way of life can prevail over another."

The most right-wing Social Democrats in the heyday of reformism would have every right to complain about such plagiarism!

Secondly, while the document of the previous congress, although with reservations, put the main blame for the stepped-up arms race on American imperialism, all the amendments going on in this direction that were proposed at the December CC were rejected. Also rejected was an amendment calling for "unilateral disarmament actions and arms limitations," as well as an amendment by Cossutta that indicated, in very vague terms, under what conditions Italy could remain in NATO. Fieschi and Castellina, who also drew up amendments, rightly accused the majority of defending positions "more backward" than those of some European social democratic parties.

On the theme of the "democratic alternative," of which numerous interpretations appeared for example in the May CC, the debate has again been rather sharp, without this however resulting in any clarity.

It is significant, in any case, that all the proposals designed to present

the alternative as an "alternative to the Christian Democracy" were rejected. Apparently, the historic compromise has still not been buried.

Opposing positions were expressed once again on the question of the use of nuclear energy. The majority endorsed the line already adopted previously calling for "limited and controlled" use. (9)

Finally, the majority rejected an amendment calling for the party to establish even "formal" relations with the Socialist International, and an amendment calling for replacing the formula "democratic centralism" — which a part of the right would like to drop — by "the method of democratic unity."

In reality, the debate on the amendments was a new round in the confrontation between the various currents or sensibilities in the party. The right — some of whose spokespersons abstained on the final vote (10) — had little to say about international questions. This was for the good reason that it thinks it has gotten its way on the most important points (the attitude toward the United States and the USSR, the question of NATO, and the fight against disarmament).

On the other hand, the right made it clear that it was not very happy about the domestic perspectives, that is, the alternative and the "programmatic government." In fact, it was in this arena that the center was able to play its mediating role, imposing formulas that everyone could interpret as they please or to suit their needs.

The left — which abstained also (in 1983, Cossutta voted against) — had three components. The ex PDUP [Party of Proletarian Unity, a Centrist current that returned to the PCI some years ago] component distinguished itself by putting amendments on international questions (Castellina) and an amendment on the programmatic government (Magri),

7. As I said already in my article in IV, No. 80, July 15, 1985, the PCI leaders are visibly bothered by the balance sheet of the Socialist governments in France and Spain, whose strategy is not qualitatively different from theirs. They hardly ever talk about Spain, and they are taking more and more distance from France. They consider, notably, that the policy of nationalizations is outmoded, and that the left has not made the necessary efforts to get the active support of the masses. They intimate that instead of governing with a 52% majority, it would have been preferable to envisage broader accords. On this subject, see an answer by Gilles Martinet in *'Rinascita'*, No. 46, December 7.

8. This is a program that should be carried out by an alternative government.

9. Eighty-nine CC members voted for, 22 against, and 33 abstained.

10. In total, there were 12 abstentions on the theses and eight on the programmatic document. No one voted against.

which went in the same direction as the one presented by Ingrao on the same subject.

Cossutta and Cappelloni continued a battle that has been going on for five years now, advocating a less critical attitude toward the USSR. They argued that this was justified now on the basis of Gorbachov's new course. Along with this, they criticized the trade-union leaderships and demanded more rights for minorities within the party.

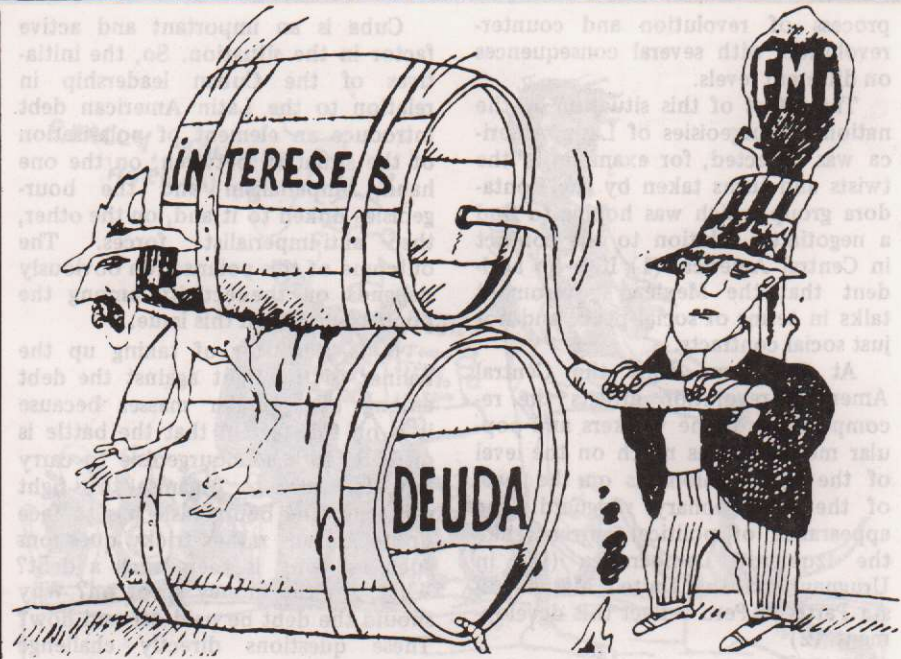
Ingrao also criticized the trade-union bureaucracy to a limited extent, mainly for its not very democratic practices. And he supported Castellina's amendments on the international questions. He fought above all on an amendment concerning the "programmatic government," which according to him should be a "government to change the constitution," because the "crucial question" today is "a reform of the state," and the end of the five-party government (11) "could give rise to a traumatic transition." The least that can be said is that the adoption of such an amendment would not have changed the party's orientation very much.

What is more, none of the components of the left presented amendments on the most important theses, such as the Sixteenth on "new internationalism," the Seventeenth, on the characterization of Italian society, the Twenty-First, on perspectives, and the Twenty-Sixth, on social alliances (calling for an "alliance for work and development" including the "forces of the industrial bourgeoisie that have an interest in fighting against imbalances and backwardness.") This confirms that the sort of left that exists in the PCI does not constitute an alternative to the leading group, whose fundamental orientations it does not challenge.

In conclusion, I repeat, the documents for the Seventeenth Congress offer nothing new of substance with respect to the party's previous orientations and with respect to what was put forward in the debate before last year's elections. The most daring "innovators" will be, at least partially, disappointed. Nonetheless, from the changes and rectifications that I have indicated, it emerges that the conceptions of the leading group are less and less demarcated from those of the Social Democrats.

The PCI is continuing its long march into the institutions of bourgeois society, and the party is more and more the prisoner of the mechanisms of this society. □

11. The five parties are the Christian Democratic Party, the Socialist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the Liberal Party.



The way out of the debt crisis

THE LEVEL OF the foreign debt for all the countries of Latin America has now reached the astronomical figure of 400 thousand million dollars. This means that the repayment of such debts is now a wholly hypothetical question.

Developments in the world monetary system (the rise in the dollar, in interest rates and the movement of capital) when added to the problem of the debt have helped to create a situation of acute crisis for the Latin American economies.

As usual it is the workers and popular masses who are being made to pay for this crisis through unemployment, wage cuts and increased lowering of the standard of living for certain sectors.

The debt itself is at the centre of the economic crisis and formed the theme of a recent conference organised by the Cuban leadership, which called on all the countries of Latin America to refuse to pay.

We publish below an article taken from an oral contribution to a meeting of the leaderships of Latin American sections of the Fourth International which took place in September 1985.

CLAUDE DEVILLIERS

The Latin American continent has entered into the most serious crisis in its history, more serious even than the economic crisis of the 1930s. This crisis is reflected in the actual erosion of the infrastructures of production and society at large. It poses a crucial problem of perspectives for the bourgeoisie.

The economic and social crisis in Latin America has been developing, alongside of the effects of the revolutionary process unfolding in Central America, since 1981-82. At the moment when the revolution brought its first victory in Nicaragua, there was a deep and prolonged crisis going on. The crisis coincided with a whole

process of revolution and counter-revolution with several consequences on different levels.

The effect of this situation on the national bourgeoisies of Latin America was reflected, for example, in the twists and turns taken by the Contadora group which was hoping to find a negotiated solution to the conflict in Central America. (1) It is no accident that the Mexican government talks in terms of social peace and not just social contracts.

At the same time the Central American revolution effects the re-composition of the workers and popular movement, as much on the level of the trade unions as on the level of the revolutionary vanguard. The appearance of political currents like the Izquierda Democratica (ID) in Uruguay and the United Mariateguista Party in Peru reflect this development. (2)

Cuba represents an alternative pole

From 1979 to 1981 the fundamental question posed in Central America was the question of power and the strategy for the conquest of power. Since then two new problems have arisen. These came about with the development of the imperialist counter-offensive, marked by the invasion of Grenada; the increasing intervention in El Salvador; the withdrawal of the revolutionary forces in Guatemala in 1982; the many-sided intervention in Nicaragua and the militarisation of the region as a whole.

On the one hand the more and more direct confrontation with imperialism is posing the problem of national independence and sovereignty; for what is at stake today is not simply the formal right of independence but the real possibility of social change. On the other hand, the socio-economic situation in Nicaragua under the impact of this aggression raises the needs for a continent-wide response to imperialist policies.

Economic cooperation between the countries of Latin America, and not just the Central American countries, is much more important than it was in the 1930s. This is as much from the point of view of their insertion into the system of imperialist domination as from the point of view of relations between the countries themselves.

In this context, the existence of the Cuban state constitutes an alternative socio-economic pole. Faced with a growing social crisis, Cuba embodies the possibility of a society which functions according to a different logic.

Cuba is an important and active factor in the situation. So, the initiatives of the Cuban leadership in relation to the Latin American debt introduce an element of polarisation of the situation between, on the one hand, imperialism and the bourgeoisies linked to it and, on the other, the anti-imperialist forces. The outcome of this polarisation obviously depends on the activity among the popular masses on this issue.

It is a matter of taking up the banner of the fight against the debt among the popular masses because it is on this terrain that the battle is difficult for the bourgeoisie to carry out. In order to organise this fight seriously, the bourgeoisie has to face up to certain rather tricky questions such as: why is there such a debt? What was the money spent on? Why should the debt be paid off and how? These questions directly challenge the competence of the Latin American bourgeoisies and their relations with imperialism.

The Cuban initiative also aimed explicitly to change the regional relation of forces to prevent imperialism from concentrating all its political and military force on Central America. The desynchronisation between the different revolutionary processes unfolding in Central America inevitably creates internal tensions and centrifugal forces in Latin America as a whole. Through posing the central question of a continent-wide dimension it is important to create a wider opening for the development of a strategy which would draw together the anti-imperialist activity in the region.

The economic crisis is unfolding in the context of a social structure which has certain particular characteristics especially compared to the 1930s:

— The working class has been qualitatively strengthened despite an uneven level of development of trade-union and political organisation. This strength is very real even if this is only for elementary reasons of survival. This has been shown in the mobilisations which took place in recent months in Uruguay and Brazil, for example.

— Urban concentration and massive impoverishment in the urban sector also constitute a new element. The crisis hits those societies which are already partially breaking up and we are beginning to see the emergence of organisations of self defence, and of resistance by these populations.

This is shown in the organisations of the popular living quarters known as *colonos* in Mexico, *pueblos jóvenes* in Peru and *favelas* in Brazil.

— The agrarian crisis is very severe and the land question often becomes a question of survival in this situation of economic crisis. The agrarian movement is very divided. It includes sections of the landless peasants, day labourers, agricultural workers, small producers and cooperatives. Their demands raise the question of the problems of prices and credits which have a general political aspect in that they relate to decisions taken by governments. This alters the import of the workers' and peasants' alliance on the political level.

— The pauperisation of the middle classes and the petty bourgeoisie is not automatically reflected in their evolution to the left. It rather provokes a differentiation within these layers which brings about a sort of double polarisation.

The combination of all these elements makes it difficult to envisage any return to the political dominance of nationalist populism of the type which developed in Latin America with APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) in Peru or Peronism in Argentina. It also makes it difficult to stabilise long-lasting social contracts. Siles Suazo has already spectacularly failed in Bolivia. It will not be long before we see exactly the room for manoeuvre that Alan Garcia has in Peru.

Beneath this crisis, then, lie the beginnings of a collapse of a whole historical model of economic development. It is not just the external factor, the debt, which has caused this crisis. That is rather the ultimate expression of the impasse reached by this model of development subordinated as it is to imperialism.

This model of development involved the beginnings of the establishment of an import substitution industry, the price of which was a systematic need for foreign capital. And this is just how the whole thing got caught up with the debt. This model corresponded to the need of the large industrial centres in the West to export production goods. A large part of the revenue going into Latin America from the export of raw materials went towards the purchase of such goods. But the capital required to finance the importation of such infrastructures went largely beyond what was accrued from the

1. The Contadora group includes Mexico, Panama, Venezuela and Colombia. For an analysis of the contradictions and the ambiguities which this group got itself involved with, see 'International Viewpoint', No 79, July 1, 1985.

2. See 'IV' No 65, December 10, 1985.

sale of raw materials under the unequal conditions of exchange dictated by the grip of imperialism on the world economy.

The only way to pursue this process of industrialisation was thus to allow the influx of foreign capital. This is how the vicious circle of continuously exporting in order to reinvest the financial returns in the purchase of production goods and technology, began.

This economic model is, by its very nature, subject to the fluctuations of the world market, as was shown in 1981 and 1982, and also of the financial market. It favours the development of the most dynamic sectors of production like, for example, the automobile industry in Mexico or Brazil, whose products are destined for the better-off sections of society, thus excluding a large part of the population. This model therefore carries within itself certain limits which prevent it from benefiting society as a whole and from producing the cumulative effects of development. These sectors rely on a large degree of state investment. This has enormous social consequences because of consequent budget restrictions linked to policies of austerity which are currently developing. But if such expenses are not reduced the budget deficit increases, interest rates go up in order to attract savings and investment dries up. This is a speculation spiral.

The collapse of this economic model is now concretely visible. Between 1979 and 1983, no less than 100 thousand million dollars fled Latin America for the United States. From 1982 to 1985 the flight of capital has increased still further. Today it probably represents more than half of the continent's debts. For the month of June 1985, alone, Miami bankers announced an influx of 3.5 thousand million dollars from Latin America. The breathtaking increase in drugs trafficking is a further indication of the historic collapse of the 'developmentalist model'. It is now much more profitable for business people to speculate on high interest rates than to invest in production especially since some countries have seen interest rates at 25 and 35% above inflation.

Imperialism's role in this fiasco is undeniable. But we have to add to that the responsibility of the local ruling classes also associated with it. This is what gives rise to such burning questions as what type of development with what goal should replace this failed model? And what are the social forces capable of maintaining a new model of economic development?

This crisis and the changes in



economic policy dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) coincides with the patent failure of the system of domination which had its heyday in Latin America — that of open military dictatorship. For the moment imperialism and the Latin American bourgeoisies are responding to this situation through an overall policy of encouraging limited and controlled democratic openings coupled with the removal of the military from direct administration of the state. From this stems the importance of popular demands for the release of the 'disappeared'; for the judgement of those guilty of crimes under the military dictatorships etc. (3) At the same time an attempt is being made to rebuild the repressive apparatus after only a limited clean-up. The most successful example of this operation at the moment is in Brazil. But the measures taken by Alan Garcia in Peru, with limited purges of the most corrupt sections of the military apparatus, conducted in direct collaboration with the US drugs control units, go in the same direction. Similarly with the judgement on the Argentinian military.

Crisis of US domination

A further effort is being undertaken, within the framework of this policy, to give more weight to the productive sector of the economy. This is because, on the one hand, an increase in exports is the only way to ensure the payment of the debt and because, on the other hand, non-productive expenditure had grown considerably under the military regimes and that is without taking account

of the enormous diversion of funds which took place as in the case of Argentina.

Some manoeuvres are also underway in an attempt to use sections of the Church and the unions to encourage acceptance of a policy of social contracts.

In conclusion, all these measures are taking place in the context of a systematic delimitation of the democratic margins of manoeuvre open to the popular masses. This is combined with the careful preparation of selective and paramilitary repression against the most radical and active sections. Of course, under the twin blows of the crisis and weight of the debt, this project is becoming more and more precarious and unstable. Several explosive issues remain in the air.

First, who accumulated this debt? Often it was the military regimes themselves who were directly responsible. The link between the debt and the fight for human rights is thus easily established as was shown in the Argentinian appeal launched by Perez Esquivel. (4)

Moreover, the context of the relations between Latin America and imperialism has altered substantially since the 1930s. At that time, several countries, at the initiative of Peru in 1931, declared a unilateral moratorium on the debt. This did not pose a big problem. The main pre-occupation of the US in Latin America, at the time was to supplant Great Britain and forestall Germany. This was not a heavy price for achieving such a result. Today the moratorium on debts would involve a different

3. See 'IV' No 88, December 9, 1985.

4. *Ibid.*



level of confrontation with imperialism. For the US, up until 1981, the export of capital to Latin America was a source of profit. Also, the Latin American debt is concentrated in a series of big banks such as Manufacturers Hanover Trust and Citibank. In some cases the debt represents up to 180% of the property of these banks. Latin America constitutes the main investment area for US capital outside of the United States itself, and also one of the main sources of raw materials.

The response of the US to this worrying situation is thus to strictly control production and to subordinate to its own interests the current and future profits accruing from the Latin American economies. This is in accordance with the need for valorisation and recomposition of world imperialist capital and of the local capital associated with it. The conclusion from this is clear; that given the inter-relationship between imperialism and the Latin American bourgeoisies, there are no sections of that bourgeoisie who, in the battle against the debt, are capable in a consistent way of heading the resistance to imperialism, not even in Brazil.

The crisis of US domination is now a reality which shows itself daily. However the reality of this crisis should not lead us to underestimate or misunderstand imperialism's current overall counter-offensive. The main target of this counter-offensive, conducted on the pretext of controlling the spread of communism, is Central America.

In fact, this crisis of US domination

is not taking the same form as in 1975. For today it is tied into a real capacity to launch a military and political counter-offensive combined. Thus it is the US National Security Council which is openly directing counter-revolutionary operations in Central America. It is conducting a policy dividing the countries and fitting the corresponding sub-regions into specific diplomatic, military and economic plans. These plans, whether in Central America, the Caribbean or the Andes belt, are presented each time as a recognition of distinct geopolitical realities. In fact, however they are designed to strengthen and consolidate the divisions and differences in each situation in order to prevent any revolutionary dynamic developing in the particular area.

US imperialism is prepared to treat Mexico or Brazil, which are considered as intermediary powers, in a specific way and on the basis of conflicting but organised reciprocal relations. Similarly with Argentina and Venezuela, the other great debtors. It is trying to separate off Central America and the Caribbean and to break the dynamic of the relations with Central America which came about in the recent process of decolonisation. This was one of the functions of Reagan's initiative in the Caribbean basin. In a parallel way, it is stepping up the pressure to unite Central America against Nicaragua and to reintegrate Guatemala within this front. At the same time it is pursuing other specific projects in the Andes region or in the Southern

Cone.

The basic policy of US imperialism consists in maintaining discussion and negotiation on the debt in a bilateral and non-global framework. The alternative to this traditional divide and rule policy has to lie in the defining of a common policy on a Latin American level. This is the issue raised by Fidel Castro.

Finally, the crisis in Latin America is combined with a prolonged crisis within the imperialist countries themselves. This time, the recession had already begun in Latin America before it had developed in the imperialist centres. The slight recovery in 1984 in Latin America only touched the surface, and was due mainly to the restrictions on imports. The renewed recession was to add to the effects of previous ones. With a fall in the price of most raw materials, the buying power of exported goods subsequently decreased. Interest rates will probably go down, but not in relation to the drop in exports. This type of vicious circle means that the idea of getting out of the crisis of the debt cycle through an increase in exports is totally illusory. But for the moment this is the only solution being put forward by the local bourgeoisies or indeed by the reformist bureaucracies.

In the first quarter of 1985 alone the value of Latin American exports went down by 14.5%. The figures for the second quarter will undoubtedly be worse. In this framework the idea of the new world economic order taken up by Fidel Castro in the 1985 Havana conferences can no longer have the same meaning as in the 1970s. At that time this meant demanding new North-South relations essentially around the issue of stabilising the prices of raw materials.

Today the main cartel providing raw materials, OPEC, is in a state of collapse. This collapse is proof of the impasse that has been reached. It is now obvious that the formula of a new economic order can only be understood in the radical sense, that is involving a model of development axised around the social requirements of Latin America and around different trading relations between the different countries in the region. Such changes in relations could not simply be reduced to a change in North-South relations, but in South-South and South-East relations. However, such a perspective, if it were to be applied at the level of the continent as a whole, would involve the implementation of a coherent economic policy and of a common currency, utilising, at best, complementary aspects of the different Latin American economies. The problem of the

establishment of a state power which would govern in the interests of the proletarian masses is then posed.

The figures for the debt in the Latin American countries are well-known. It is, however, useful to re-examine the effects of the debt, and the implication for workers' and popular demands and the axes of struggle.

Export of Latin American capital

During the 1960s the net inflow of capital which came to Latin America was financed by middle and long-term credit. The result was obvious: a decline in direct imperialist investment. There were several reasons for this, one of which was the simultaneous attraction of the European and Canadian markets. This was the time of the great 'American Challenge' and the fear of the effects of the Cuban revolution on the continent of Latin America. The loans being granted in Latin America were essentially Eurocredits, or loans coming from international or government organisations.

During the 1970s, however, the private banks stepped up their penetration of Latin America. This credit then became an important element of profit-making for imperialist finance capital and its allies. There developed, at the same time, an abundance of credit, thanks to the availability of petrodollars and a lowering of investment in the imperialist countries themselves. This is where the decline in public credit and the development of private credit in Latin America originated. It was concentrated on four countries which included Mexico and Brazil.

The abundant supply of money and the increase in the sale price of raw materials masks the exhaustion which is already perceptible in the model for developing currently being followed in these countries. Since the 1973-74 economic crisis growth levels have remained high which all helps to perpetuate the illusion. However, during this period there have already been warnings on the debt in Jamaica, Zaire, Peru and Turkey. Although limited, this crisis has already been of sufficient gravity to impose changes on imperialist strategy. Since 1978 the banking system has changed their loans into short-term credit only. This was a sign of the loss of confidence of the banks in light of the development of the economic situation in these countries. The proportion of this type of credit within the loans total has gone up rapidly. So much so that in 1981-1982, five elements of a real crisis

began to come together;

— High interest rates in the USA (20% in 1981 compared to 11% in 1979) due to the arms race and to the US deficit budget.

— A lowering of the price of raw materials since 1981, partly linked to technological changes.

— The coordination of terms for the recovery of medium-term loans with those for short-term loans.

— The development of the crisis in the imperialist countries which brought with it a reduction in demand and a possibility of exporting to these countries.

— A withdrawal of credit by the private banks who find it more financially profitable and less risky to invest in the US itself than in Latin America. From now on it was to be the USA which absorbed most of the credit from the European market.

It was this accumulation of circumstances which was at the origin of the 1982 crisis. Such a crisis was not foreseen by those concerned and was most spectacularly revealed by the crisis of debt payment which Mexico underwent during the summer of that year. From this date the big credit banks were looking for a way of permanently refinancing without injecting massive new credits. This involved sustaining the debt payment and keeping the economies afloat without embarking on any great schemes for development. The credit banks have moved from a kind of economy of interest to a commission economy which has a totally parasitic aspect to it.

The consequences are clear. Since 1982, the economic resources of Latin America have served to relaunch the economies of the US and Europe to the detriment of their potential to revive economic activity on the continent itself.

Since then we have witnessed the wholesale export of capital from Latin America to the imperialist centres through the payment of interest on the debts and the flight of capital. The increase in the level of the debt means that the payment of interest alone soaks up a growing part of the revenue from exports. In some cases it soaks up well over half and up to 140% in Argentina. This means that it is physically impossible to pay off this debt or to get out of the vicious circle of debts and dependence.

This only brings out the position of dependence of all the countries in the region in which about 30% of Gross Domestic Product is tied up in credits, except in Colombia. The problems of independence and national sovereignty are once again sharply posed. This general situation is

related to the so-called policies of 'adjustment' and austerity practised by different governments. Following this schema the flow of productive capital remains low in volume. Imperialism took advantage of this to seize control of whole branches of industry in these countries which were considered as of strategic importance such as, for example, computer science. But the amount of investment and jobs created is very modest in comparison to the extent of the crisis. It was, moreover, the only thing which the local bourgeoisies still hoped for. They were not expecting an influx of new credit but they did expect selective imperialist investment to take over control of the most modern sectors of the economy. This was at the price of a growing alienation of the national economies, which were undergoing at the same time, programmes of denationalisation (as in Argentina, Peru, Mexico, Bolivia); and the relaxing of customs regulations. The result of these measures and of the freeing of imports was that the relation between US imperialism and the countries of Latin America developed in the direction of trading rather than production. This took the form of the conquest of the Latin American market and the taking over of certain sections of the service and agricultural industry by US imperialist capital. Dependency is thereby increased anew.

The bourgeoisie divided

The local dependent bourgeoisies nevertheless have an interest in putting slight pressure for negotiations with imperialism on the conditions of this change. This however, has nothing to do with any kind of confrontation. However, the industrial development of the 1960s and 1970s was very real and it brought with it, in Latin America, very real social forces also. But the problem for the Latin American bourgeoisies lies in the impossibility of establishing a common front of the bourgeoisie across the continent which would go beyond a few very general demands such as: the lowering of the interest rates; or the demand for the IMF to allocate credit at preferential rates (which would amount to a socialisation of the losses through the mechanism of the IMF); or even the demand to offset the value of exports against the debt repayments. Alan Garcia reckons that the debt repayment should not go beyond 10% of exports while Jose Sarney puts the limit at 25% for Brazil. But a sort of 'Contadora of the economy' would not be able to go beyond these decla-

Trade unionists fight the debt

OCTOBER 23, 1985, was decreed a day of continent-wide fight against the foreign debt and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) by a trade union conference of Latin American and Caribbean workers on the foreign debt held in Havana last July (see IV, no 85, October 28, 1985, which published the call to the sections of the Fourth International to support this initiative). A meeting of trade-union representatives was held in Montevideo, Uruguay, last November 29 to draw up a balance-sheet of actions organized as a result of this call. All together, even though they were on the whole quite modest, the mobilizations that occurred on October 23 mark the beginning of a continent-wide campaign against the debt and the IMF.

The main October 23 protests took place in Mexico and Peru.

In Mexico 66,000 people assembled at a demonstration called by dozens of trade unions that oppose the control of the workers' movement by the trade-union bureaucracy linked to the party in power, the Partido Institucional Revolucionario (PRI). Let us remember, by the way, that our comrades of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT), the Mexican section of the Fourth International, inaugurated their deputies' seats, won in the last elections, by proposing a two-year suspension of the Mexican debt so as to use the

money owed for compensation of the earthquake victims. This proposition was quickly rejected by the government (see IV No 84, October 14, 1985).

In Peru, there were 25,000 people who participated in a demonstration called principally by the Peruvian General Workers Confederation (CGTP) joining with the Peruvian Communist Party (PCP).

Other demonstrations on a smaller scale took place in Chile, Bolivia and Colombia. In Argentina a demonstration called by the opposition sections of the Peronist Confederacion General del Trabajos (CGT) took place.

The situation was a little different in Uruguay owing to the position of the Inter-Union Workers Plenum — National Workers Convention (PIT-CNT), which supports nonpayment of the debt. Doubtless in order to avoid demonstrations on this theme, the Uruguayan government preferred to declare October 23 a day off.

In Brazil different initiatives were taken in the principal large cities and wherever the United Confederation of Workers (CUT) is implanted. It was in fact at the initiative of CUT that these actions and protests occurred. The chief demonstration took place in Rio de Janeiro. It got together however, only 6,000 people while the election campaign was attracting the

attention of all Brazil. In Sao Paulo a public meeting of 3,000 people was held. The CUT played an essential role in the organisation of these initiatives, developing a politics of unity by appealing to the Congress of the Working Class (CONCLAT), the trade union current led by the "yellow" bureaucracy and the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB). In spite of the importance of this question the CONCLAT has often adopted an ambiguous position that leads it as, at Belo Horizonte, to refuse to organise a common demonstration with the CUT.

On the occasion of the third congress of the PIT-CNT in Uruguay, a meeting was held on November 29 of Latin American trade-union organisations. A common declaration was adopted and signed by the CGT (Argentina), the CST (Colombia), the CUT (Brazil), the CGTP (Peru), the CTC (Cuba), the CNT (Chile), the COB (Bolivia), the CPTE (Paraguay, in exile), as well as representatives of the Autonomous University of Mexico workers union and some regional trade union organisations. This assembly reinforced the idea of calling a meeting of Latin American trade unions in the coming months. For its part, the leadership of the Brazilian CUT proposed for next May 1 another continent-wide day of demonstrations against the debt and the IMF.

rations of principle because there are too many differences of interest in terms of exports and markets amongst the Latin American bourgeoisies themselves. For example, Brazil only exports 20% of its products to the US whereas 70% of Mexico's total exports go there. Beyond the general statistics the structures of the debt are therefore different. For the two major debtors the important thing is to renegotiate the conditions. But such a renegotiation always comes back to accepting the perspective of a new increase in the debt itself. If today it has reached 400 million million dollars, with an interest rate of 7% it will reach 600 million million dollars by 1990 and that is if the negotiations go well.

The renegotiation of the terms of the debt would consist in putting off the crucial moment of the crisis and relying on the imperialist economy picking up in the meantime. Other hypotheses are also possible. It is pointless to speculate

on the likelihood or otherwise of a banking failure but it is always possible.

The debt cannot be paid!

A second possibility, which is very real and very dangerous in the medium term, is that envisaged by MacNamara and the World Bank. This is the idea of turning the debt into some form of liability which would amount to a transfer of the ownership of assets to the imperialist states with low and long-term interest rates. This would mean in effect a thorough-going process of denationalisation within the dominated economies. The US had already carried this out in the Dominican Republic before the Second World War and it was this that served as the pretext for the imperialist intervention in 1965, 'to recover our rightful property'. This solution would

give imperialism time to defer the crisis but at the obvious cost of over-riding still further the national sovereignty of the countries of nearly an entire continent. In the current process underway as with the suggestion of this medium term solution, the question of independence and national sovereignty of the indebted countries is therefore posed.

So the debt is unpayable; from the economic point of view because the repayment would deepen the spiral of dependence; from the political point of view, because it undermines national sovereignty; and from the moral point of view because this running up of debts is illegitimate and the payment of it pushes onto the workers and peasants the cost of the military dictatorships, their arming, the military chaos, speculation and the flight of capital. We could also add that the debt is unpayable from the social point of view, because of the effort it involves and the ~~large~~ hole in the wealth of the country that

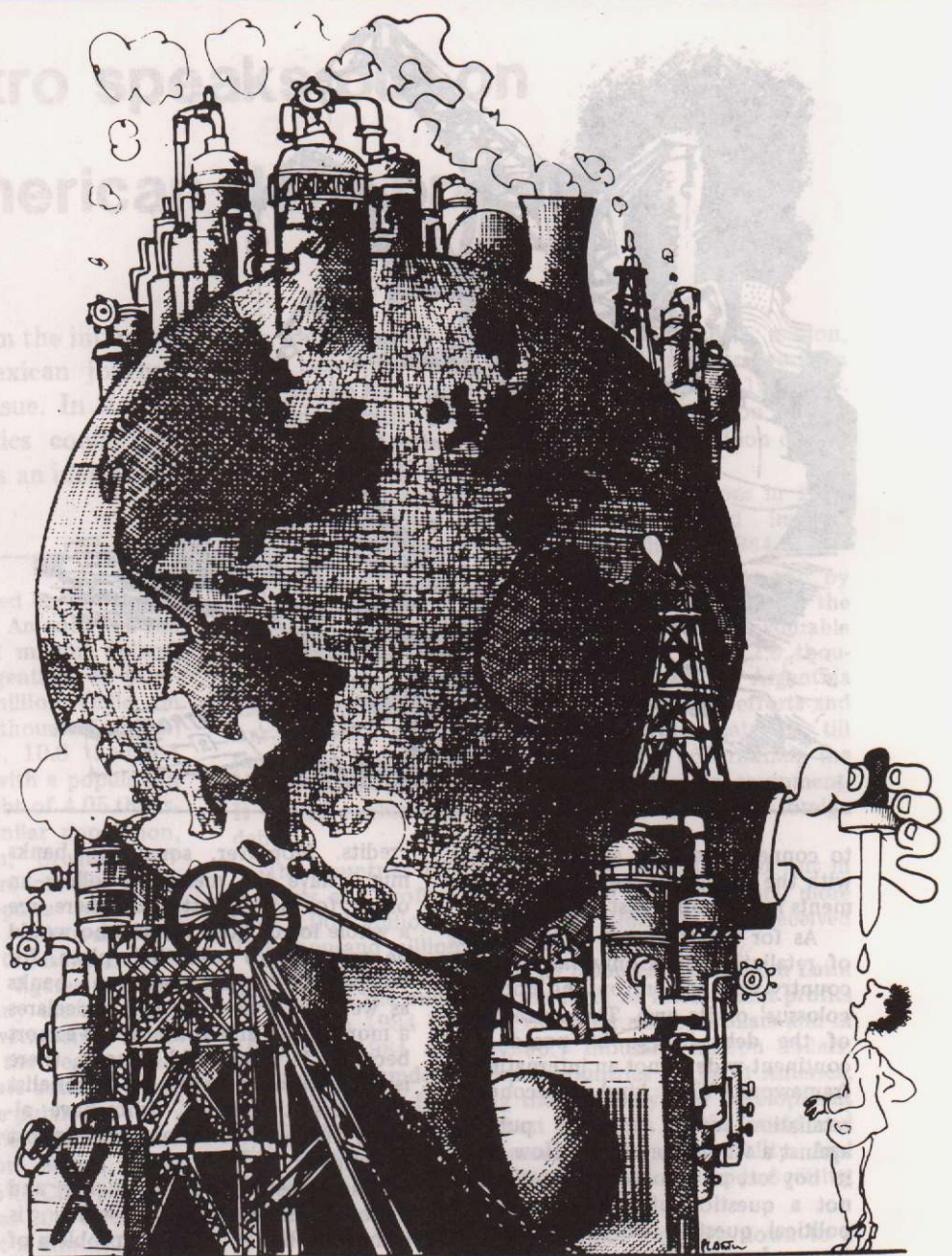
it represents with, as a consequence, an increase in the misery of the population.

The debt should therefore be purely and simply annulled. Within this perspective the formula which, in each country, best expresses the demand for non-payment, that is either for suspension of payment or for a unilateral moratorium, is a tactical question. The decision not to pay takes on its true political meaning insofar as its effective application would take away from the IMF any power to control the future and destiny of the peoples of Latin America. The most important question is not the moratorium in itself, which under certain circumstances already exists in some countries such as, for example, Bolivia, but the political content of the decision. To recover its debts imperialism cannot simply use the same methods used by a national state against bankrupt debtors. There are no courts or international police force. The only pressure they have is political and economic blackmail.

To illustrate the legitimacy of the demand for non-payment of the debts as against those who say that the payment of debts is a duty, it is important to show the illegitimacy in every detail of the debt itself. If the imperialist banks have lent money to private enterprise then that is the problem of the companies involved, not the problem of the population as a whole. Now, one of the aims of the renegotiations currently being undertaken by some of the Latin American governments is that the national states should take responsibility for the debt of private companies thus mortgaging the entire country for the benefit of the private sector. In this way the state becomes a kind of insurance for the private sector. This is why the curious notion of the 'indirect public debt' begins to appear more and more often in order to give a name to this state guarantee.

Rejecting the whole legitimacy of the debt therefore creates the best conditions for concrete and punctual mobilisations around the opening of the account books or for the expropriation of those companies which are in debt, for example.

A further aspect of the legitimacy of the debt is the question of the endless flight of capital. This capital is already in the coffers of the imperialist banks. And sometimes it comes back in the form of new credits. This escaping of capital constitutes a diversion of the surplus value and wealth of the country. Instead of negotiating the repayment of the debt, it would almost be more logical to recommend to the imperialist banks to pay them-



selves back directly by seizing exported capital which already represents a considerable part of that debt.

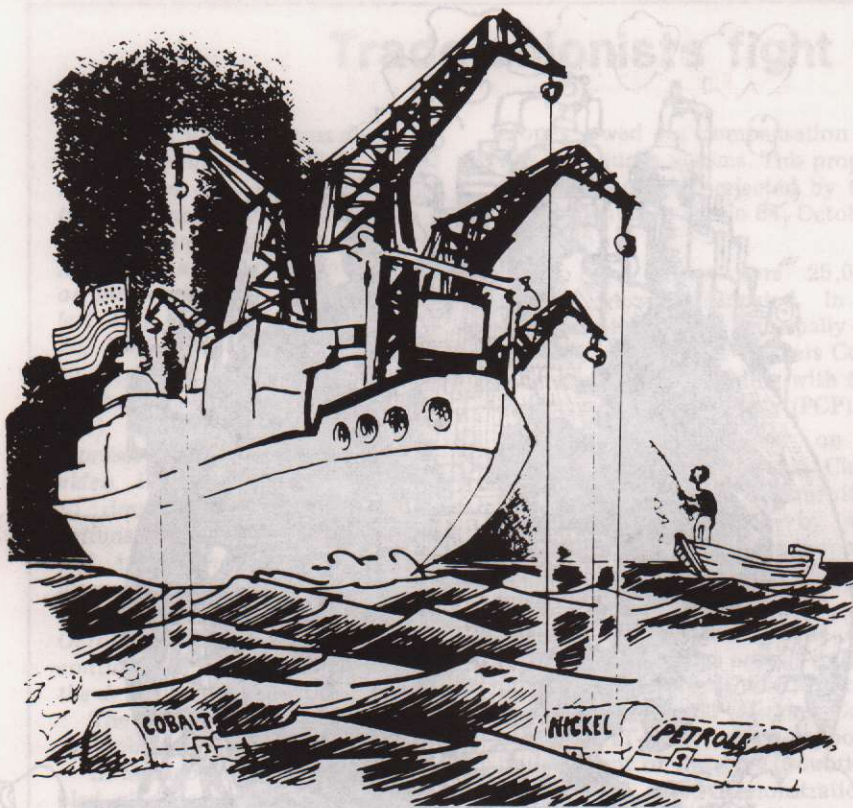
Finally, a large part of the loans which caused the debt were either spent on investments in costly and useless operations or in corrupt practices which were perfect illustrations of the parasitism of the local ruling classes and of their responsibility in it all.

The illegitimatising of the debt was the road chosen by the Sandinistas in Nicaragua after the overthrow of the dictatorship. They began by refusing to recognise the debt and linked that to the investment in the repressive apparatus of the old regime. This pedagogic approach is important because there is no spontaneous tradition within popular morality for non-recognition of the debt. Bourgeois leaders know very well that once the illegitimacy of the debt becomes

conceivable, the whole thing could snowball. What would it mean for mass popular consciousness, for the legitimacy of the peasants' debts to the banks or for the legitimacy of housing speculation?

The main opponents of the Cuban proposal for the non-payment of the debt take up the argument of realism from two angles: first they say they do not want to precipitate a generalised economic crisis and second they refuse to risk retaliation from imperialism. (5) On this argument Fidel Castro responded that a reduction of 10 to 12% in the military budgets of the imperialist countries would be enough to pay off the debt. This argument helps

5. Castro's response was explained in an interview given to a Mexican newspaper, 'Excelsior', on March 21, 1985. It was also published in the French LCR journal 'Critique Communiste', No 43, 1985.



to connect the fight against the debt with the struggle of the anti-war movements in the imperialist countries.

As for the argument on the danger of retaliation, it is only valid if each country were to confront the 'northern colossus' on its own. The cancellation of the debt has to be posed in a continent-wide, if not an international, framework. What kind of economic retaliation could the US put up against a whole continent? How could it boycott a whole continent? It is not a question of economics, but a political question of the relation of forces. Imperialism is united through the IMF. The six hundred banks which negotiate with Mexico do not do so one by one but through a single delegation. The debtor countries could confront their creditor with a common plan. Here we are entering the realm of scenarios, hypotheses and, to a certain extent, fiction. But it is possible to have the argument out on this terrain.

It is possible, as has already been mooted, that imperialism would respond to a suspension of payment with a cut in commercial credit to ninety days. Such credits are vital for the functioning of the whole economy. But if the suspension of payment was embarked on through a common movement then common reserves could be drawn on. We already have the example of Brazil, Mexico and Venezuela who, although they are also in debt, were able to help Argentina through short-term

credits. Moreover, some big banks might have the means to follow an order for a boycott. But there are a whole lot of little banks who would be prepared to take their place, for competition exists between banks as well and a country which declares a moratorium and continues to export becomes 'a good risk'. Finally, there is competition between the imperialist exporters themselves, who have already divided over the embargo against Nicaragua.

The question of sovereignty and national independence, which is intimately linked in to the problem of the debt, is a powerful method of dividing those sections of society who are 'vende patria' (literally — selling the country) from the others. In this way the non-payment of the debt has become a key point of discussion on election platforms and even a central agitational theme. In the countries where the government is putting forward the idea of social dialogue, it is possible — in the workers' and peasants' movement — to make the non-payment of the debt a precondition of every possible consultation.

The question of national sovereignty raises, in fact, many other burning questions like control of national resources and a rejection of policies for denationalisation of the economy, for the liberalisation of trade and the ending of exchange control and the nationalisation of the multi-nationals. The defence of sovereignty would basically be hollow without the

control on the national resources.

The debt question can be looked at in two ways. 'Misery is the national destiny' is one way, to use Fidel Castro's description, and the other is the cancellation of the debt accompanied by a concrete and positive social and economic reconstruction of the countries involved. Not subordinated to financial concerns, such a plan should aim to obliterate misery, unemployment and hunger and should be for independence. Such a plan would involve the use of resources on the basis of need; a fight against under-employment; making proper use of the underused capacity in the economy; the phasing out of the strict imperative of production for export only and the ensuring of a more equal distribution of wealth to expand the internal market and to stimulate production on the basis of the needs of the broad masses; to implement radical agrarian reform which will assure production of basic foodstuffs and put a check on the rural exodus.

It is enough to put forward a set of measures like this, which are coherent and which go alongside the non-payment of the debt, to understand that only the workers and peasants in alliance with the popular sectors in the towns, including sections of the petty bourgeoisie who follow their lead, only these groups are capable of conducting a struggle with real commitment. This of course poses a problem for a government seeking to defend its interests.

On the other hand, the continuing payment of the debt will lead inevitably to austerity policies of a more and more severe nature and thus to social explosion and, at the end of the day, to a renewed squeeze on those democratic rights which it has been possible to force during periods of struggle. Military institutions have, for the most part, remained intact despite democratic openings and already whole areas have been militarised. Moreover, paramilitary forces and militias belonging to large property-owners have never allowed their operations to be interrupted.

As for the question of the new economic order, it is not so much a matter of getting involved in a confused debate for or against a particular concept, but of spelling out what the practical content of such an economic system should be today; mutual trade between Latin American countries outside of foreign exchange control; the creation of an unexchangeable monetary system. Under today's conditions, this would involve, not a return to autarky, but the perspective of a socialist federation of Latin America, capable of confronting imperialism in the context of a new balance of forces. □

Castro speaks out on Latin American debt problem

WE PUBLISH below an extract from the interview given by Fidel Castro to the Mexican journal, *Excelsior* in its March 21, 1985 issue. In it the Cuban leader cites several statistics concerning the debt in Latin America and gives an idea of the scale of the problem.

According to the latest figures published by the United Nations Economic Commission on Latin America and the Caribbean, Brazil owes 108.8 thousand million dollars; Mexico owes 95.9 thousand million; Argentina, 48 thousand million; Venezuela, 34 thousand million; Chile, on a very conservative estimate, owes 18.44 thousand million; Peru, 13.5 thousand million; Colombia, 10.8 thousand million; a little country like Costa Rica, with a population of about two million inhabitants has a debt of 4.05 thousand million dollars; Panama, with a similar population, has a debt of 3.55 thousand million; Uruguay, 4.7 thousand million. And these figures are on the whole conservative, because, according to reports from, for example, friends in Uruguay and Chile, the real debts there are 5.5 thousand million and 23 thousand million respectively. In other words the official figures are well below the real level of the debt. In many cases international organisations and even the governments themselves find it difficult to know what the real volume of the debt is because debts in the private sector are not registered and have then to be added to the public debt ...

A country like Argentina devotes 52% of its revenue to paying off the interest on the debt; Bolivia, 57%; Mexico, 36.5%; Peru, 35.5%; Brazil, 36.5%; Chile, 45.5%. In fact it is estimated that even as much as 20% of export revenue given over to paying off the debt is almost insupportable.

What do these figures mean? That no country can develop under these conditions as is shown in the fact that the Gross Domestic Product of all the Latin American countries has declined between 1980 and 1984; in Uruguay it has declined by 13.9%; in Argentina, by 6%; in Chile by 5.4%; in Venezuela, by 6.1%, despite the enormous economic resources of that country.

Because the population has increased at the same time, the Gross Domestic Product per head of the population has declined even further. In Bolivia, for example, it has fallen by 24.6%; in Costa Rica by 14.1%; in Chile, by 11.2%; in Mexico, by 6.3%; in Argentina, by 11.8%; in Venezuela, by 16.2%; in Uruguay, by 16.2%. In the case of Venezuela, the Gross Domestic Product per head of the population has not only gone down from 1981 to 1984 but for the last seven years running it has declined by a total of 24%.

We can see the impact of the economic crisis and the foreign debt, above all in the last few years, in the fact that production per country and per inhabitant has not only stagnated but declined even further. Some countries are making really impressive efforts to confront the situation as the example of the three biggest shows.

In 1982, Brazilian exports amounted to 20,172 mil-

lion dollars worth and in 1984 to 26,960 million, whilst imports declined by 19,395 million dollars worth in 1982 and to the tune of 14,360 million dollars in 1984.

Mexico, which had exported 22,810 million dollars worth in 1982, raised this figure to 23,500 million dollars in 1982 to 10,000 million in 1984.

Argentina raised exports from 7,622 millions in 1982 to 8,700 million in 1984 and reduced imports from 4,859 million in 1982 to 4,270 million in 1984.

By making a huge effort to increase exports and by reducing imports to almost intolerable limits, for the economy, these countries achieved a very favourable balance of trade. Brazil's trade balance was 12.6 thousand million, that of Mexico 13.5 and that of Argentina 4.43. This credit was the result of tremendous efforts and was obtained by using up stocks of raw materials, till they were almost dried up and also by undermining the regular maintenance and repair of production equipment. It served exclusively to pay the interest on the foreign debt.

The countries of Latin America in 1984 paid out in interests and profits, 37.3 thousand million dollars, more than 3,000 million more than in 1983 and only received 10.6 thousand million in loans and investments.

The net transfer of financial resources going from Latin America to the outside in the form of interest and profits went up in 1984 by 26.7 thousand million dollars and in 1983 and 1984 only by 56.7 thousand million dollars. In short, the underdeveloped countries of Latin America, as a whole, are financing the economy and development of the industrial and richest countries in the world and with enormous sums of money. This is the reality. And this money has gone for good without any hope of getting it back.

The rate of increase of the debt did slow down to a rate well below the record one of 24% attained in 1981. This is logical since nobody dares borrow any more. But, in any case, the debt itself has gone up for one reason or another by 5.5%. In the next ten years the payment of interest on the debt, assuming that this will hardly go up, would run to about 40 thousand million dollars per year.

Twenty-four years ago, at the time of the Alliance for Progress, Kennedy had envisaged a 20 thousand million dollar economic investment programme over a period of 10 to 15 years, in order to confront the social problems and stimulate development in Latin America. This idea had been born under the impact of the trauma provoked by the Cuban revolution and was an attempt to prevent the appearance of conditions which would bring about new revolutions.

Currently, the economically under-developed countries of the sub-continent, with double the population and three times the social problems will be paying 40 thousand million dollars to the industrialised countries in the form of interest on the debt and should pay 400 thousand million over ten years. This is twenty times the sum which Kennedy was proposing to invest over 10 to 15 years of economic cooperation to resolve the economic and social problems of Latin America ... □

Students challenge neo-colonial regime

LAST NOVEMBER saw thousands of Congolese school students on the streets in anti-government protests (see *International Viewpoint*, No 90, January 13, 1986). This highlighted the extent of the crisis reached by the country's neo-colonial regime, which all its Marxist-Leninist rhetoric could not conceal.

The movement expressed the discontent of the youth in the face of austerity policies being implemented by a corrupt regime. It also reflected similar sentiments amongst the masses as a whole. These events revealed the nature and form of neo-colonial domination and exploitation which exists in most Black African states, whatever the political regime. They show that beyond the anti-imperialist speeches and the professions of faith of the regime there exists a military clique, based on a particular ethnic group, implementing widespread repression of the masses.

MICHEL LAGUENAUD

Saturday, November 9, 1985, saw the opening in the *Palais des Congres* in Brazzaville of the fifth congress of the youth organisation affiliated to the dominant single party — the Union of Socialist Youth of the Congo (UJSC).

According to custom the students were obliged to pay tribute and form the guard of honour for the delegates and dignitaries of the regime. In honour of the occasion students from the teacher-training colleges (CEG) and second-year school students from Brazzaville were freed from their classes for the task.

On this occasion to everyone's great surprise school and college students arrived *en masse* chanting the slogan, 'a grant for everyone, without competition' [*la bourse pour tous sans concours!*]. They were carrying banners and writing this slogan on the walls of school and other buildings along the route. They were responding to the decision of the Council of Ministers on November 6 to suspend the system of an automatic grant awarded to every student who passed the *baccalaureat* [exam] and wished to continue their studies at university. This system was to be replaced by a competition to award the grants.

When they arrived at the UJSC congress venue the school students threw themselves at the security

forces who, once over the initial surprise, charged at them, wounding several. The students responded by throwing stones at official cars parked round the *Palais des Congres*. The minister of secondary and higher education, who was a particular target, was forced to flee. And for the first time, the president of the republic, Denis Sassou-Nguesso, was forced to use the back door in order to get into the *Palais des Congres*, without a fanfare or an escort apart from some Cuban commandos of the



presidential guard who were shielding him.

Incidents continued in the *Quinze ans* quarter of the city in particular, until midday, as the school students made their return journey. The result was 11 wounded.

After a relatively calm Sunday the movement began again on November 11, this time on a still more intense level. It erupted first in the School of the Liberation where the students, after chasing the headmaster out, organised a mass meeting of all the school students. They divided up into groups who were responsible for rounding up students from other schools and colleges (the May 1 Technical School and the Red Flag and Lumumba schools) and the students from the university. Some went to the Sassou-Nguesso palace to show their opposition to the measures taken by the government and to demand the withdrawal of the minister for youth and sports, Oba-Apounou, from the secretariat of the UJSC of which he is a member.

After being prevented from entering the palace by the presidential guard who opened fire, the school students attacked the administrative buildings, smashed windows in nearby ministries and set about any cars which happened to be in the parking lot.

Other young people attacked the *Ecole de la Jeunesse* (school for young people), set up by Oba-Apounou, and the university rectory because of the refusal of students there to support the school students. Throughout the morning the students dominated the stunned and panicked city, shouting their slogans in the streets: 'For grants without competitions', or 'Sassou-thief'. The school and college students also attacked any symbols of power and wealth that they came across on their way. They smashed the windows of certain shops and banks and ransacked official or luxury cars.

The youth have had enough!

A military truck carrying supplies was pillaged and the driver was forced to flee. The residence of the president of the National Assembly and of the minister for youth and sports were also the object of attacks by the groups of young people.

One group of students went and placed flowers on the grave of the former president of the republic, Marien Ngouabi, whilst another chanted slogans supporting ex-president Yombi-Opango, shouting: 'Sassou-thief, Yombi to power!'

That day the confrontation with the police force was extremely violent. Their forces were deployed very early in the areas around the schools and they showed themselves to be especially brutal. They tried to disperse the students with gunfire and created panic amongst the population and the traders. The police were subsequently reinforced by air and artillery army battalions. The balance sheet of the day was fairly impressive: four dead and about thirty seriously wounded. Amongst the wounded was the head of careers and grants officer and a commissaire of police.

Throughout Monday military trucks patrolled the city unceasingly whilst armoured cars were sent to special strategic points. The next day, Tuesday, the regime shut down all educational establishments in Brazzaville and put the whole town under tight police control.

In order to understand the reasons for the November 9 and 11 demonstrations, which were the first since November 1971 (1), it is important to look at two aspects of the crisis of the regime in Congo. First, the economic crisis, capped off by tensions within the state apparatus and the crisis of the school system. Second, and above all, it is important to examine the reasons why the government announced the new measures on the eve of the youth organisation's congress.

The youth organisation is affiliated to the ruling Congolese Party of Labour (PCT) and the usual tactic of the government was to proceed through consultations prior to taking action even if such consultation was purely for show. (2) Undoubtedly, the government was so convinced of its ability to control the mass movement that it thought that it could take these measures and that the UJSC congress would give their support in spite of everything. Also the government must have been relying on the Sunday rest day to quieten down the protest movement. The fact that the movement actually began to grow on the Monday shows just how profound the discontent was.

The Congolese economy, in the last five years, has, in large part, if not exclusively, been built up on the basis of oil production. From 1979 to 1982, the Congo's oil production went up by 20%, which provoked a real euphoria in the country. From the returns on this the ruling class was able to launch three different projects:

— A restructuring of the ruling class by deliberately concealing the tensions between the rival factions within the state apparatus, in order to guarantee the durability of an



President Sassou — Nguesso on an official visit in Paris in 1983 (DR)

ethnocentric and regionalist military power;

— A widening of its social base through a clever policy of redistribution of oil payments via ethnic or family networks or through a large pool of brokers;

— The financing of a five-year plan aimed essentially to create a road network supposedly to open up the country's hinterland but in reality concentrated on the north of the country where the president of the republic comes from.

Since 1983, however, the Congo has had to face a stagnation and even a decline in overall oil production from six million tons in 1984 to 5.5 million in 1985. This was combined with a fall in the price of oil and in the value of the dollar. At the same time debt repayments are continually going up and in 1985 they represented 40% of the revenue from oil, that is 140 thousand million CFA francs as compared with 18 thousand million CFA francs in 1980 (one dollar equals about 375 CFA francs).

The Congolese ruling class have thus had to pay a price for their own economic stupidity characterised by an investment budget of which 55% was allocated to buildings and public works as against 12% allocated to agriculture which should have been the major priority; and a foreign trade policy which saw 45 thousand million CFA francs devoted to the importing of basic agricultural foodstuffs. There developed a state sector which was grossly and artificially inflated in order to enlarge the social base of the regime. This sector now employs 38,000 people and shows a net deficit of 30 thousand million CFA francs. There is also a higher rate of inflation in 1985 than all the other neighbouring countries.

Faced with the refusal of France to spread out the payments of the

bipartite debt, which increased to 40 thousand million CFA francs in 1983, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) intervened in order to force the Congolese leaders to cut down on operational expenditure and to slash the investment budget especially in regard to the road-building programme.

In spite of a timid opposition by the PCT the Congolese leaders ended up conceding to the IMF demands by elaborating a whole programme of measures to accompany the five-year plan. This was known as the Programme for Structural Adjustment (PAS). It is nothing more than an austerity plan tailor-made for the IMF.

The regime's political and economic crisis

In the meantime the Congolese leaders had taken certain precautions. They had organised a series of information campaigns throughout the country to explain that the PAS was not a mere IMF decree but a rational solution. Such campaigns were aimed to pacify the bewildered base of the regime as well as sections of the army who were beginning to grumble. To this end the prime minister had to explain that the army was not affected by the PAS and that the road-building programme would go ahead whatever the cost. This pointed up the dilemma facing the ruling class: whether to continue with the road building and risk the wrath of the IMF or whether to interrupt the programme

1. From 1970 to 1974, there were several demonstrations and strikes of students and school students in the Congo. However, the 1971 strike was the only one which was exclusively organised by school students.

2. A few days before its congress, the UJSC was officially made the youth organisation of the PCT.

and undergo the scrutiny of the people. All this was in light of the fact that the roads which remained to be built (even those in the North) were not those linked directly to the president's region.

In fact the PAS, rather than attacking the regime's absurd schemes or the exorbitant financial benefits accrued by its representatives, largely attacked the workers and peasants, the school students and students by proposing a decrease in wages; the abolition of automatic grants; and a decrease in the health and education budgets and cutbacks in public-service personnel. (3)

From this point onward it was reasonable to suppose that the restrictions imposed by the IMF would, on the one hand, bring about a disintegration of the social base of the regime and on the other, a resurfacing of the divisions within the ruling class, which had been obscured since Sassou-Nguesso's coming to power on February 5, 1979. (4)

It was most probably in preparation for such an eventuality that Sassou-Nguesso provoked a crisis within the PCT Central Committee by accusing the regime's number two, JP Tchistere-Tchicaya of wanting to destabilise the country, through attributing to him the responsibility for the February 1982 bomb attack on Brazzaville airport which left several dead. (5)

Despite the lack of real charges against him, Tchistere-Tchicaya was thrown out of the government, put under house arrest and then jailed. This manoeuvre enabled the president to get rid of all his enemies in one fell swoop by relegating them to junior posts (6) and to consolidate almost absolute power into his own hands (as president, head of state, president of the council of ministers, head of government, minister of defence in charge of state security), by leaning on his family clan (7) and certain members of the February 22 Movement (M22). The most eminent of these was Camille Bongou the permanent secretary of the PCT and the second most important person in the regime. (8)

However, after the third congress of the PCT in July 1983, which confirmed Sassou-Nguesso's victory, the divisions began to re-emerge. First, at the Central Committee plenum in July 1985, where Sassou-Nguesso launched a very violent attack against Pierre Nze, a former minister of foreign affairs, which was aimed quite simply at getting him off the Central Committee in a similar way to Tchistere-Tchicaya. But Sassou-Nguesso had not taken account of the wiliness of this former bureaucrat of the Federation of Black

African Students of France (FEANF). Accused of having infringed the principles of democratic centralism by putting out his analysis of the national political situation in the foreign press, Nze succeeded in turning the accusation around and pleading on behalf of the workers who, through the PAS, were being made to bear the brunt of the mess the regime was in. His break with democratic centralism, he explained, stemmed from profound disagreement with the conduct of economic affairs in the country. He finished by demanding that government leaders bring home the 'thousands of millions of CFA francs stashed away in Swiss or Brazilian bank accounts'. For the first time Sassou-Nguesso found himself in a minority and Pierre Nze was not excluded.

Other internal conflicts emerged leading up to the preparation of the fifth congress of the UJSC and came to a head around a conflict between the president of the republic and the permanent secretary of the PCT, Camille Bongou. For the latter there was no doubt that the post of the first secretary should be separated from that of the minister for youth and sports. Sassou-Nguesso was, rightly, afraid that the departure of his nephew from the position of general secretary of the UJSC would reduce his capacity to keep an eye on the youth and so he categorically rejected the proposal.

A leaflet put out on this occasion exhorted, in the current jargon, 'the revolutionary forces to be extra vigilant to ensure that those people who had favoured the death of Marien Ngouabi did not bring about the downfall of President Sassou-Nguesso.' Such people's 'dark designs had already been realised since they had managed to prise the president away from his comrades of February 5, such as X Katali, PD Ngolo, JP Tchistere-Tchicaya, L Sylvain-Ngoma'.

This leaflet, obviously produced by the leadership of the UJSC under

Oba-Apounou, constituted a thinly veiled invitation to reconsider the current alliance between the president of the republic and the penitent members of the M22 and a clear invocation to go back to the former leadership team, which came directly out of February 5, 1979.

The struggle for the control of the UJSC apparatus had dominated the scene in the last while and this is what made everyone assume that the school students' demonstrations on November 9 and 11 were just the latest expression of the trial of strength between the M22 faction and the Sassou-Nguesso faction. In fact, the latter, who was taken by surprise by the school students' actions, started blaming almost everyone for having started them. He blamed the religious groups who had not yet been recognised or legalised; he blamed the prime minister for not taking into account the situation in society at large before implementing certain measures; and he blamed Yombi-Opango supporters, because some of the demonstrators were shouting, 'Long live Yombi, Yombi to power'. (9)

The response of the trade unions

In the case of this last suggestion, the regime brought forward circumstantial evidence to support the thesis that Yombi-Opango supporters were manipulating the naive school students. Trade union meetings and meetings of parents were organised around the theme of 'we must learn to look after our children so that they cannot be misled'. A meeting of support for the president would also be prepared at the same time. But these meetings, instead of being sessions to register support for the regime, produced discussions which ended up questioning government

3. Such aberrations are legion: at the time of the adoption by the PCT of the PAS in the July, 1983, congress, the government coming out of the congress was increased by five ministers. The apparatus of the party doubled its number of full-time workers. More recently, the secretariat coming out of the last congress of the UJSC went from 15 to 25 members, all party functionaries with a monthly salary of 372,000 CFA francs. The council of ministers voted for a law which increased the president's salary to 2.5 million CFA francs from 1.5 million.

4. For a more thorough analysis of the economic and political situation in the Congo in the last few years see 'Inprecor' ('IV's sister publication), No 101, May 13, 1981, and 'IV' No 48, March 12, 1984.

5. This fact is reported by Madame Tchistere-Tchicaya in an open letter to the members of the Central Committee of the PCT.

6. The most blatant case is that of the prime minister, Louis Sylvain Ngoma, for whom the post of president of the

constitutional council was created.

7. The Oyo clan, named after the village where the president of the republic was born, has seven members in the government and in the Central Committee of the PCT and 14 on the Central Committee of the USJC. The most well known are Ndinga-Oba, minister of foreign affairs, and Oba-Apounou, minister of youth and sports and first secretary of the UJSC, respectively uncle and nephew of Sassou Nguesso.

8. The February 22 Movement (M22) came out of the mobilisations of August 1963. For several years this organisation appeared as the repository of the main gains of the mobilisations. But the logic of entering into the state apparatus caught up with it after the downturn in the mobilisation and the decline of the movement. This led many leaders of the movement to openly join up with the regime.

9. The same decree which abolished the automatic grant system also forbade certain religious sects. Moreover, the prime minister was summoned to explain himself on television and before the UJSC congress.

measures to abolish the automatic grant. For the trade unionists and the parents alike realised that the grant constituted a source of revenue for ordinary families who have one or even several children registered at university.

The leadership of the Congolese Trade-Union Confederation (CSC) asked each federation to make proposals on this. The documents produced by the federations went beyond the simple compilation of good advice and became real political texts. This was especially true in the case of the federation of bank workers (FESYBAC) (see box).

During a meeting of support for the regime, Sassou-Nguesso, whilst maintaining his accusations against the 'dark forces' tried to tone down the government proposals by inviting 'all the mass organisations and all parents to find new ways to allocate the grant, given that it cost the state almost ten thousand million CFA francs'. This statement represented a slight retreat by the government.

The accusations being thrown around by the authorities that the students' actions were motivated by different factions are basically without foundation. They betray a panic, which increased when the November 9 and 11 demonstrations began to affect the Poto-Poto and Ouenze quarters. These areas are largely populated by those ethnic groups of the North which make up the social and ethnic base of the regime much more than the *Bakongo* areas do.

The students who were arrested swore that they did not belong to any political group and asserted that the slogans supporting Yombi that they had chanted were intended as pure provocation. This could well be the case since the leaflet given out the next day by supporters of Yombi itself indicated an obvious mistrust of the motives for the school students' demonstration. On the other hand, it is not excluded that some supporters of the ex-president were involved with the demonstrators especially in the Ouenze quarter. (10) The regime therefore had to face the fact that this represented a massive rejection of its policies among its own social base as well. The November 9 and 11 school students' movement was a spontaneous expression of popular discontent which was felt deeply by young people. It was, above all, dictated by the objective situation into which the PAS was forcing people. That is why this movement received the backing of the whole population and even some sections of the army.

More specifically, the school students' revolt on November 9 and



Immortal glory for the former president but what for the people? (DR)

11 was also an expression of a fundamental crisis of the neo-colonial education system. The system is based on contradictions which it is becoming more and more difficult to overcome in the current financial and economic situation. The contradiction stems from the weakness of an economy structured around extraneous needs, which, during a period of stagnation, has had to absorb an influx of new students. This was aggravated by the fact that the government, instead of consolidating the productive system, got itself into debt in the excitement over oil and then ended up introducing an austerity policy under the diktats of the IMF.

The Congolese school system is not very different from any colonial system in that it provides a general education geared to a job in the government bureaucracy. The Sassou-Nguesso regime and its five-year plan did not improve on this.

Coupled with the creation of the road network, whose effect was to bring the rural population to Brazzaville (the population has increased by 155,000 inhabitants in six years), the school system has helped discourage young people from going into agriculture. This has led to a constant decrease in the labour force and a massive rural exodus. Indeed it could not be otherwise since the peasantry gets no help from the government, and the agricultural schools in Loubomo, Ngoyo and Mouyondzi only receive 48,000 CFA francs in yearly subsidies to cover about 200 students each.

The PCT's reaction, however, is to do nothing but praise the example of the town of Ouessou in the Sangha region, which is the centre of cocoa beans. They do not mention that the cocoa-bean plantations are dying off because of the rural exodus and that the drinking chocolate served up at breakfast comes from the Cameroon.

The school system in the Congo is thus aimed at internalisation and

consolidation of the market relation of forces in which economic power is concentrated in the hands of a minority. The productive apparatus is dominated by imperialism, and therefore the possibility of extracting an economic surplus or even of enjoying some social advancement can only be realised in the sphere of distribution (trade and business) and within the bureaucratic apparatus of the regime for which the school equips you. The regime contributes to this by building phoney schools like the PCT school or the *Ecole de la Jeunesse*, which train civil servants and service the PCT but are paid by the state. These schools have managed to intice 1,062 teachers away from primary education in seven years in order to throw them into the PCT and UJSC apparatus. This is in a country which had only 6,892 teachers in 1978 when the haemorrhage began.

Despite their socialist rhetoric, the ruling class is very attached to the dominant relation of social forces, and under pressure of more demand for schooling in the Congo they have had to impose a more and more strict selection system. (11)

November 9 and 11 saw the beginnings of a new type of school- and college-student movement. It was much less an expression of a political radicalisation characteristic of the stu-

10. We note, all the same, that in its frenzied burst of reorganisation, the regime cancelled the participation of Congolese football clubs in competitions abroad. This measure hit the military football club as well as the club 'Etoile Rouge' in the Ouenze quarter. The latter club has always symbolised the unity of the North, and it is very probable that this measure was seen as a break-up of alliances and a betrayal by the authorities. Many supporters therefore took part in demonstrations to protest against this decision.

11. From 1969 to 1984, the number of those attending school trebled, with an annual rate of 10%, that is, nearly 3.5 times more than the rate of increase of the population. At the level of secondary education, the number of students went up by 467% in ten years. More and more parents have to take charge of the provision of local school equipment and have even had to contribute furniture on occasions. There are still many students who have to take classes sitting on the floor.

FESYBAC statement

WE ARE publishing below some extracts from a document drafted November 18, 1985, by the Trade Union Federation of Banks (FESYBAC) for the Congolese Trade Union Confederation. The text, which incorporates the thoughts of the trade union delegation, is intended to answer the directive of the permanent secretariat of the Congolese Trade Union Confederation (CSC) dated November 13, 1985, concerning the current political situation expressed by the events of November 9 and 11, 1985.

On the political level, this document notes the increasingly bourgeois direction of government members and of political leaders, a direction that does not differentiate them from the behaviour of the capitalists, and further notes their 'authoritarianism' and the 'tendency to the development of a personality cult'. The text also criticises 'the feudal character of the trade union, expressing itself through the lack of militancy of the members of the trade-union leadership' and it 'condemns the act of the military who fired on unarmed people'. The regime is judged to be 'too needlessly police-like' and reference is made to 'the unpopularity of policies for which the regime is supposedly accountable, but which are in reality forced' on the country.

On the economic level, the PAS was presented as 'the consequence of bad management of public affairs'. But 'the government's base feels the effects of the PAS while

the political leaders become increasingly bourgeois'. The negative financial situation of the public sector was analysed as revealing a 'poor choice of management by the political leadership'. Also given as causes are 'the bad choice of projects' and 'prestige spending'.

A series of social objectives in the fields of health, education and nutritional self-sufficiency were reaffirmed.

The following proposals were finally put forward: 'permanent contact with the government's base for a better dissemination of information; reinforcement of the South-South economic dialogue; grants-in-aid from the treasury as a priority to children of the poor and to the most deserving; decentralisation of the university system; strengthening of a system of control over examinations in order to avoid evasion; a census of foreigners in the country; reduction of operating expenses, civil service salaries and advantages for political officers; consolidation of a number of ministries and secretariats of the central committee; holding a national conference on education in the Congo; the development of a patriotic spirit in the members of the Popular National Army (APN)'

And the document ends with the following commentary: 'With the collection of all this information the workers of FESYBAC hope that the political leadership will reflect on the discontentment manifested here'.

dent struggles in May 1968 and of the National Youth Movement of the Revolution (JMNR) which came out of it. (12) This new radicalisation is the product of a crisis of the neo-colonial states. The specific demands of the movement are the best expression of this. They also demonstrate the movement's objective limitations.

Very early on, this movement showed both its strengths and the limits of its strictly economic goals. In demanding the withdrawal of Oba-Apounou from the head of the UJSC, and in denouncing prevarication (they demanded 'What have you done with the oil revenues') the youth have spontaneously made the links between the economic and political situation. The hardening of the movement which has been noticeable from November 11 is the product of this development. For although initially spontaneous, the school-student revolt has shown a continuing maturation.

Although the November 9 and 11 movement can be characterised as being essentially around economic demands, it also showed itself to be radicalising politically by attacking the symbols of the regime. (13) The students denounced wastage and corruption. They built a united movement that swept away those ethnic divisions which weigh so heavily against collective awareness.

Also, on the ground, the movement showed a real capacity for organisation by setting up liaison between the different schools, by outsmarting police traps and in organising general assemblies in the playgrounds.

One problem, however, was the lack of solidarity from students in higher education for the school students' struggle, even though the latter went to the campuses for assistance. The movement could have broadened out and involved students outside of Brazzaville as well. But because of these problems it remained focused on the capital city.

Today, the students,
tomorrow, the workers.

The movement was full of contradictions throughout. We just have to look at the example of the flowers placed at the foot of Marien Ngouabi's statue. It is true that for a whole generation of young people brought up on a diet of PCT ideology, Marien Ngouabi is a symbol — especially since a large section of the youth were not part of the tradition of school-student struggles initiated during the 1971 strikes.

It is obvious that the November 1985 school students' movement has had to pay the price of a certain lack of direction which would have allowed it to coordinate its activity with other educational establishments in Brazzaville; to prepare actions outside; to stamp its own political line on the movement so that it could not be used by any faction within the neo-colonial regime (such as the Yombi supporters or others); and above all would have allowed it to prepare activity after November 11. The apparent calm which followed these events does not hide the tension

which still exists in the schools and colleges.

The only resort for the Sassou-Nguesso was repression. More than sixty people were taken in for questioning by police and some students are still in prison and have been beaten and tortured. As well as maintaining the demand for 'grants without competitions', the school students now have to take up the demand for the release of their comrades.

Today it is the students who are going into action; tomorrow it will be the turn of the workers, when they begin to feel the pinch of the PAS. Civil servants have already felt it in the form of a cut in wages last November, which was portrayed as an increase in pension contributions.

In any case the school students' movement must find a way to unite with trade unions and organisations of parents who, as the FESYBAC document shows, are more and more opposed to the idea that their children should pay for the regime's mess. □

12. The JMNR was the youth organisation of the MNR, the ruling group in the country after the August, 1963 revolt which overthrew the Fulbert Youlou regime. Although not really autonomous from the party, the JMNR appeared as a more radical current with its armed units, references to Che Guevara, control of the popular quarters etc.

13. Contrary to what the state-controlled press said, the only things that were touched were the symbols of the regime (black cars belonging to PCT high-ups), places and objects representing capitalist over-consumption from the oil revenues (supermarkets, Mercedes cars etc) and residences of certain important people who were particularly hated such as Oba-Apounou and the figurehead president of the National Assembly, Ganga Zanzou.

National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign steps up action

ONE YEAR FROM the end of the British coal strike miners and their supporters are stepping up the fight for reinstatement of miners sacked or imprisoned during the dispute.

JUDITH BAKER

The National Justice for Mineworkers Campaign was originally launched from a rally at the 1985 Labour Party conference following the adoption there and at the Trades Union Congress (TUC) conference of a resolution in support of sacked miners.

The campaign held its first conference under its new name (it was formerly known as the Miners Amnesty Campaign) on January 25 in Sheffield, Yorkshire when over 250 people attended from every coalfield in Britain. Also in attendance were national officials of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM), representatives of the national committee of Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) and representatives from the Campaign group of Labour Party Members of Parliament (MPs).

The Campaign Group of MPs have drafted a Justice for Mineworkers Bill which will be presented to parliament on February 27 as a way of publicising the miners' case and putting pressure on the Labour Party and trade unions to commit a future Labour government to justice for the miners. The presentation of the bill will coincide with a lobby of parliament.

The aims of the campaign are stated as follows;

1. Support for the NUM resolutions to the 1985 TUC and Labour Party conferences.
2. To raise support for the sacked and imprisoned miners and to raise

money for the NUM's National Solidarity Fund.

3. To publicise the Justice for Mineworkers' Bill.

4. To call on the TUC and Labour Party to refuse all recognition of, or dealings with the breakaway Union of Democratic Mineworkers.

The campaign is officially recognised by the NUM.

Over 500 miners remain sacked following the strike and 21 are still in prison. A great deal remains to be done in campaigning for their release and reinstatement and also in provi-

ding support for the families of those in prison or sacked (see interview following with Liz French, wife of imprisoned miner). The campaign on an international level is still going strong and needs to be stepped up along with the renewed activity in Britain. Support groups exist in Denmark, Italy, France, Belgium, Australia. Such groups can affiliate to the campaign in Britain and where possible send delegations to the national march and rally in London on March 2, two years since the great strike started, one year since it ended.

Since the end of the strike more than thirty pits have been closed and 15,000 jobs have been lost as the National Coal Board have driven through their attempt to run down the industry and destroy the national union. This project recently received a blow when the 2,200-strong workforce of the Leicestershire coalfield voted not to join the scab 'Union of Democratic Mineworkers', this despite the fact that all but thirty of the Leicestershire miners worked during the strike.

A year after their strike ended, the miners are still carrying on their fight. The labour movement nationally and internationally owe it to them to back them in this campaign. □

Miners in gaol

WILLIAM SMITH: Whittle — 2½-year sentence from February 1985. E44975, Durham Jail, Old Elvet, Durham DH13HU.

JOHN MATTERSON: Murton — Two years and three months youth custody from December 1985.

JOHN HEMINGWAY: Murton — One year and three months from December 1985.

JOHN ROBSON: Murton — One year and three months from December 1985.

ROBERT HOWE: 22, 21 months
ANTHONY RUTHERFORD: 24, 18 months.

JOHN ROBINSON: 21, 18 months jail

GARY BLACKMORE: 19, 2 years youth custody.

ANTHONY HOWE: 19, two years youth custody.

WILLIAM BELL: 20, 18 months youth custody.

MARTIN HODGSON: Wakefield — Three-year sentence from November 1985. Armley Jail, Leeds.

NIGEL HODGSON: Wakefield — Three-year sentence from November 1985. Armley Jail, Leeds.

PAUL WRIGHT: Saville — 18-month sentence. G76424 Kirkham Jail, Freckleton Road, Preston Lancs.

CLIVE THOMPSON: Frikley

Three-year sentence from April 1985. G79348, Acklington Jail, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE65 9XF.

Not miners but sentenced in connection with the miners strike:

DAVID TEASDALE: Student — Nine-month sentence from April 1985. HMYCC, York Road, Wetherby, West Yorks LS22 5ED.

PAUL BROTHERWELL: 12-month sentence.

DAVID GAUNT: Shirebrook — 2½-year sentence from December 1984. E71037, A Wing, Millers Park Youth Custody Centre. Doddington Road, Wellingborough.

TERRY FRENCH: Betteshanger — Five-year sentence from January 1985. B73383, Weald Wing, Maidstone jail, Kent.

CHRIS TAZEY: Betteshanger — Three-year sentence from January 1985. A29398 Youth Detention Centre, Springfield Road, Chelmsford.

DEAN HANCOCK: Oakdale — Eight-year sentence. Gartree maximum security prison, nr Market Harborough, Leicester.

RUSSELL SHANKLAND: Taff Merthyr — Eight-year sentence. Gartree maximum security prison, Leicester.



The miners - one year on from the strike

IN THE following articles a miner and a miner's wife give their views of the situation since the strike ended. Dennis Pennington describes the closure of the Bold, Lancashire pit. Liz French, whose husband is currently serving a five-year gaol sentence for his activities during the strike, talks about the campaign for amnesty in extracts from an interview by Ruth Chenette on behalf of the Collectif d'information et de soutien aux mineurs Britanniques - victimes de la repression (Paris).

THIS MONTH Bold pit in Lancashire, with 700 workers, will be closed. Many IV readers have met miners and their wives from this pit, which was one of the most active and militant during the strike, particularly while they were drumming up international support.

We record below, a description of the events which led up to the closure, by Dennis Pennington who is on the branch executive of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) and editor of the Lancashire Miner. Pennington was imprisoned after the miners' strike and then sacked by the National Coal Board (NCB). The Industrial Tribunal ordered his reinstatement, but the Coal Board refused to have him back.

In the article Pennington describes how the Coal Board, determined that the pit should be closed, deliberately ran it down, although it was not one of the ones originally earmarked for closure before the strike began. Clearly the Coal Board wanted to close this pit because of its militancy in the strike.

On October 9, the area director took less than two minutes to inform all present that because of heavy financial losses incurred before and since the strike, the Coal Board wished to close Bold colliery by the end of this financial year.

A special meeting of the Bold branch NUM was held on Sunday October 13. The branch committee had decided to recommend opposition to the closure.

During the same week that the Bold closure was announced the NUM suffered the multiple shocks that the men at two pits in South Wales (Penrhiwceiber and Bedwas) and two pits in Yorkshire (Brookhouse and Cortonwood), all of them militant pits, had accepted closure. Corton-

wood was the very pit whose threatened closure in March 1984 had sparked off the strike.

At that time the total workforce at Bold was seven hundred. Five hundred were miners - members of the Bold branch NUM - and the remaining two hundred were members of the craftsmen's section of the NUM, the deputies union, the clerks and the managers. The meeting was for the main section of workers at the pit, the five hundred members of the Bold NUM.

Over three hundred attended the meeting. It was possibly the best I have ever attended, and there was much discussion and debate.

The inevitable question came up from the floor - 'Why don't we hold a ballot?' This was suitably rebuffed. At no point in the meeting was a proposal made and seconded for a secret ballot. A proposal for a vote by a show of hands on whether we should or should not oppose the closure was made, however.

The vote was taken. I put my head in my hands and closed my eyes. The men voted to oppose the closure by a majority of two to one. There was uproar and jubilation amongst those who had stood firm for 12 months and those that had come to the meeting to close the pit shuffled out of the hall in stony silence.

The Coal Board then started to encourage the men to believe that the decision made at the meeting of October 13 was undemocratic, that in fact over four hundred men had already put their names down for transfer or redundancy, that only a minority of men had participated in the vote by show of hands on October 13 and that a ballot should be held.

With this encouragement from the

management, those who wanted the closure of the pit, many of whom had participated in the October 13 vote, started demanding a ballot. They presented the branch committee with a petition containing two hundred signatures.

In this, the whole question of democracy was brought to light. After a long debate the men had collectively decided to fight for the pit. If they had been allowed to harbour their individual fears or protect their individual self-interest by means of a secret ballot, perhaps they would have voted to close. The petition for the ballot was rejected unanimously by the branch committee.

The key to Bold's productivity was the face known as T27. This was a new coal face and all expected great results from it. It was acknowledged as one of the best faces ever installed. It was worked almost exclusively by strikebreakers, since all jobs which could offer the highest bonus had been given to them after the strike. The rate of work of these colliers of course affects the productivity of the pit. On October 21, the scabs on T27 decided that they could not mine coal until a ballot had been called.

Meanwhile an unofficial ballot had been called. We instructed men not to participate and that the decision taken must stand until the next branch meeting. However, 252 did vote and of those, 222 voted to close the pit. This was still a minority of the Bold NUM.

Management backs scab action

Management was openly encouraging these scabs to take strike action to close the pit. The irony of the situation was laughable. Last year 140,000 miners who struck to save their pits and communities were openly scorned by management and media alike, and now men were being encouraged to strike to close the pit.

The net result of the actions of those selfish men was that barely more than 3,000 tonnes of coal were coming up the pit each week. The NCB propaganda machine went into full gear. Bold was losing a fortune each week; less than a quarter of target output was being mined!

The management then offered a financial bribe to the men in the hope that they would sell their jobs. They said that if any man accepted redundancy and the immediate closure of the pit, then he would be paid his service payment for 1984, even if he had been on strike. The terms of

redundancy in the mining industry are that you receive approximately £1,000 for each year worked. This offer had to be put to the men and the branch committee decided to do it by means of ballot. I and two others voted against this decision. The ballot was duly held and the question on the paper simply said: 'Are you prepared to fight for Bold?'

The men decided by two to one to close the pit.

When the ballot was being held many men were clearly angry about what was happening.

The closure of Bold colliery was planned and executed by the Coal Board for political reasons. Bold was the pit most loyal to the NUM in the county of Lancashire. □

"They are political prisoners"

Interview with Liz French

Question. What did Terry actually get put away for?

Answer. Well, he was charged with grievous bodily harm on a policeman. That's the terms they put it in. That was May 1984.

Q. When he went to court, what did he plead?

A. He didn't go to court until December, and he pleaded not guilty to the charge. The first trial was at the beginning of December, where you had four dockers gave witness to the fact that Terry was there, and after a week in the courts, we had to have a retrial because of the lack of evidence that they'd got. So we had a retrial in January 1985. In the meantime they had found another 13 policemen. They gave statements saying that in September 1984 they'd heard Terry shout on a picket line and that he'd actually beaten a copper up. So with all this new-found evidence that they were supposed to have had, there was no way that we could beat them. They were after having Terry put away and they'd already made the decision about it beforehand. We knew that they were going to be hard on miners; they were going to be made an example of. Leon Brittan [then Home Secretary] said right at the beginning of January that anybody going to court would be made an example of. Terry was one of the first big cases to come up in the courts, and he was made an example of. Its political, whatever you say about it. They are political prisoners.

Q. But here in Britain there is no political status. What are the prison conditions like?

A. The first prison he was in was Wandsworth in London. He spent five months in there and the conditions were appalling. I mean, you wouldn't keep animals locked up for 23 hours a day.

If you haven't got a job in Wandsworth [prison], which is cleaning or in the kitchens, then you are locked up 23 hours a day. I only used to get a visit once a month.

Q. Was that when he was on remand?

A. No. That was after he was sentenced. He never was on remand, was Terry. But he used to get visits once a month for 45 minutes. And to go in and out of the prison was frightening. But he is now in Maidstone, where I get a visit once a week.

Q. The problems faced by imprisoned miners are very similar to those in the North of Ireland concerning the question of political status.

A. Well, it is. It's the same. Terry would love to pursue the political status bit, but if he starts doing that, he's going to spend more than four years in prison. He's really going to lose everything. He wanted to demand political-prisoner status but to do that, you have to go on hunger strike, you have to refuse to wear prison clothes and the only people that suffer in the end would be me and him. So he never pushed it that far.

I think all miners were aware after a few months on strike that we were being used like the Irish were used, and we started linking up with the Irish and the coloured communities in London over police harassment. We knew how it felt then to live in Ireland, with continual harassment from the police and the army, because they were there on the picket line and all, you know!

Q. Obviously you're involved now in the support committees for the victimised miners, so your time is quite occupied?

A. Yes. Since the end of the strike the campaign has been for reinstatement of the sacked lads and to get the lads out of prison. It's died off a little bit because of it being just after Christmas, but we've got to start really getting the show on the road again and really pushing home because nobody up top is going to do it for us. No Labour Party [LP] leadership is going to do it for us. They've made it obvious that they think we're criminals. And if you're a criminal for fighting for our jobs,

then so be it. We're not going to get any help from the leadership of the TUC [Trades Union Congress] or the LP; we've got to do it ourselves now. It just means that we've got to work that much harder.

We've got fifty lads sacked and imprisoned round here. They're all really strong fighters. When they were sacking men they knew who to sack.

Q. What were they sacked for?

A. Occupying the pit during the summer of 1984, to make sure it was safe. The reports said that Betteshanger was finished, that it was collapsed. They went down and checked it, and it was as good as the day they had left it. And 29 got sacked that day. Some of them weren't even there, like Terry; no way did he occupy the pit because he was reporting to the police station twice a day.

Q. What about the women who gave a lot of support? Not just the miners' wives but all the other support groups?

A. There's a hell of a lot of support groups still in London and the national WAPC [Women against Pit Closures] is still there, but I wouldn't say it is as solid as it was. This thing about 'we're never going to go back to the kitchen' — at the end of the day you've got to go back and cook the meals, and I mean, it was a bit silly to say that in the first place. Women have gone back home and gone back to their own little lives again, and really and truly, they can't do anything else, can they? They're married, they've got families. It was something they had to do at the time, and I'm sure if there was a strike they'd be back out again and they'd be supportive, but they had to go back.

Q. What about the international support? Is that still there?

A. The links are still there. I've been out in Denmark since the end of the strike, I've been in Holland and Germany. I still get a lot of letters from foreign parts saying that they're still thinking of us.

Q. How has this experience changed your attitude in general about politics?

A. Instead of being just worried about my own little house and how Terry and me were going to cope, through the strike you began to think about different things. They think about Ireland, they think about the Blacks. We're very supportive now to South Africa and Nicaragua, El Salvador. I mean, you're there. So it has opened our eyes about world problems. □

AROUND THE WORLD



Antilles

GRS election appeal

THIS COMING MARCH, legislative and regional elections will take place in France and its overseas departments. The Groupe Revolution Socialiste (GRS), the section of the Fourth International of the Antilles (French West Indies), has just adopted at the last meeting of its central committee a position of active participation in regard to the regional elections. We reprint below translated extracts from an article on this question that appeared in the mid-January issue of 'Revolution Socialiste', a publication of the GRS.

On December 26 and 27, 1985, the Central Committee confirmed the orientation of the organisation toward active and determined participation in the upcoming regional elections. The people should not be left just with a choice between a revengeful right and a local left, which have, in the Antilles just as in France, done their groundwork by applying policies hardly distinguishable from each other.

Our presence aims to offer a revolutionary, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist alternative. We want to build this alternative with those who are interested in a double perspective of national liberation and of power for the working masses, with those who conclude from this general perspective the necessity for joint tasks in the coming period.

With this in mind the GRS has begun discussions with Combat Ouvrier [a formation linked to Lutte Ouvriere in France], an organisation whose programmatic positions are known to us and which is composed of anti-colonial militants who, although with different origins than ours, are nonetheless opposed to reformist capitulation (in Guadeloupe as well as in Martinique).

The GRS has also written to the Mouvement pour l'Independance de la Martinique (MIM), proposing that this organisation weigh the conditions for joining with us on a slate of independents who have not been implicated in any class-collaborationist projects.

The GRS will account for all these proposals, but it announces here and now that it will, in any case, enter the coming fight, in a unified

cadre if possible, but alone if necessary.

For now, we call on all our sympathisers, our friends, workers loyal to their class, determined anti-colonialists, democrats who have respect for the proletarian struggle, to lend us the financial, material and political support that we need in order to fulfil our obligations to the masses. □

Mauritius

Revolutionary campaign

THE MUNICIPAL elections of December 8, 1985, were a political confrontation of national importance. In the first place, they constituted a trial run for the formations entering the lists, a preview of the legislative elections that would normally take place in 1988. Also they provided the occasion for a vote against the politics of the regime and the orientation of the governing coalition, the Alliance. This Alliance unites the Mouvement Socialiste Mauricien (MSM) of Prime Minister Aneerood Jugnauth, champion of the interests of the Hindu faction of the bourgeoisie; the Parti Mauricien Social Democrate (PMSD) of the vice prime minister, Gaetan Duval, a great admirer of the racist Republic of South Africa and traditionally the supporter of the interests of the Franco-Mauritian sugar-producing bourgeoisie; and a collection of former Parti Travalliste (PT) members who had been excluded from the latter because of their participation in the coalition government.

Only the Mouvement Militant Mauricien (MMM) [a left party that has been moving to the right] seemed to be sufficiently strong to really oppose the present regime. However, the MMM of 1985 is no longer the same as the MMM of the late 1970s which used to sermonise: 'Class struggle, not race war'. After a brief period in the government in 1983, in a coalition with the bourgeois party that is now a member of the Alliance, the MMM began a clear political evolution to the right. This recentering, pushed by the MMM leadership, was shown during the time of the party's participation in the government by the many compromises it accepted with big sugar-producing capital and international

financial institutions. The recommendations of these interests were scrupulously followed by Paul Berenger, a leader of the MMM and finance minister at the time. This caused a severe disorientation among the people who had voted massively for a real change in policies.

The mass disorientation in the face of the MMM's about-face, its electoralist evolution and the communalist campaign by Aneerood Jugnauth, increased the divisions among the workers and popular classes along communalist lines.

On the island of Mauritius, communalist demagoguery and patronage find a fertile field for their development because the bourgeoisie is itself split up along the various communalist lines and the working masses also are divided between the small farmers, mostly Hindu, and the urban proletariat, largely Creole.

The importance of communalism has been very apparent in the recent municipal campaign. Within this context of manipulation of the communalist reflexes of the minorities (Creole, Muslim), setting them in opposition to the majority Hindu community, which the present prime minister claims to support, the electoral victory of the MMM has been largely distorted. True, it carried all the municipalities and 19 of the twenty electoral districts, but it continues to be, as a leaflet of the Organisation Militante des Travailleurs — Front National Anti-Souffrance (OMT-FNAS) states: 'an unhealthy political situation'. This document, which draws up a balance sheet of the elections, affirms: 'The island of Mauritius is divided into two communitarian blocs. The MMM has made a clean sweep of the PMSD's electorate in Beau-Bassin and Curepipe and has taken control of all the municipalities. But on what basis? The general elections of 1976 and 1982 were decided on the basis of class. But the December 8 municipal elections were decided on the basis of race. The MMM has succeeded in uniting a fraction of the working class, the middle class and the bourgeoisie linked directly to the sugar interests, by a strategy of a communal alliance of minorities.'

The meaning of the participation of revolutionary candidates in these municipal elections must be viewed in the context of the division of the workers' movement along com-

munist lines. The OMT-FNAS presented slates in four districts where it is most implanted.

For the OMT-FNAS, as this organisation explained in its electoral manifesto, it is a question of proposing a 'vote against the economic policy and the strategy of pro-capitalist development of the Alliance government', but also 'a vote against the MMM's plan for economic development' and 'against austerity, whether it is labeled left or right'.

The OMT-FNAS conceived of its electoral campaign as an important opportunity to reinforce its implantation and its coverage, especially through developing grass-roots bases of the FNAS, its mass front. The results here are encouraging since several branches of the FNAS have formed and about two hundred young activists have been recruited.

Meanwhile, these activists have waged a campaign imaginative enough to counter-balance their unequal financial situation vis-a-vis the other political parties. Thus in the districts where the OMT-FNAS had candidates, a door-to-door campaign was waged to present its ideas and the symbol of its slates entitled 'dimunn' ('ti-dimunn' in Creole means 'the little people'). The December 8 issue of the journal *Week-end* reported on the OMT-FNAS campaign in these terms: 'Following the example of the two large blocs that are confronting each other in the municipal elections today, the OMT and the FNAS organized a march yesterday to mark their presence in these elections. Six automobiles filled with OMT-FNAS activists, about a hundred cyclists and some motorcyclists took a route along Berthaud to Quatre Bornes and on to Port Louis, radiating out particularly into the working class areas ... The slogans called upon the electorate to vote for a "workers' " alternative, and against the capitalist policies advocated, according to the OMT-FNAS, as much by the MSM-PMSD Alliance as by the MMM. They also urged a vote for the unity of the "ti-dimunn" the "dimunn mizer" (miserable) and the small farmers. It was a march, novel in its conception, which illustrates the power and the means of the two movements as well as the role they intend to play in the current joust.'

The electoral results of the OMT-FNAS slates are quite encouraging. Since cross-voting was possible, the candidates on the different OMT-FNAS slates got different results. In Port Louis, the head of the slate received 1.1% of the votes cast in one district and 2.4% in another. The best results were obtained in Quatre Bornes with 2.5% of the vote. □

Philippines

Election machismo

PRESIDENT MARCOS has sought to undermine his opponent in the Philippine elections, Corazon Aquino, by playing on the machismo of Philippine men. For him, 'the Philippines' first woman presidential candidate was misbehaving by "challenging the man".' (*International Herald Tribune*, January 25-26, 1986).

Marcos' wife, Imelda, concurred with this, noting that 'women have their place somehow — at home' (idem). And, when addressing dockers in Manila, she denounced Corazon Aquino for not using make-up or going to a manicurist. Developing this theme, Imelda justified, in her own terms a vote for Marcos: 'All Filipinos who love beauty, love and God are for Marcos. I know the Philippine people ask for nothing else from life than this — beauty. This is what they aspire to more than to wealth and power.' (*Le Monde*, January 11, 1986).

More than 50 per cent of Filipinos live below the poverty line. Imelda Marcos, on the other hand, a former regional beauty queen, and wife of the president, is one of the most rich and powerful people in the country. As minister of state for human settlements, amongst other functions, she controls some of the main networks of corruption in the country. She personifies the crisis of the regime. □

Grenada

Humphrey freed

ON JANUARY 21, 1986, the Grenadan Court of Appeals finally returned its verdict; it overturned the decision made a year earlier to extradite the trade-unionist, Chester Humphrey, to the United States.

Humphrey was accused of having falsified some documents in 1979 while he was living in the United States, and of having furnished arms used in the overthrow of the dictator, Eric Gairy. The court found that there was not sufficient evidence to sustain the charge.

The court's decision is an important victory vis-a-vis the United States, which sought to end Humphrey's participation in the Grenadan trade-union movement. After the invasion he spent 23 months in prison.

This victory is owing to Humphrey's tenacity in starting a hunger strike in September and the demonstrations that have spread during these last

few weeks in Grenada and in other countries demanding his release.

The victory is all the more remarkable in that it came about a month before Reagan's visit to Grenada and at a time when the Grenadan government was trying to criminalise the left: in December, the police claimed to have discovered some men engaged in military training, and on January 7 they searched the house of two leaders of the Maurice Bishop Patriotic Movement, looking for weapons. □

Liechtenstein

Women get the vote

AT THE end of January the women of Liechtenstein went to the polls for the first time in the legislative elections. At long last the government of the tiny principality, bordered by Austria and Switzerland, has been forced to concede this most basic democratic right, one of the last, though not the last government in Europe to do so (there are still some cantons in Switzerland where women do not have the vote). □

Canada

Missing missile

CANADIAN anti-nuclear protesters received an unexpected and perhaps unwelcome bonus during recent cruise missile tests in the Cold Lake area which, the US government says, is an ideal site for simulating Russian conditions because it is covered in snow. The community of Wandering Valley, Alberta, were startled to see a missile going by at 1000 feet which should have passed five miles away. When the missile reached the weapons testing ground it went down in almost inaccessible territory and it was three hours before the US Strategic Air Command could find it. This is the fifteenth missile to suffer a mishap during testing. □

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