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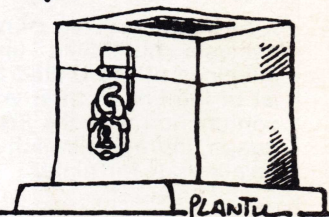
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Algeria:
**Can the
fundamentalists
be
stopped?**



**FRONT
ISLAMIQUE**

FLN



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ERRATUM

THE second half of the third sentence in the final paragraph of the comment "The Fall of the House of Gorbachev" by Salah Jaber which appeared in the last issue of *IV*, was omitted, resulting in a significant distortion of the author's meaning.

The published version reads: "Is it correct, for example, to reproduce the classical approach to the colonial question under capitalism, demanding unconditional independence for the oppressed nationalities?"

In the original text however, this sentence was: "Is it correct, for example, to reproduce the classical approach to the colonial question under capitalism, unconditionally demanding independence and emphasizing the liberatory content of oppressed nationalisms, in which the social critique is presented by bidding highest in the nationalist stakes ('We are the most consistent independentists')?"

Our apologies to the author and our readers!

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International VIEWPOINT

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First round to the fundamentalists

LATE in the evening of December 26, 1991, Algeria learned the results of the first round of the legislative elections.¹ The fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), which has pledged to introduce an Islamic state in Algeria, had won, in an election in which only 6.8 million of the 13 million registered voters had turned out to vote. There was discreet rejoicing in the fundamentalist camp, and shock among its opponents, silence and hesitation from the regime and futile fussing by impotent government bodies.

CHAWKI SALHI

THE results show that, in the absence of a mass workers party, workers, the unemployed and the youth chose to express their rejection of liberalism by voting for a reactionary force, which has been able to give the impression of being a radical, powerful and effective opposition able to lift Algerians out of their misery.

The electoral system encouraged the "useful vote" and reinforced the temptation to vote for the FIS as a vote against the ruling National Liberation Front (FLN).

In the first round, the FIS has won outright 188 of the 430 seats and remains in the running in almost all the 199 seats still to be decided. It gained 3.26 million of the 6.8 million votes cast.

Islamic parties win majority

If the 150,000 votes for the Ennaahda party, politically hardly distinguishable from the FIS, and the 368,000 votes for the more moderate fundamentalist Hamas are added on, the Islamic parties won a majority of the votes. The FIS only has to win 28 seats in the second round to have the majority all by itself.

The FIS' success underlines its influence among the popular sectors, and the electoral system may well give it a majority of the deputies with a minority of the votes in the second round.

The Front of Socialist Forces (FFS) gave expression to the wish of the Berber people to speak their own language (Tamazight) and aroused hope among opponents of the fundamentalists in the centre of the country. However, with 510,000 votes and 26 deputies it is no position to make a bid for power, even if it wins all the 13 seats where it is still in the running in the second round. Its line today is to establish its leadership of the democratically minded forces and extend its base

outside its stronghold in the Berber Kabylia region.

With 1.65 million votes and a mere 15 deputies in the first round, the FLN garnered votes from the countryside, as yet untouched by the October tempest² as well as of layers worried by the rise of the FIS. It remains in the running in 172 seats in the second round. Its significant score, contradicting the heavy burden of its 30 years in power, shows that many middle class people as well as a considerable number of poorer people voted for it out of fear of the FIS.

The intellectual and social elites appear to have chosen to vote for the multitude of liberal democratic parties, their votes being rendered useless by the electoral system. The Cultural Democratic Assembly with 200,000 votes and Ben Bella's Algerian Democratic Movement with 135,000 as well as the 30-odd other liberal parties that garnered a further 300,000 votes campaigned, with the blessing of the regime, for a two round system in which the FLN can hope to garner the votes of these parties.

Thousands of candidates

They have wasted enormous sums putting up thousands of candidates, plastering walls with their ambitious leaders only to disappear from history through incompetence. They fought against the proportional system which would have ensured that they got representation; frenetically active in the luxury hotels and on the front pages of the press, they were altogether less active out in the real world.

Of forty parties, only three remain. The Socialist Workers Party (PST — Algerian supporters of the Fourth International) aroused some interest in its campaign, but was not of course, seen as a credible force capable of initiating

immediate change.

The PST had always challenged the legitimacy of these elections, with their blatantly anti-democratic rules, including the disproportionate allocation of financial and organizational means, a voting system that inflated the scores of the big parties and biased media coverage. The complexity of the voting procedures, moreover, as well as the political field led to more than 6 million abstentions and invalid votes.

Excluding the illiterate

The complicated voting procedure was designed to exclude the illiterate, and only the FIS made the mobilizing effort needed to get the votes of women and the illiterate. It organized courses to show illiterate sympathizers how to tick the right number of boxes. The 924,000 invalid votes therefore represent votes lost from illiterate supporters of the FIS' opponents.

In many women's polling stations, the FIS gained a big victory. The right of women to vote, freshly won under the noses of the fundamentalists, turned out to the advantage of the enemies of women's rights, because the so-called democratic parties did not attempt to get women out to vote and have not brought them into political debate; the fundamentalists, on the other hand, were able to rely on their women militants.

The PST took part in these elections in order to go through the democratic experience with the masses and present a socialist alternative. Both the Stalinist Party of the Socialist Vanguard (PAGS) and the Labour Party (PT — followers of French Trotskyist Pierre Lambert) boycotted the elections, with the first demanding the banning of the FIS, and the second the release of imprisoned FIS leaders as a condition.

Following the vote, the Lambertists dropped the talk about a FIS-FLN or FIS-FFS government they had been promoting before the vote. The PAGS meanwhile launched its diminished forces into a hysterical campaign for the cancellation of the second round.

The regime, which promised us free and honest elections, was not expecting either the FIS' victory or the high rate of abstention. The Minister of the Interior first mumbled about everything having passed off calmly; popular participation was taking place. Later, however, when the scale of the regime's defeat became clear — with the FIS gaining so many seats that a turnaround in the second round was clearly impossible — it seems that the possibility of a coup was considered.

1. See *International Viewpoint* no. 218, December 9, 1991.

2. A reference to the repression that followed the riots of 1988.

Panic sets in

Panic set in, notably among the middle classes, and was used to launch a crazy campaign for the cancellation of the elections. Leaders of the democratic parties, the PAGS and the democratic newspapers plunged into a Committee for the Salvation of Algeria formed by the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA) and employers' organizations.

This activity discredits democracy and increases the size of the FIS which is maintaining an Olympian calm. The only comforting event has been the massive success of the march called by the FFS' Ait Ahmed for January 2, which brought out an estimated 300,000 people in "defence of democracy".

Finally, the regime is challenging the validity of ballots in the FIS' seats, where indeed there have been many cases of fraud, with 341 appeals in 150 constituencies. The electoral process will thus be protracted, improving the FLN's chances, but above all it will allow the FLN to get its reply to the FIS in order. There is talk of a Ministry of the Interior that would bring together Defence and Foreign Affairs around the presidency. The governor of the central bank, who already has very wide powers, would also be free from control by a future elected head of the government.

It does not seem likely that the FLN can catch up, even if some of the FIS' results are cancelled by the Constitutional Council. But the game is not yet over; there could be a FIS-FLN coalition, an Islamic technocratic government or the radical wing might push ahead.

Attitude of the West

There is a question mark over the attitude of the West to an FIS government; will the country be left to be crushed under the weight of the debt? Imperialism is hesitating between the possibilities offered by a terrorist regime which can beat down purchasing power, close public enterprises and open the economy to the world market, and the fear of destabilizing its domination in the region.

The campaign by the National Committee for the Salvation of Algeria (CNSA), which is mobilizing the democrats against democracy, legitimizes the FIS in the eyes of its electorate with its call for what is, in effect, a military dictatorship. This committee is paving the way for the demoralization of the FIS' opponents in the second round. The only way to resist the setting up of a fundamentalist dictatorship is mobilization in defence of cultural and democratic gains. Only those freedoms that are not defended will be lost, and a struggle can be effective regardless of which government is in place. The defenders of democratic liberties must act in common.

4

However to beat the fundamentalists it

is necessary to tear the youth away from them, continue the fight against liberalism and resist the plans of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) which the FIS' president, Hashani, has said he will respect. The factories must again become the centre of the struggle of the

oppressed; the revolt of the marginalized youth must be the striking force of the popular masses but not its leadership. This is the challenge that has to be met. The workers movement has unfortunately been slow to react, but it represents the only force that can re-awaken hope. ★

Women fight exclusion and poverty

THE following article by Shafia Jemame, an Algerian socialist feminist, first appeared in the November 7, 1991 issue of *Sozialistische Zeitung*, paper of the German United Socialist Party (VSP).

MUCH has been said and written in the Western media in recent years about the women's movement in Algeria, above all about its struggle against the Islamic fundamentalists. However, this movement did not arise yesterday.

Already during the war of independence, women took part in the liberation struggle. Some, the best known among them, but only a minority, planted bombs. Others went into the mountains and joined the guerilla struggle. Most, however, joined the resistance in the towns, while the men took to the mountains. Their participation in this struggle has given Algerian women a strong sense of historical legitimacy. Even today, women involved in the war of independence take the front line in the movement, above all at the moments of sharpest confrontation with the fundamentalists.

The ruling National Liberation Front (FLN) has never acknowledged that women took part in the guerilla struggle. In 1958 it gave the order that all the women fighting in the mountains on the Tunisian border should be sent back into the home. Women have never been represented in the leading bodies of the FLN or the liberation army.

It was in the FLN's nature that, at the time of the declaration of independence, it should pursue its policy of excluding women. Resistance to this took shape in the capital, Algiers. This led the president of the time, Ben Bella, to call an Algerian women's association into being, in order to head off the women's protests.

Throughout the whole existence of this association, that is, since 1963, its leadership has always been in the hands of men. Some of them have permitted themselves, when speaking of the association, to say "we, the women of Algeria."

The roots of the present women's movement lie outside this organization. It is the work rather of women outside the association who have resisted attempts by the government to enact anti-women legislation.

The FLN was a liberation movement with a national programme. It had no precise social programme for the building of an independent Algeria, and has come under the influence of the most diverse social forces, including that of the fundamentalists.

Attempts to impose family law

Since independence, the government has tried many times to impose a family law which regulates marriage, divorce, inheritance and so on according to Islamic law. Such a law was entirely unacceptable to the women who had taken part in the war of independence, and in the decade after independence they created an unorganized women's movement which reacted to events as they arose.

With the industrialization drive of the end of the 1960s and early 1970s, girls were allowed to go to school and university; the newly founded industries needed working women. At this time women were able to significantly improve their social position. But with the end of the "Golden Age" at the start of the 1980s the situation of women once again began to deteriorate. Layoffs affected women first. The government once again began to seek to legislate against women.

In the 1980s, independent movements such as the women's movement, the student movement and the Berber movement were harshly suppressed. It was the women's movement that put up the stiffest resistance to the government; people would say: The women are the only men left in this country.

However, lacking a firm national organization, even the women's movement

finally went under. After the big demonstrations of 1981, '82, and '83, the movement suffered a big retreat in 1984. And this was the very year in which the government brought the family law before the national assembly.

In 1988 Algeria saw a social explosion. The youth occupied the streets of the capital and attacked all the institutions that symbolized the regime. In Algeria 60% of the population is under 20 and 75% under 25 years old. This revolt shook the regime; one of its results was that it allowed several political parties to be set up.

Murder and mass torture

The subsequent repression was terrible. There were deaths and torture was used — for the first time since independence — and on a mass scale. Thousands of young people “disappeared”. Women besieged the barracks, the police stations and prisons; they organized committees for the release of their sons, against torture and for democratic freedoms. It was out of this movement that organized groups of women emerged in a variety of places, above all in the north of the country.

These women's structures had broadly similar aims. In time, and through common work, they constructed a national coordination. This collaboration was strengthened by the malicious campaign which the fundamentalists had launched against women. At first this campaign was conducted through verbal insults in the streets, the media and the mosques, and with the use of anti-women arguments.

The essential message was: The only cause of the crisis striking Algeria is women. Women are responsible for unemployment since they take men's jobs. Women are responsible for the decline of the education system, since most teachers are women. Women are responsible for rising crime because they are not where they should be, bringing children up properly; women are responsible for the moral decay of the country.

After a few months the whole country was in a state of real psychosis. Women were being attacked in the streets, on the buses, at work, in the universities — especially women on their own — whether widowed, divorced or single.

At this time, almost every weekend, the women's groups organized rallies, demonstrations and other activities. The movement seemed to grow with every attack. The 1990 communal elections brought the fundamentalists' campaign to a standstill. For the whole of 1989 and the first half of 1990, the women's movement was practically the only force that actively opposed the fundamentalists, and this under conditions of total social isolation. There were indeed several parties whose programmes included the emancipation of women, but women have not been able to count on their support —

apart from that of the far left parties.

Nonetheless, the activity of the women's movement led the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), the biggest of the Islamic parties, to change its approach to women for the communal elections. The same people who had been inveighing against women, now started talking about a wage for housewives. If you asked how this was to be paid, the answer would be that the police would be abolished — an argument especially popular among the young.

Since the revolt of 1988 there has been a deep gulf between the population and the FLN regime. The FLN is seen as corrupt and has lost the confidence of the people. Opposed to the regime, the fundamentalists propose to restore moral values and social justice. They have promised housing for all. There is an extremely severe housing shortage in Algeria.

Promising heaven on earth

On the average, seven people live in dwellings of nine square metres. Whoever promises housing promises heaven on earth. They have promised a just distribution of water. There is indeed water in the rich quarters but not for the poor.

Such promises have found a good reception among women. They saw their daily housework valued and a possibility of improving their living conditions. This explains why women who had taken part in demonstrations against fundamentalist attacks voted for these same fundamentalists on June 12, 1990, and contributed to their massive victory.

The electoral law was devised so that a man could vote for himself, for his wife and for three other people. On the eve of the 1990 poll the interior minister publicly stated that there would be no identity checks at the voting stations. In this situation every kind of electoral fraud could be practised. People would vote several times in different booths or towns, absent or dead people voted and so on.

This led the women's movement to concentrate its attention on the electoral law. It has succeeded in getting the right of men to vote for three other people withdrawn.

However it has not yet succeeded in depriving a husband of the right

to cast his wife's vote. Nonetheless the women's movement has won a victory. Once again it was this movement and the far left who have fought for basic democratic rights. Now, the front has widened; 28 parties are now demanding the reform of the electoral law.

Women do not only have to deal with democratic questions. Another issue is the economic crisis, which has worsened in recent months. The agreement made by the government with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has meant massive job losses. The official unemployment rate is 22%, but is in reality higher; the dinar has already been devalued twice but wages have hardly risen. Purchasing power has been sharply reduced and the government has decided to abolish subsidies on basic necessities.

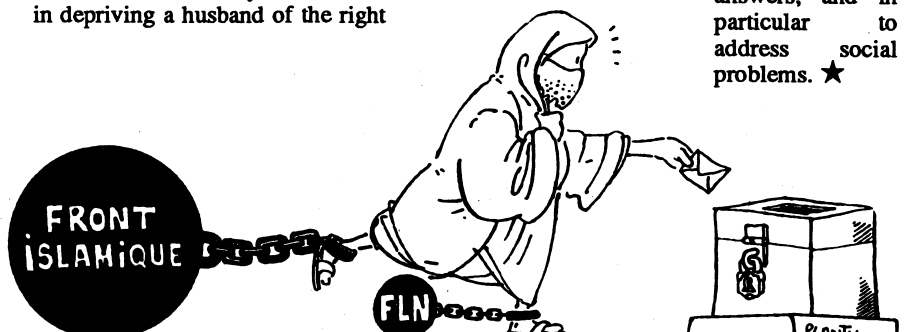
This means a huge deterioration in the living conditions of women. Previously, the health care system was free, but now one has to pay.

State plans for health care have disappeared into the bottom drawer, since the state is withdrawing from the health service. This means a huge rise in the death rate for women.

The price of school books has sharply risen. Families will soon have to decide which children to send to school. On the average, every woman has seven children. It will of course be the girls who lose out. Similarly it is women who get laid off first. They will thus have to enter the shadow economy, selling home-made products in the markets to supplement their shrinking housekeeping money. The prospect looms of growing impoverishment, which will destroy all possibility for women's emancipation.

The fear is that the subjection of the government to the IMF's diktats will only serve to make the reactionary ideology of the fundamentalists more popular. Women are the victims in both cases; on the one hand, from the FLN's liberal, pro-capitalist orientation, and on the other from the Islamic movement which wants to re-create the past.

This situation obliges the women's movement to look for new answers, and in particular to address social problems. ★



The Chinese Communist Party woos workers

THE collapse of the Communist parties in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union has severely shaken the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). To avoid suffering the same fate, the CCP leadership is trying to strengthen its work amongst the working class, at least on paper.*

ZHANG KAI

IN AN ARTICLE IN THE MAY 1, 1991 issue of the Chinese theoretical journal, *Qiushi*, a provincial party secretary pointed out, in an article entitled "Strengthen and improve the work of the Party towards the working class under new historical conditions", that "the intense international class struggle cannot help but affect and have an impact on the working masses and the flooding in of bourgeois liberal thoughts cannot help but cause some ideological confusion among the working masses."

The article further says that, "in recent years, people promoting bourgeois liberalization advocate the separation of the working class and the party, thus destroying the relationship between the two, and call for 'trade union autonomy and independence' saying that leadership by the party is obstructing the working class from becoming masters of society."

It goes on to urge the working class to "resolutely oppose the idea of 'everything for money', to 'obey the constitution and laws', to 'consciously accept [modern enterprise management]' and 'to exercise self-restraint'."

Such criticisms and demands reflect growing discontent among the workers and their antagonistic mood to the CCP, constituting, with the changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in the background, what the article referred to as "the new historical conditions".

Relying on the working class

Faced with such "historical conditions", the article stressed the need to strengthen the CCP's work towards the working class and improve the CCP's relationship with it, specifically by 'wholeheartedly relying on the working class' and "further expanding" the channels of workers' participation in politics

and social management, and so on.

After the August failed coup and the banning of the Soviet Communist Party, the "new historical conditions" are even more harsh for the CCP. Another article published in *Qiushi* one month after the coup, entitled "Several problems to be solved so as to give the workers full play to become masters — a study on the situation in some factories" highlighted the CCP's concern over work amongst the working class.

In the article, the two authors from the CCP Central Policy Unit explained the results of their survey of how the policy of relying wholeheartedly on the working class was applied in the factories; overall, some big state enterprises have applied it better, while many factories still lack effective mechanisms and, although some factories have set up a system, it has not been functioning normally.

Arrogance of leading cadres

Specifically, during recent management reforms, quite a few leading cadre have been behaving in a way that "results in the weakening of the idea that the leadership should rely on the workers to run the factories. Some leading cadres think that the call by the central committee to rely wholeheartedly on the working class is only a slogan arising out of the need for political stability; some are worried that too much talk of respecting the master status of the workers would affect the scientific management of the enterprise. According to a survey by a city-level trade union federation, 58.8% of workers think that their factory leaders 'think of the workers only during difficult times and forget about them during good times.' A few factory leaders see themselves as "owners" of the factory and the workers as employees, resulting in a tense relationship."

Both of the above-mentioned articles talked about setting up a democratic management system inside the enterprises to "give full play" to the functioning of the workers' congress system set up ten years ago by a "provisional law on workers' congresses in state enterprises" in July 1981. The second article from *Qiushi* revealed some facts about the progress of this law.

"According to a survey of the city at the end of last year", the article says, "only 76.4% of all basic enterprises and units in the city have set up a workers congress. Even some that have been set up exist only formally... it is widely felt that the

least applied rights of the workers' congresses are the rights to democratic election and monitoring. In one city, 76% of the factories have not applied the right to democratic election." Furthermore, "in some enterprises workers' congresses, the deputies are mostly party and political cadres of various grades and categories; even in the advanced enterprises, production line workers only constitute about 5% of all deputies."

The survey also revealed that income distribution in "some" factories is not fair. Specifically, some small enterprise contractors and lease-holders have incomes and accounts whose origins are unclear; enterprise assets seem to have become private property, spent at will without mass supervision. Some contractors have amassed huge wealth without an improvement in productive efficiency. Secondly, the income of many factory contractors differs too much from that of the workers. In many poorly performing factories, the contractors have incomes over ten times or even more than those of the workers."

The article's authors think that it is important to safeguard the interests and rights of the workers so that they can be enthusiastic in production. They also suggested guaranteeing the rights of the workers' congresses.

Such suggestions reflect to some extent the pressure from the workers, but they run against the whole bureaucratic system and the fear that giving more power to the workers will endanger the CCP. Thus, it is probable that the suggestions will remain mainly on paper.

Independent workers actions

Regardless of reforms from above, the Chinese working class have been fighting for a long time by their own efforts to improve their living and working conditions. The recently released White Paper on Human Rights in China revealed an "incomplete" figure: During 1990, the national and local factory work disputes mediation committees have dealt with 18,573 cases of work disputes. This figure does not include cases where workers bypassed these committees to take action themselves.

The need of the bureaucracy to maintain its monopoly on power while speeding up economic reforms and increase production at the expense of the workers, will mean that social, economic, and political contradictions between the bureaucracy and the working class can only sharpen, thereby triggering a new wave of struggle for democracy and a rising workers' movement that will eventually lead to confrontation and revolutionary struggle.

★

* This article first appeared in the December issue of the Chinese revolutionary Marxist journal, *October Review*, published in Hong Kong.

Will the United Nations bring peace?

ON OCTOBER 23, 1991, the Cambodian peace accords were signed in Paris. On November 20, 1991, they were ratified by the United Nations' General Assembly. The country has been placed under international supervision, imposing "responsibilities on the United Nations that are more complex, extensive and costly than for any previous UN mission."¹

The accords reflect recent changes in the international situation. Essentially, control over developments in the run up to elections in 1993 is in the hands of Japan and the Western powers, and the former USSR plays no role.

They also confirm the bloody impasse into which the policy of the Khmer Rouge has led the Cambodian revolution. It seems that Cambodia will once more fall into the imperialist sphere of influence, breaking its close links with Vietnam.

However the future remains uncertain in many respects, including the outcome of the UN's official objective: the re-establishment of a lasting peace, a perspective which has raised many hopes in a country that has experienced 21 years of wars.

PIERRE ROUSSET — December 17, 1991

THE October 1991 accords came at the end of years of difficult negotiations.² They contain the following clauses:

- The formation of a Supreme National Council (SNC), with 12 members, including the four Khmer "factions" (the Phnom Penh regime, the Sihanoukists, the Khmer Rouge and the movement led by Son Sann, a right wing politician).

- Prince Norodom Sihanouk, now 70 years old, has been named as the SNC's president, and is now recognized as head of state by at least three of the four factions.

- The country has been placed under UN supervision.³ The first military contingents have already arrived, but the bulk of the forces will only arrive in six months time. In an exceptional measure, the UN has been authorized to take direct control of the country's main administrative mechanisms, in particular the ministries of defence, foreign affairs, public security and information. It must, finally, supervise the holding of elections in 1993.

- Meanwhile, the UN must regroup and then disarm all the Cambodian armed forces and demobilize "at least" 70%: check that purchases of arms from abroad have ceased; impose respect for human rights; and ensure the clearing of mines from the battle zones to allow the dis-

placed population to return.⁴

The total cost of this intervention is considerable — presently calculated at between one and two billion dollars.⁵ The necessary funds have not yet been formally granted by the governments concerned. This is one of the first unknowns: the UN's "Operation Cambodia" may be bankrupted before it is concluded.

The Paris accords open the way for the re-development of capitalism in Cambodia. Foreign investors will be interested in exploiting the country's natural resources: offshore oil, wood, rubber, mining products, fish and so on. Economic missions are following one another into Phnom Penh, accompanying the diplomats. However, while the situation remains unstable it is likely that Japan and the West will proceed cautiously, above all as far as oil prospecting is concerned.

The full expansion of a neo-colonial economy requires, furthermore, various preconditions: the green light and loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the formalization of inter-governmental agreements, the restoration of the physical infrastructure, including the road network, which has been nearly destroyed, and the setting up of a new financial system. However capi-



talist development here can immediately draw on far more vigorous regional and national sources than in many of the Eastern European countries.

Cambodia is already a crossroads in a regional trade and smuggling network which connects South East Asia (starting with Thailand), Taiwan and southern China. In this area, trans-national Chinese capital disposes of strong banking networks. Fortunes have been built up in the country itself, where the Sino-Cambodian bourgeoisie has regained its footing.

Flood of functionaries

The United Nations intervention is also going to give a powerful impetus to the process, given its massive and concentrated character. There will be around 20,000 UN civil and military functionaries with considerable purchasing power. They will attract many other "clients" (journalists, business people, tourists) into Phnom Penh, which already has a population of 900,000, and some provincial centres. Aid missions will multiply. Here also,

1. Tommy Koh, a member of Singapore's delegation at the Paris conference on Cambodia, *International Herald Tribune*, November 1, 1991.

2. See IV 183, April 23, 1991.

3. The UN forces are called, respectively, UNAMIC (UN Advance Mission in Cambodia) and UNTAC (UN Transitional Authority for Cambodia).

4. Numerous areas of Cambodia are heavily mined, causing great suffering to the civilian population. The percentage of amputees in the country is extremely high. See Jon Lidén, *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, November 21, 1991.

5. See in particular Stephen J. Solaz, chair of the Asian and Pacific Affairs sub-committee on Foreign Affairs of the House of Representatives, in the *International Herald Tribune*, November 14, 1991. He estimates the cost of the US contribution at several hundred million dollars.

Vietnam — political prisoners released

STARTING in mid-November 1991, a number of political prisoners have been released in Vietnam and others are to be set free in coming months. Those released include a "dissident", the former Communist militant and writer Duong Thu Huong, as well as figures from the counter-revolutionary regime and army imprisoned since 1975. Duong Thu Huong was arrested on April 14, 1991. This 44 year old woman, a long time Communist, and a volunteer during the American war, has never renounced her past. But she committed the crime of publicly denouncing the regime of the so-called "dictatorship of the proletariat" and "democratic centralism" in force in Vietnam; that is to say the monopoly hold of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) over the country's socio-political life and that of the party leadership over the VCP itself.

The CP apparatus meant to make an example by imprisoning Huong: no one should question its authority. More recently, the party demanded that she ask for pardon as a condition for her release, but Duong Thu Huong refused to make a statement that would be tantamount to an admission of guilt. Since April 1991, a significant solidarity campaign has been undertaken, notably in France, for the release of this writer.¹

A Catholic priest, the Reverend Le Thanh Que, has recently been freed, as well as a poet, Nguyen Chi Thien. The latter, 49 years old, had previously been imprisoned from 1958 to the end of the 1970s. He was re-arrested in 1979, but has never been brought to trial.

Finally, the Vietnamese leadership has announced that the last occupants of the "re-education camps" are to be progressively released — this involves around a hundred people. The releases, which began in mid-November, will go on until February or March 1992. Many officers in the counter-revolutionary army and top officials of the Saigon regime were imprisoned in these camps after the 1975 victory. Vo Dai Ton, a former lieutenant-colonel in the Saigon army, arrested in 1981 on the Laotian frontier when he tried to launch an anti-Communist guerilla struggle, was also set free on December 9.

These "appeasement" measures come after the holding, in June 1991, of the VCP's 7th Congress, at a time when the regime is trying to renew dialogue with critical intellectuals and when it is taking diplomatic initiatives, and supporting the Cambodian agreement.² However they do not seem to signal a real change of line on repression, as is shown by the Nguyen Dan Que affair.

This doctor was sentenced to 20 years in prison on November 29, 1991. The charges, as transmitted by the press agencies, are all connected with crimes of opinion and in no way justify such a sentence.³ Nguyen Dan Que has already been imprisoned from 1978 to 1988. This time he has been sentenced for distributing a petition in favour of "pluralist" elections, launching appeals for "the abolition of socialism" and translating, as a member of Amnesty International, some Vietnamese documents.

Here we find all the themes of the national security obsession shown by the VCP leadership in the run-up to the 7th congress: the prohibition of any mention of "pluralism", having links with the "foreigner", and giving unauthorized expression to one's critical opinions and writings. The trial of Nguyen Dan Que is a warning against dissident temptations.

This continuity of orientation was also expressed at the last plenum of the VCP's Central Committee, which met from November 25 to December 4. On the one hand, the CC took decisions to support the development of the private sector (economic liberalization). On the other, it announced that the new, amended, constitution would continue to embody the "leading role of the CP" that is, a single-party regime (no political liberalization).

The CP leadership's proposal that Lee Kuan Yew should become their advisor on economic matters was an ideologically symbolic diplomatic manoeuvre. As we know, Lee Kuan Yew, the highly authoritarian former premier of Singapore, is no expert on socialism. However, he does know a bit about dependent and repressive capitalism. — **Pierre Rousset** ★

1. See IV 201, March 4, 1991, and 209, June 24, 1991.

2. See IV 213, September 13, 1991.

3. *Le Monde*, December 1 and 2, 1991; *International Herald Tribune*, December 4, 1991.

significant funds will be mobilized — the rebuilding of the infrastructure requires at least \$900m. Sectors like transport (from air travel to taxis), building and hotels, are going to burgeon.

The economic fallout from Operation Cambodia will interest many people and weigh on political developments. However, this speculative brush fire may well be superficial and give way to a crisis, when, in two years, the UN forces leave.

Another question remains in abeyance. What will happen in the countryside, where the great majority of the eight million Cambodians live? The present development mainly concerns the urban economy, even if the trade networks of the local bourgeoisie irrigate the countryside. Highly individualized, Khmer peasant agriculture will certainly accommodate itself to a market economy, but the irruption of wild capitalism may open a sharp social crisis, from which the Khmer Rouge will certainly hope to profit.

The restoration of food production is slow, particularly because of mines and the lack of draught animals. The rice harvest for 1990 (1.86 million tonnes) is an improvement but is still not enough. The cultivated area in 1991 was 1.5 million hectares, as opposed to 2.5 million before the 1970 coup d'état and the American war.

Return of refugees

In the short term, the return of the refugees, as well as the survivors of the traditional elite, may ignite a social rural and urban conflict over property rights. There are 400,000 persons displaced by the war on the Thai frontier and 150,000 in the country itself. Their lands and housing have been occupied by others for years.⁶ Furthermore, the party of former minister Son Sann is demanding the restoration to the rich of their pre-1975 "rights".

The Paris accords have been conceived with the aim of weakening as much as possible, and even dismantling, the regime in Phnom Penh which is allied to Vietnam. The legitimate Khmer administration is supposed to be embodied in the SNC (and, by default, by Sihanouk in person).

A rapprochement between Sihanouk and Hun Sen, the prime minister in Phnom Penh, is well advanced. After having in a fashion recognized each other, on November 25, 1991 they signed a military cooperation agreement and announced a coalition government (postponed indefinitely after the riots which broke out in Phnom Penh during the arrival of the Khmer Rouge leader Khieu

6. A significant proportion of the refugees were born in the Thai frontier camps and have never been able to work. These youth, even more than their parents, might well be unable to adapt themselves to rural life and could swell the ranks of a "marginal" urban population.

The UN plan runs into trouble (update)

THE situation in the Cambodian capital Phnom Penh sharply worsened as a result of the repression of a demonstration by medical students against corruption last December 21. Several demonstrators were killed by the armed forces, a curfew was imposed and the right to demonstrate was severely limited.

The sale of public property carried out as part of a policy of privatization, ignited a series of demonstrations that began on December 17. These demonstrations have mobilized many students — who are often from families belonging to the elite (the son of a senior officer was among those killed). Many slum residents who had been evicted from their homes by government officials hoping to realize quick profits, also demonstrated. The corruption that has accompanied the uncontrolled sale of public property has thus already led to a socio-political crisis, which can only grow with the arrival of United Nations (UN) forces.

The political situation remains very unstable. Sihanouk is keeping his options open. He has authorized two of his children to enter the Hun Sen government, but Raniriddh, the most influential of the princes and princesses, has maintained the perspective of an independent Sihanoukist movement. The Supreme National Council (SNC) met in the Cambodian capital for the first time on December 30, 1991, with the participation of Khieu Samphan. There was much concern over when the UN forces would arrive.

The UN plan has met one of its first setbacks: A delay in the sending of international forces until several months after the installation of the SNC government is being envisaged, in a country where the situation is extremely unstable. The situation is not at all improved by the fact that a new General Secretary of the UN, Boutros-Ghali, has just been appointed while questions remain as to how the operation will be financed — P. R., January 9, 1992. ★

Samphan).

Underlying this rapprochement is the desire to establish a common front against the return of the Khmer Rouge to power. But this also perhaps reflects the profound evolution of Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party (CPP), the former KPRP (Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party).⁷ This party, which has 30,000 members, adopted its new name at a congress on October 17-18, 1991. Taking its distance from Vietnam, the CPP declared that it had renounced Marxism and socialism. In the past such declarations have been more formal than substantial, but it is very possible this time that they express the desire of at least a part of the apparatus to participate "loyally" with Sihanouk in the reconstruction of a neo-colonial state.

This is certainly not the case with the Khmer Rouge, who have also declared that they now support capitalism and multipartyism. In their internal documents, their leaders underline the "tactical" aspect of the change in official orientation. Ieng Sary, for example, notes that "it is merely that our operational methods and the forms of our combat are somehow different."⁸ They retain, furthermore, their racist and xenophobic attitude towards Vietnam — and thus leave the field open for the reinforcement of Japanese, Western or Thai influence.

The Paris accords seal the collapse of

the revolutionary process in Cambodia. The tragedy of the Cambodian revolution has many causes: the savagery of the American war of 1970-75; the enervating and anti-democratic heritage of French colonialism; the relative passivity of the Western working class movement in the face of the imperialist war; the international weight of Stalinism; the calculations of the Chinese bureaucracy; the internal tensions in the Indochinese liberation movements (between Khmers and Vietnamese) and so on.

But the brutal abortion of the revolutionary potential of 1975 is above all due to the policies of the Khmer Rouge, and specifically the Pol Pot faction. The purges that decimated the Communist ranks, the massive population deportations, the employment of torture as a means of government, and insane xenophobia condemned the regime to plunge further and further down into the spiral of terror.

The Khmer Rouge retain powerful resources that could allow them to profit from any socio-political crisis in the country: stocks of arms, their own economic resources (notably through the traffic in rubies); lucrative contacts with sections of the Thai army; an underground political and organizational network across much of the country; and a command structure and militant rank-and-file. There has been no sign that the movement's unity is threatened by inter-

nal disagreements, even if this is a possibility. A real change in the Khmer Rouge line would not go unnoticed: it would require a formal self-criticism, the end of the reign of secrecy and a general renewal of the leadership, the putting on trial of existing cadres responsible for the crimes committed in the name of the revolution and so on.

The Khmer Rouge presence will continue to influence the political situation, by maintaining anti-Vietnamese pressure and perpetuating the identification of communism with a reign of terror — as was confirmed by the popular reaction in Phnom Penh, with the violent demonstrations against the arrival of Khieu Samphan on November 27, 1991, which forced him to immediately return to take refuge in Thailand.⁹

The political geography of Cambodia is probably going to rapidly change. It is too soon to know what the replacement of the KPRP by the CPP really means, what Sihanouk or his family intends, whether Son Sann's party has a future, or what political forces the new Cambodian bourgeoisie will call into being.

Vietnam: the big loser

The big loser from the Paris accords is Vietnam, "bled white (as the Chinese wanted) by the Cambodian adventure, obliged to retreat without any real compensatory moves by either the Americans or the Chinese and forced by the international situation to again give allegiance to China."¹⁰

The unity of Indochina, artificially cut up by French colonialism, but also the scene of revolutionary struggles which (objectively) tended in the direction of regional solidarity, has received a mortal blow. The implications of the Sino-Vietnamese rapprochement on Cambodia remain to be seen, but the passing of the country into the imperialist sphere of influence seems more or less inevitable.

It does not seem that the US is capable of deriving immediate advantages from the situation. They lack a regional policy (apart from a desire for revenge, confirmed by the maintenance of the embargo against Vietnam). Sihanouk, meanwhile, will not have forgotten that in 1970 he was overthrown by a coup d'état supported by Washington and that the US is largely responsible for the disaster that

7. The Kampuchean People's Revolutionary Party was the Communist Party established in power after the Vietnamese intervention of January 1979. In October 1991, Chea Sim, aged 59, was elected president of the Cambodian People's Party and Hun Sen, aged 41, vice-president. On this congress, see Murray Hiebert, *FEER*, October 31, 1991.

8. Quoted by Nate Thayer, *FEER*, November 7, 1991.

9. The Khmers Rouges were in power from April 1975 to January 1979 (when they were overthrown by the Vietnamese intervention). Their most well known leaders are Pol Pot, Nuon Choa, Ieng Sary and the two members of the SNC: Khieu Samphan and Son Sen.

10. Nguyễn Quang, *Dien Dan*, December 1991.

has overtaken the country.

France, the former colonial power, and Australia, which has pretensions to becoming a new power in the Pacific, have both played an active role in the UN plans and are in direct competition.

However, it is probably Japan that is best placed to make its presence felt. As the main provider of funds, it will demand big trade and political concessions in return. Japanese industry is interested in the natural resources of the Indochinese zone (as well as the presence of cheap labour). Above all, Tokyo actually has a regional policy: East Asia is the framework for the "re-deployment" of its capital, and thus forms a security sphere of major importance.

However, the "smaller" players in the Cambodian game, starting with Thailand, should not be overlooked. Thailand has many advantages (the Thai minister of foreign affairs, Arsa Sarasin, took a wicked pleasure in visiting Phnom Penh two days before his French colleague Roland Dumas). The Thai military and bourgeoisie are already behind much of the trafficking involving Cambodia. Symptomatically, the Thai Military Bank has opened two agencies, in the capital and at the key port of Koh Kong, thus getting a head start in the competition. Inter-imperialist and inter-capitalist competition is thus going to contribute, behind the common UN flag, to the Cambodian reality of tomorrow.

After 21 years of war, most Cambodians are probably not too worried about what the future holds, just as long as it means peace.

Armed gangs

However, even here, nothing is certain. The "peace process" may run aground and the civil war restart. Even without that, Cambodia has become a paradise for armed gangs. This is for geographical (the widespread forest cover), economic (the role of smuggling) and political (the heritage of the past two decades) reasons. Banditry is growing, while piracy is endemic in the Gulf. These may well benefit from the demobilization of soldiers into unemployment. Peace might mean no more than the right of those who do not have private armies to be robbed in silence.

The placing of the country under supervision may aggravate this danger rather than limit it. There is a risk that the UN intervention will have perverse effects. It may well weaken the existing administration (that of the Hun Sen regime). Indeed, the UN personnel, wholly ignorant of the country, cannot replace it (in a good number of places, this personnel will be, moreover, primarily preoccupied with pocketing princely salaries and servicing this or that commercial backer). The UN money will feed an unparalleled corruption and, perhaps, contribute to the

quiet formation of private armies by the more powerful "families". What can form the counterweight to this?

The new Cambodia will certainly be that of the rich. In the current circum-

stances, it is hard to see how a popular alternative could impose itself. But it is not yet certain that the country will finally know peace. ★

Sri Lankan Marxists rally to Fourth International

THREE hundred delegates to the conference of Sri Lanka's Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP — New Socialist Party) voted for affiliation to the Fourth International at the end of November.*

PHIL HEARSE

THE NSSP has around 3,000 members and leads two important trade union federations, which makes it a powerful force on the Sri Lankan left. One of its leaders, Vasudeva Nanayakkara ("Vasu" to everyone on the island) is an MP and among the most popular leaders of the Sri Lankan left.

Two major questions dominate the life of the working class and the political left in Sri Lanka: the IMF-sponsored austerity and privatization policy imposed by the UNP (United National Party) government of President Premadasa, and the prolonged war between government forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who seek an independent Tamil state.

At the conference there was a lively debate about the policy to be followed in the fight against the government. According to NSSP leaders, the bourgeois opposition Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the opportunist left (the ex-Trotskyist Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP), the Sri Lanka Mahajana Party (SLMP) and the Communist Party) are trying to force all anti-government currents into a "popular front", a policy rejected by the conference. NSSP leaders pointed out that the bourgeois opposition had no clear alternative policy to that of the government (see box).

Given the role played by the NSSP in Sri Lankan politics, a big campaign against the NSSP's policy is being waged by the bourgeois opposition and the opportunist left. In particular they want to coopt the popularity of "Vasu" for their popular front.

Immediately before the conference, Colombo newspapers reported that 30 government soldiers had been killed in an ambush by Tamil Tigers. According to hospital workers, the real figure was much higher. The war in the north and east of the island, far from being a sporadic campaign, is a daily war on a huge scale. Armed police, soldiers and sailors guard road-blocks all over Colombo, despite its distance from the war zone.

The NSSP calls for self-determination for the Tamil-speaking people, but does not give support to the LTTE. NSSP leaders I spoke to compared the Tigers to the authoritarian "Shining Path" guerillas in Peru and Pol Pot's movement in its early stages. The Tigers murderously repress all other Tamil organizations in their Jaffna stronghold, and have assassinated NSSP members.

Party leaders in hiding

During the last decade Sri Lankan socialists have faced enormous difficulties in maintaining and developing their organization. Between 1983 and 1985, the NSSP was banned and operated underground with its key leaders in hiding.

Between 1987 and 1990, the Sinhalese terrorist organization, the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), waged a fierce campaign against the government and left wing parties. NSSP general secretary, Vickremabahu Karunaratne ("Bahu" to the Sri Lankan left) was seriously wounded in a JVP machine gun attack in 1989.

In response to the JVP campaign the government unleashed a reign of terror by security forces and death squads. In the 1987-90 period, 60,000 people were slaughtered in this campaign, and, according to the NSSP, more than half of these people had nothing to do with the JVP.

As a result, a movement of the parents and families of the "disappeared" has developed, and the NSSP considers building this movement a major task for its supporters.

Trade unionism in Sri Lanka is "political" unionism, with left wing parties controlling their own trade union federations.

* This article first appeared in the British revolutionary Marxist fortnightly, *Socialist Outlook*.

These federations co-ordinate their activity through the Joint Council of Trade Unions, but there is fierce competition for membership between them.

The NSSP leads two union federations, the United Federation of Labour and the Government United Federation of Labour for public sector workers. These two federations organize a wide range of workers, including those working in tea plantations, rubber factories, shoe factories, hospitals, fish processing plants, banks, print works, the garment industry and a wide range of national and local government offices.

A major UFL affiliate has been leading a long strike of hundreds of young workers, mainly women, at the Polypack plastics plant over union recognition. A one-day solidarity strike, and a rally addressed by NSSP leaders, was organized on November 20. During the conference it was learned that the NSSP-backed GULF had won a fiercely-contested election for union representation at the People's Bank, the largest in Sri Lanka.

In addition to political perspectives, the NSSP conference held debates on international perspectives and organization. At the centre of the debate on international perspectives was the question of the semi-collapse of Stalinism.

While recognizing the offensive which international capital has launched, delegates stressed the new possibilities for building the international Trotskyist movement. The international perspectives resolution, including the proposed affiliation to the Fourth International, was carried with just one abstention.

Looming large in the organization debate were the special problems which women have in participating in Sri Lankan politics. Women make up a very low percentage of the NSSP's membership, although the party has a high percentage of women members compared with other parties. The party leadership stressed the importance of making it easier for women to join the party and become part of its leadership. ★

Religion and Marxism

SRI LANKA is a country in which Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and the Roman Catholic church all have a large following. It is also a country in which many people with religious faiths rally to the fight for socialism. The British revolutionary Marxist fortnightly, *Socialist Outlook*, talked to two members of the NSSP leadership, Linus Jayatilalce, a Catholic priest, and Baddegama Samitha, a Buddhist monk, about their faith and its relation to socialism.

Linus was previously the priest at the largest church in the Negumbo region, but now devotes himself full-time to politics and trade union organization. Samitha, while already a Buddhist priest, was a student at Britain's Lancaster University, and active in solidarity work with the 1984 British miners' strike.

8TH Congress of the Nava Sama Samaja Party

THE 8th Congress of the Nava Sama Samaja Party was held at the New Town Hall on the 21st, 22nd, 23rd and 24th of November 1991. About 200 member-delegates and 50 observers attended...

The political resolution clearly spelt out that the party, while participating in common agitation against the Premadasa regime, should strive to forge a left alternative on the basis of:

1. implacable opposition to the dictates of the IMF/World Bank leading to privatization and destruction of the living standards of the masses;
2. Land to the tiller and preservation of the nationalized plantations;
3. Mass actions as the main form of struggle;
4. Enshrining the right to self-determination of the Tamil-speaking people inclusive of the right to separatism as a means of unifying the nation on a voluntary basis;
5. Replacement of the present dictatorial presidential constitution with a revolutionary constitution based on workers', peasants' and soldiers' councils.

The Congress resolved to unify the struggles against privatization and the erosion of living standards of the working masses with that of the movement of the students and teachers against the Affiliated University Colleges and cuts in free education.

The Congress gave special attention to the political need to intervene in the building of a women's liberation movement in Sri Lanka.

The Congress gave particular attention to the urgent need for an independent workers' movement to bring together the working class and other oppressed peoples of the South Asian sub-continent combined with any other secular and democratic forces.

Further, the struggle against imperialism, the resistance to the erosion of the living standards of the masses, the defence of democratic and human rights and the fight against chauvinist and sectarian forces throughout the world was acknowledged as the priority in the discussion under the International Resolution.

In the International Resolution, the party re-affirmed its decision to join the United Secretariat of the Fourth International as its Sri Lankan section. The need to mobilize all conscious forces against environmental destruction and the plunder of ecological resources of the world by the multinational corporations and local destructive elements was another vital decision of the Congress...

Revolutionary greetings sent by Socialist Action of the USA, the Revolutionary Communist League of Japan and the Marxist Platform of the USSR were read out at the Congress.

(extracts from NSSP official statement, November 25, 1991) ★

LINUS, how did you get involved with Marxist politics?

In the late 1950s, well before Liberation Theology developed, I was a youth leader in the Church and sought ways to fight for justice, which for me meant the struggle of the poor against the rich. I was identified as a leftist, but the hierarchy was powerless to do anything about it.

For me it started with the "mystical" or spiritual side of Christianity, which many Marxists might find difficult to understand. But I was struck by the history of the people of ancient Israel being led out of the exploitation, towards the "promised land".

In my area, Negumbo, people are Christians and those who thought like me wanted to probe into the depths of Christian belief. We feel that serious Christian people have to take sides in a society, to take a class position, to side with the exploited, the oppressed and the unjustly imprisoned. After serious analysis of how you could identify with the exploited class, the working class, we decided that it was the Marxist tools of analysis that you need.

■ **Samitha, as a Buddhist monk, what do you think of Christianity?**

That's a big question! I can't give a complete answer in a short interview, but I think that contrary to the establishment Christian view, Jesus was a rebel who defended oppressed people. You can look at the story of how he cleared the money-lenders out of the Temple, and how he attacked the tax collectors. Of course, that was a long time ago in the history of Christianity, but I think that original

Christianity is definitely in contradiction with a profit-making society.

But I think a serious problem, a serious question every Christian has to face, is the whole Christian idea of Creation and the idea of an "external God". I think that Christians will find reconciliation with Marxism much more difficult than I do, especially since Christianity often clashes face-to-face with Marxism in Europe. I think Buddhism is more logical and consistent in its concern for all living

things.

My impression is that, because of Liberation Theology, Christianity in the Third World is often very different from that in the advanced countries.

Anyway, I think that any religion has to listen to its followers, that religion cannot ignore the cries of the people.

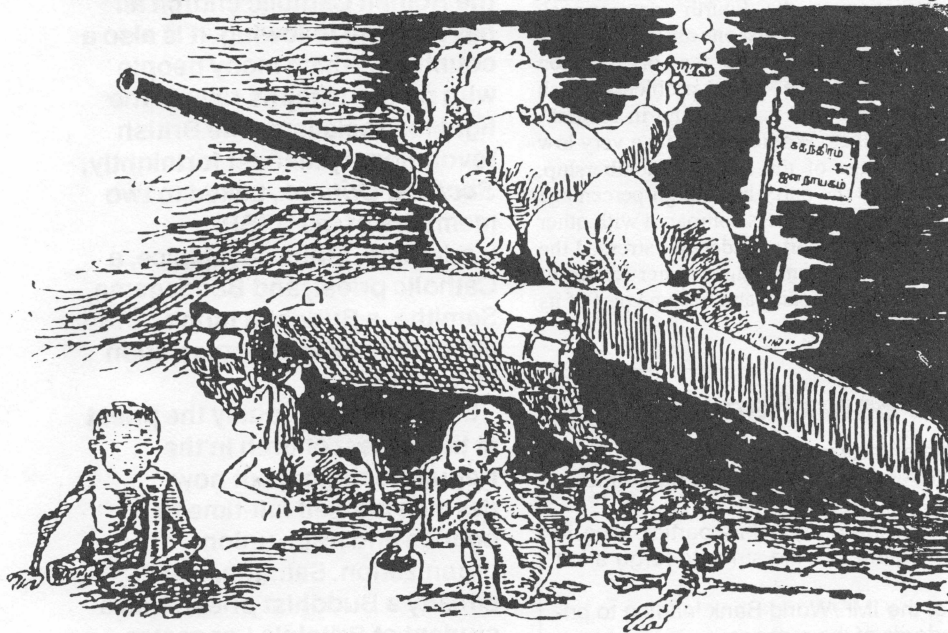
■ **Linus, what do you think about Buddhism?**

Well, I try to understand original Buddhism, not Buddhism as it is practised now, which seems to me to have become too narrowly concerned with the needs of individuals.

I think that there should be a serious attempt by all religious people, including followers of Islam, to go into the history and roots of these religions, and what human needs they responded to.

Obviously, you have in the roots of all religions the need to comprehend the world, to make sense of the universe, but also deep-seated needs of human beings to express their most deep-rooted hopes and fears, including those for a better world.

On Buddhism, I must say that it is more logical in its basis than Christianity, and therefore has a more straightforward foundation to develop towards Marxist thinking. The problem is that its logic is not yet dialectical logic. For that you need Marxism! ★



Fighting for the "disappeared"

DURING the 1987-1990 State of Emergency in Sri Lanka, government sponsored death squads waged a campaign to exterminate the Sinhalese chauvinist terrorist organization, the Janata Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP). But the JVP were not the only victims. Estimates put the number of those killed or "disappeared" at 60,000, with more than half of that number being innocent civilians or leftist opponents of the UNP government.

HOW did you become involved in the movement of the families of the disappeared?

MY husband Ranji disappeared on October 29, 1989. I needed shelter and protection and I wanted inquiries made about what had happened to him. So I turned to the NSSP in the Negumbo region where we lived. They sheltered me and their MP, "Vasu", raised the question in parliament, demanding to know what had happened.

*** Why was your husband "disappeared"?**

Mu husband was a supporter of the UNP government, actually a member of the same UNP branch as the prime minister. But he was also a trade union activist in the "free trade" zone in Negumbo. These free trade zones, tax exempt areas for foreign businesses, are being promoted by the government as part of the IMF plan.

In the plant where my husband worked, "Floral Greens", a Hong Kong company making artificial flowers, many workers get bad industrial injuries, for example losing fingers in the machinery.

My husband raised this issue vigorously with the management and got the issue raised with the National Labour Office. The company or its agents abducted him.

*** But there were attacks on other members of your family.**

Both my elder and younger brothers were abducted by security forces and one of them certainly killed.

My elder brother was one of a group building new houses in a village. They were told to leave the village by the army, who used the security situation as an excuse. My brother refused and was abducted in the middle of the night. After inquiries, the authorities said he had been killed in an accident.

My younger brother was taken away from our village by the JVP, who took him to one of their encampments as a labourer and cook. But after about 30 days he escaped and returned to the village. When the army heard he had been with the JVP they took him away and he has not been heard of since.

After that time I was regularly followed by the security forces, and again the NSSP got it raised in parliament and stopped. Since that time I have devoted my time to campaigning for the disappeared.

Also I have been building an organization called the Negumbo Women's Committee. Our aim is to organize the young women in the free trade zone, who are terribly exploited. Last year we set up a magazine for free trade workers, but as a result some of us were arrested and it was effectively closed down. But we continue our work; the party will not abandon this struggle. ★

A shift in the wind

POLITICAL life in France has accelerated sharply over the last few weeks including a wave of social struggles in Autumn 1991 and the development of a political crisis.¹ The limits of the social mobilization, the deep crisis of the workers movement and above all the desynchronization between social and political crises leave some remaining margin of manoeuvre to the government but this is shrinking. The crisis could deepen in the months to come, in particular after the next regional elections in the Spring.

FRANÇOIS OLLIVIER

1 990 marked a "low tide" of working class combativity. It is necessary to go back to the year 1946 to find such low figures for hours lost in strikes. Mitterrand himself boasts of having defused social conflict:

"The government, which is very hard-working, which is always attentive to its job, is settling situations and conflicts one after the other. There is no generalized movement... In 1988, there were 91,000 days lost a month... In 1991, for the same period it is 26,000. In 1976, the number of days lost was four million. In 1991, it was 290,000... Constantly, through 1989, 1990, 1991, there have been less days lost because of strikes..."

But the dirty work of the Socialist leaders has not been enough to eliminate the class struggle.

Without modifying the main outlines of a situation characterized by the downturn of the workers movement — a declining strike curve above all in the private sector, the dislocation of traditional industrial sectors, the structural weakening of the trade union movement — the struggles of this autumn indicate a social remobilization.

The final quarter of 1991 has seen a demonstration by 200,000 peasants, a strike movement by health personnel which lasted more than a month, a national strike by a whole profession, the social assistants, a bitter strike at the Renault Cléon car factory which was followed by great sympathy in the country, struggles in aeronautics and among air transport personnel, significant mobilizations in the public and nationalized sector around wages, and a relatively successful national

day of action and strike called by the FO and CGT trade union federations on October 24.

These partial or sectoral struggles have been massive, unitary and combative. The fundamental issue has been wages. The loss of purchasing power over the last ten years is almost 10%. But beyond this, there is, in certain sectors like health or among the social assistants, a demand for recognition of qualifications or status. These struggles indicate a change in the social climate, even if their results in terms of wage increases have been limited by the relationship of forces and by governmental intransigence.

However, the rejection of government policy goes well beyond these movements. The discontent is general. Apart from wage demands, workers have been expressing their rejection of the social democratic management of the crisis. Under the guidance of Minister of the Economy and Finances Pierre Bérégovoy the policy of the strong franc, of deflation and of cutting budget deficits has meant unbearable social costs for the mass of unemployed, whose purchasing power is now at a record low. While wage costs are slashed and profits explode, unemployment continues to rise, and now stands at almost three million.

Rising unemployment

At a time when the world economy is going through a new period of "cooling", tens of thousands of people have been made redundant, in both traditional and high-tech industries. The CGT estimates the number of dismissals since June 1991 at nearly 100,000. This wave of layoffs approaches that of 1982 in size. The argument that high profits yesterday and today would mean investments and jobs tomorrow has been exposed in the eyes of everyone for the fraud it is. The deepening of the neo-liberal policy has created a gulf between the Socialist Party (PS) and the "people of the left" and the Socialist government has seen a substantial narrowing of its social base. The vast gap between the programme of May 10, 1981, on which the Socialist Party came to power, and the realities of the Mitterrand decade is the first element in an explanation of the collapse of the Socialist regime.

Both President Mitterrand and Prime Minister Edith Cresson are at all-time lows in the polls, while the PS has lost

nearly a third of its votes in the partial elections between 1988 and 1991.

The crisis of the Socialist regime is amplified by the crisis of the anti-democratic institutions of the Fifth Republic, initiated by De Gaulle in 1958. This involves an extreme concentration of power at the summit of the state by an increasingly monarchical president, the withering of a regime that has been in power for more than ten years, and an increasing limitation of the prerogatives of parliament — without forgetting the corruption and *affaires* of a number of Socialist and right wing deputies, which add to the crisis of political representation.

In response to this, Mitterrand is now taking a gamble which could allow him to take the political initiative, proposing changes in the constitution to be ratified by a referendum. These changes are: the reduction of the presidential term from seven to five years (other possibilities have been floated, for example, a non-renewable seven-year term) and the introduction of a substantial measure of proportional voting.

New alliances

The aim of these proposals is to cushion the predictable losses of the Socialists at the next elections and to create better conditions for new alliances with the bourgeois centre and the Greens, all turning on the division of the traditional right in the face of the rise of Le Pen's fascist National Front.

Such is Mitterrand's plan: the fragmentation of parliamentary political representation, the division of the right and a Socialist-centrist coalition with authentic representatives of the right like Raymond Barre. This presupposes a Socialist Party which retains 20-25% of the vote and which is a sufficiently attractive focus for an alliance with the centre. But nothing is less sure. The Socialist Party could experience a collapse without precedent since 1968-69 at the next regional elections. It may no longer be able to constitute the axis of power. The right, with or without the extreme right, will probably win a very large majority. Opinion polls indicate that 22 out of 26 regional councils will be taken by the coalitions of the right or right/far right.

The country could become ungovernable. Mitterrand will then be obliged to bring forward the anticipated elections to contain the political crisis. Whatever happens, the return of the right is predictable, with the fascist party, the National Front, likely to win almost 20% of the vote.

This is the major problem of the French political situation: more than 50 years after the Vichy regime and the collaboration with the Nazis, the upsurge of a mass neo-fascist party with nearly 20% voting sup-

1. See *International Viewpoint*, no. 215, November 28, 1991.

port.

This weighs first and foremost on the traditional right. The declarations by mainstream rightwing politicians such as Jacques Chirac — who spoke of the “smells” of immigrants — or Giscard d’Estaing against “the foreign invasion” mark a profound transformation of the traditional right. Confronted with the problems of immigration from the south and the east, and the difficulties of European construction, the right is increasingly abandoning references linked to the French Revolution or to the Resistance of 1940-45, reverting to the most reactionary themes in its history. But some are ready to go further and prepare for direct or indirect coalitions with the FN. This creates, inevitably, new differentiations in the right, from which Mitterrand hopes to profit.

But inasmuch as the left or the workers movement does not reverse the current political tendency, both the possible outcomes — a Socialist-centrist coalition or return of a right under FN pressure — will feed the political crisis and the continuing progress of the FN.

A fascist party

This is a fascist party. Le Pen’s 50 measures against the immigrants², going from the placing of immigrants in camps before their expulsion, to the retrospective cancellation of all naturalizations since 1974, his proposals to destroy national education, his “social” programme which seeks to increase the exploitation of the workers by obliging people to work an average of 49 hours while reducing their wages, his desire to liquidate democratic liberties and the workers organizations — this is a fascist programme.

Some reassure themselves by pointing to the absence of reactionary or counter-revolutionary mass violence, the classic violence of fascists. Even if there are many provocations by FN thugs, there is not, it is true, fascist mass violence. If it is also true that there is no counter-revolutionary violence, this is, unhappily, because the revolution is not exactly around the corner.

All the same, the accession of the fascists to power is not an immediate threat since no fraction of big capital has made such a choice. But there is no room for complacency. Already, these parties are accumulating their forces, and not only in France — note the rise of the Flemish nationalists, the Austrian fascists, the Lombard Leagues in Italy, the activity of Nazi groups in Germany, and so on. The danger is real, and sharp turns are possible.

In this situation, the crisis of the workers movement is deepening. The Socialist Party is no more than a rudderless boat. Subject to the imperatives of the government’s austerity policy and to the dictates of the Fifth Republic, it loses each day a little more of its militant substance.

It is further undermined by its internal divisions. The debates among its various

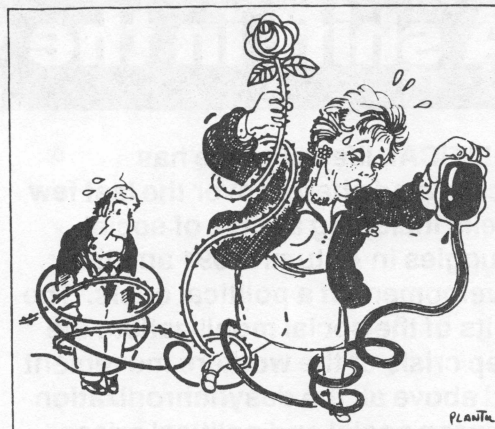
currents are more than ever operating under the influence of the next presidential elections. The PS is increasingly becoming little more than a collection of “presidential stables” organized around future candidates. As long as Mitterrand is at the summit of the state, the institutions of the Fifth Republic cement the unity of the PS. But what will become of it when Mitterrand abandons the reins of power? Already, the duel between Rocard and Delors (two of the possible candidates at the next presidential elections) threatens Socialist unity. The next electoral battles could put the explosion of the Socialist Party on the agenda.

Realignments on left

There is some resistance here and there. The tendencies “Socialisme et République” and “Gauche Socialiste” reject the rightist drift of the current social democratic policy, but they are far from offering a class orientation independent of the leadership. “Socialisme et République”, led by former defence minister Chevènement, represents a cross-class nationalist reaction (with diverse appeals being made in the direction of the Gaullists) to the European project, while the “Gauche Socialiste” of Dray and Mélançon lays claim to the tradition of Mitterrand.

The French Communist Party (PCF) is also sinking deeper into crisis. Having refused to condemn the Moscow putsch of August 23, 1991, this party every day demonstrates that it remains among the most Stalinist. Self-proclamations, on the theme “The PCF is changing, we are no longer Stalinists” are not taken seriously. The decline in the PCF’s militant activity has reached a critical threshold.

Finally, the crisis of those two fundamental pillars of the PCF — the parliamentary and municipal deputies and the trades unionists — is sharpening. A good third of the deputies are no longer under the control of the leadership. A substantial part of the leadership of the CGT trade union is opposed to strict subordination to the PCF apparatus. This means a considerable weakening of the party, which nonetheless, given the collapse of the PS, believes it can limit the “damage”. But-tressed by the hard core of its apparatus, the PCF hopes to cushion its electoral decline by projecting itself as the party which resists the rightward drift of the Socialists and which rejects the Europe of the 12. Social resistance and nationalist proclamations — the campaigns to “produce French” for example — intersect each other in the PCF’s current approach, which combines references to self-management with manipulatory practices



in the unions. Thus, the national leaders of the PCF and the CGT recently sold out the strike at Renault Cléon, a strike it could no longer control — an expression of the limits of the “democratic” orientation of the PCF. There is opposition to the PCF’s current line from sectors of its leadership, but unhappily these oppositions are evolving towards rightist, indeed ultra rightist, positions. Thus PCF leader, Charles Fiterman is behind the Refondation current, a cross-roads for ideas and debates with the militants of the left of the PS: “Refondations” is, for its initiators, a place of reflection for a new reformist current, though many of the militants involved are searching for an alternative to the social-democratic policy.

Philippe Herzog, another member of the PCF’s Political Bureau, goes much further; he has just launched another association, “Confrontation”, which brings together PCF trades unionists, some Socialist leaders like former prime minister Rocard, and some bosses, among them representatives of some of the principal French enterprises (Péchiney, Rhone-Poulenc, Crédit Lyonnais).

The situation in the trade union movement reflects this crisis of the workers movement. The trade unions have experienced a structural weakening, losing more than 50% of their members over 10 years. The current struggles do not reflect a strengthening of trade unionism, except in some sectors, like those of small companies. Division and battles between apparatuses dominate the picture.

The centrist drift of a whole layer of the trade union movement influenced by the PS and the Stalinist stranglehold in the CGT is paralyzing the union movement.³ The national teachers federation is on the verge of a split. This gloomy general situation is of course the product of the global relation of forces between classes, which does not favour the working class and its organizations. Only the combination of a social and political crisis bringing “new generations” into the struggle could reverse the course of things. ★

2. See *International Viewpoint*, no. 218, December 9, 1991.

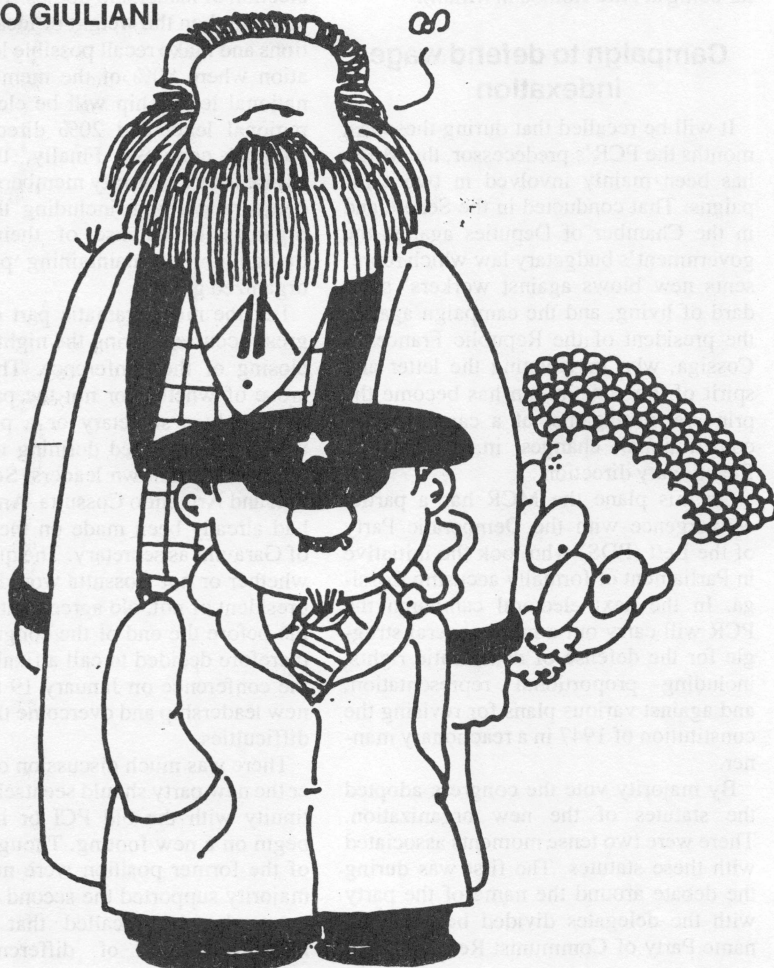
3. See *IV*, no. 208, June 10, 1991.

Founding congress of Party of Communist Refoundation

THE once mighty Italian Communist Party (PCI) disappeared in February 1991, to be replaced by the new Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS). Many former PCI members, however, refused to accept this decision, seeking instead to re-appraise the crisis of the PCI tradition from a leftwing point of view and seek unity with other forces on the left.

This led to the formation of the Movement for Communist Refoundation (MRC) whose congress took place as planned from December 12 to 15 in Rome. The decision was formally made to build a party which will be called the Party of Communist Refoundation (PCR). The importance of this event cannot be over-estimated in spite of all the difficulties that the new organization has experienced from the beginning and which carried over to the congress itself. Contrary to what has happened in the Communist Parties of other countries, the split that took place following the last congress of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in February 1991 is unquestionably a break to the left involving a large number of militants.

ANTONIO GIULIANI



SOME 1178 delegates, elected by regional congresses on a proportion of one for every 100 members, participated in the congress. This gives a clear idea of the number of members of the organization at around 120,000. It must be noted that all members are not necessarily militants in the strictest sense of the term. In this sense the MRC follows the tradition of the former Italian Communist Party (PCI) most of whose members did not have specific political assignments. It is not surprising therefore that less than 40% of the members took part in the local pre-convention discussions in preparation for the December congress.¹

This does not lessen the fact that more than 100,000 people participated in the foundation of a new party identified with communism and the traditions of the workers' movement. This is significant given the current national and international situation. If the PCR is able to seriously re-appraise the key problems of the workers' movement after the failure of the bureaucratic regimes and the identity crisis of the Social Democratic parties, with a view to the development of an anticapitalist strategy for the industrialized capitalist countries and on the basis of real integration in the traditional and new mass movements, this new party could constitute the beginning of a revitalized Italian workers' movement.²

Limited goals of leadership

To what degree did the congress actually move in this direction? It must be said that the provisional leadership set a limited goal for itself. It was clear that in the space of two or three months it would have been impossible to prepare a serious discussion on all the questions involved in refounding a communist movement today. On the other hand since it appears that legislative elections will be held in the spring, the congress could not be held later than December. This is why it was decided to hold a founding congress with the goal of founding the party, of setting up elected leadership bodies at all levels, and of charting a political orientation for current struggles. A second congress will take place several months after the elections.

More concretely, a political resolution, a resolution on the organization of the party and a draft of its statutes were submitted for discussion.

The provisional leadership submitted texts on these questions. However, only two to three weeks was allowed for discussion by the rank and file. Nevertheless,

1. See the article on the formation of the MRC in *International Viewpoint*, no. 209, June 24, 1991.

2. A survey of the around 700 delegates revealed that there were 108 blue-collar workers, 289 white-collar workers and 82 students (teachers, of which there were many, probably appeared under the white-collar working heading). Women made up 21.2% of the delegates.

in the majority of branches there were lively debates in which the most varied opinions were expressed on all problems, even if they were not on the congress agenda. The political resolution was widely considered to be inadequate and a large number of amendments were proposed.

Unfortunately, the input from the branches was restricted due to a method of preparing the congress which had the opposite effect of what was intended. The intention had been to allow the freest expression from the rank-and-file and to avoid any intermediate structures that would intervene between the local and national bodies. Thus, the decision was made that votes on the resolutions, amendments, and agendas would essentially take place at branch level and that the regional congresses would merely elect delegates to the national congress. But these very measures caused major problems.

The regional congresses could not elect their delegates on the basis of clear political criteria and the congress was literally flooded by thousands of amendments and resolutions from the branches which it was impossible to review and discuss not only in the plenary meetings, but also in the sub-committees.

No vote on political resolution

The result was that neither the political resolution proposed by the outgoing leadership nor the branch resolutions could be voted on. The report given by Sergio Garavini in the name of the outgoing executive was not submitted to a vote either. Only resolutions on social struggles and on international questions were adopted by a majority, almost without discussion.

For the most part, the amendments and resolutions, especially those on international questions, outlined more precise orientations than those of the first political resolution submitted for discussion. For example, while a debate had been launched around the demand for "going beyond NATO", which was criticized by numerous local branches, a congress resolution demanded the dissolution of NATO and the departure of Italy from that organization. At the same time it rejected any European military organization whether through NATO or the Western European Union (WEU) - and had nothing positive to say about the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), unlike the original text. The conference also came out against any eventual sending of a European contingent to Yugoslavia.

The congress also mandated the parliamentary groups of the PCR to vote against the ratification of the Maastricht accords. The solidarity campaign with Cuba was vigorously relaunched and the address of the Cuban ambassador — the sole foreign

estine Liberation Organization (PLO) — was given a standing ovation by the delegates.

The resolutions on the crisis of the trade unions and social struggles set the goal of a mobilization in defense of a sliding scale of wages which, as a result of a recent agreement between the unions, the employers and the government, is to be dismantled in a few months (a new agreement around this issue is not likely for the moment). The resolution also stresses the demand for a reduction in the number of working hours without a reduction in pay as a means of fighting against unemployment and proposes the formation of committees of struggle for work and for a definition of "the social goals of work".

There was no discussion of an overall union orientation on the agenda. This is a thorny problem as there are a number of different opinions on this in the organization. The majority of the members of the new party are active in the CGIL union confederation. Many of them helped organize the class struggle "Essere sindacato" (Being a unionist) tendency at the CGIL's confederation in October 1991 which registered significant scores, passing the 30% mark in some industrial branches. Other PCR members are active in other unions or are leaders of the COBAS rank-and-file committees or of self-management groups which engage in similar struggles (the most notable of these so far being at Alfa Romeo in Milan).

Campaign to defend wage indexation

It will be recalled that during these last months the PCR's predecessor, the MCR, has been mainly involved in two campaigns: That conducted in the Senate and in the Chamber of Deputies against the government's budgetary law which represents new blows against workers' standard of living, and the campaign against the president of the Republic Francesco Cossiga, who in violating the letter and spirit of the constitution has become the principal protagonist of a campaign for constitutional changes in a Populist-Reactionary direction.

On this plane the MCR has a partial convergence with the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS) who took the initiative in Parliament of formally accusing Cossiga. In the next electoral campaign the PCR will carry out a more general struggle for the defense of democratic rights, including proportional representation, and against various plans for revising the constitution of 1947 in a reactionary manner.

By majority vote the congress adopted the statutes of the new organization. There were two tense moments associated with these statutes. The first was during the debate around the name of the party with the delegates divided between the name Party of Communist Refoundation,

and simply Communist Party. After lively exchanges the former name was adopted, but a certain number of delegates left the hall in protest (they explained that in a meeting held in May 1991 it was decided to call the organization the Communist Party and that this decision could not be altered).

The second source of tension concerned an article in the statutes affirming the right of women comrades to meet in "women's spaces". Three positions were expressed on this topic: Those of the comrades who defended this statute, that of other comrades who wanted to amend it, explaining that the "women's space" should not constitute actual organizations, and those of women comrades who came out against all forms of autonomy for women as well as youth and so on. The amendment presented by the comrades supporting the second position being defeated, the article was submitted for a vote in its original form. It was defeated with many delegates abstaining or not participating in the vote. This caused much tension at the congress. Accordingly, the decision was taken to open a discussion of these questions in the organization.

Strengthening the weight of local organizations

Furthermore, the statutes contained a rather radical innovation concerning the election of leadership bodies. The pressure to strengthen the weight of local organizations and make recall possible led to a situation where 80% of the members of the national leadership will be elected at the regional level and 20% directly by the national congress. Finally, the statutes assure future minority members a series of democratic rights including the right to organize in defense of their positions though not of maintaining permanently organized groups.

But the most dramatic part of the congress occurred during the night before the closing of the conference. The question arose of whether or not the party should have only a secretary or a president as well. This involved defining the roles of the two best known leaders, Sergio Garavini and Armando Cossutta. An agreement had already been made on the candidacy of Garavini as secretary. The question was whether or not Cossutta would be elected president or not. No agreement was possible before the end of the congress. It was therefore decided to call a final session of the conference on January 19 to elect the new leadership and overcome the existing difficulties.

There was much discussion over whether the new party should see itself as in continuity with the old PCI or if it should begin on a new footing. Though partisans of the former position were numerous, a majority supported the second position. It must also be recalled that the party includes forces of different origins.

Though a very large majority come from the February 1991 split in the PCI, others had quit the PCI at different times since the end of the 1970's, some were former members of the Democratic Party of Proletarian Unity (PDUP), still others of Democrazia Proletaria (DP) and other far left groups who have come out of retirement to become politically active again.³ It should also be noted that the weight of former PCI members is less among the active members of the new organization.

The pluralistic character of the PCR was

clear at the congress and was hailed as a positive feature of the organization by a series of interventions at the congress by some of the best known leaders, including Cossutta. It was no accident therefore that the speeches of two members of the former DP, Giovanni Russo Spina and Livio Maitan, the latter known as a Trotskyist, were among those that received the most applause. ★

3. According to the above-mentioned survey, 532 delegates came from the ex-PCI, 113 from other political formations and 56 had had no previous party affiliation.



Union in August 1991, despite the fact that the party had clearly condemned the putschists (see IV 213). A minority within the PCE, around the historic leader Nicolas Sartorius, profited from the situation to launch a campaign, supported by the general secretary of the Workers Commissions (CCOO) Nicolas Gutierrez and by the leadership of the Catalan party, the Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia (PSUC), for the dissolution of the PCE into the IU. These dissidents also wish to distance themselves from "Communism" which they consider an error. They claim, moreover, that the maintenance of the structures of the PCE will lead to suspicion that the latter is manipulating the coalition — they believe the image of the PCE to be negative, above all after the events in the Soviet Union.

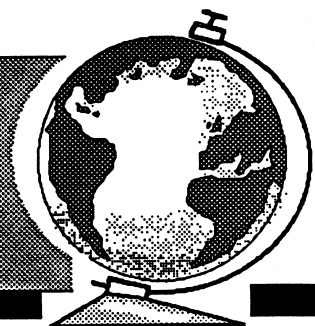
In November 1991, the crisis broke out in broad daylight: the Valencia section of the IU decided to register itself as a political party, despite the protests of Anguita, who was beaten in the election for the presidency of the coalition. The latter then resigned his post.

Anguita argues that the IU must be a sovereign and pluralist organization, a federation of parties, and that the PCE should recognize the discipline of the IU while remaining, for the moment, an internal current with its own ideology and propositions (he does not rule out the ultimate "extinction" of the party, which would take place in a "natural fashion"): Anguita also rejects any perspective of the IU's entering the Socialist International.

The majority of the PCE seems to be closing ranks behind its general secretary: the minority, behind Sartorius — who says he no longer wants to be seen as a "Communist" but simply as a "democrat" — is continuing the fight for the transformation of the IU into a political party.

The crisis of the IU will not be immediately resolved: if Anguita and the PCE majority try to impose their conception, they could deal a mortal blow to the unity of the coalition. But behind the debate over the future of the IU is the struggle over the future of the PCE: between those who wish the party to take a social democratic turn and abandon all reference to radical social change and those who, in words at least, remain attached to such a reference point. ★

AROUND THE WORLD



EGYPT

Women's association dissolved

ON MAY 1, 1991, Nawal Es-Saadawi, the well-known writer and fighter for women's rights in the Arab region and Egypt took part in the International Tribunal in New York which judged American president George Bush for war crimes in the Gulf War, in the presence of 500 figures from the antiwar movement in the US and throughout the world.

During the war, the Solidarity Association of Arab Women (ASFA), which she founded in 1982, condemned the annexation of Kuwait, while supporting Iraq in the face of the imperialist onslaught. In February 1991, Nawal Es-Saadawi took part in the initiative that brought together women and feminists from throughout the world on a boat that brought food, medicines and messages of support for the Iraqi people. On her return to Cairo she spoke of her shock at what she found in her own country, whose government had slavishly supported the imperialist war effort: "I am amazed by what I am hearing and reading in the newspapers...I feel as if I am living in one of the states of the US" (*El Ahaly*, July 3, 1991).

On June 15, 1991, the deputy-governor of West Cairo decided to dissolve the Egyptian section of the ASFA, which had won legal status from the Ministry of Social Affairs in 1985 after three years of existence. The Association was only informed of the decision to dissolve it a month after it was taken without warning or inquiry. The official pretext is "the discovery of financial irregularities".

The real reasons for the dissolution,

which comes after a series of warnings, are clearly political. The authorities have several times informed the ASFA that the law of 1964 prohibits organizations that talk about "politics" or "religion". The Association has also had to obtain the permission of the ministry to hold its congresses.

The opposition — the nationalist parties, women's organizations, human rights' organizations and the opposition press — have protested against this attack on democratic rights. However, it has had less to say about the fact that the banning is one more blow to the cause of Egyptian women. However, the message is clear; the legal liquidator of the ASFA, a social affairs official, is none other than the president of the Association of the Women of Islam, which has been given the ASFA's property, which consisted of contributions by militants.

Nawal Es-Saadawi has appealed to the Council of State, and many lawyers have offered their services to defend the association. An international campaign is underway to demand the lifting of the ban. — Luiza Maria ★

SPANISH STATE

Crisis of the United Left

THE coalition of the United Left (Izquierda Unida — IU), in which the Spanish Communist Party (PCE) plays a dominant role, is on the verge of breaking up, following the resignation of its general coordinator, Julio Anguita (who is also general secretary of the PCE).

The IU's problems stem from conflicts within the PCE itself: these began after the failed coup attempt in the Soviet

Clarence Thomas hearings raise awareness on sexual harassment

FOR a few days in October of 1991, the allegations of sexual harassment that Professor Anita Hill made against United States Supreme Court Justice nominee Clarence Thomas captivated the nation, prompting discussions in workplaces, schools, and homes.

CAMILLE COLATOSTI

SOME of the talk focused exclusively on the hearings. "Was she guilty or innocent?" everyone asked. "He seems respectable, but why would she, a tenured law professor, make this up? What would she have to gain?" More importantly, many discussions went beyond the particulars of the charges to ask questions about sexual harassment at work. "What is it?" "How widespread are its effects?" "Who experiences it and what can be done about it?"

While in the end the U.S. Senate dismissed Hill's allegations, the hearings themselves had positive results for working women. They showed that the fight against sexual harassment has come a long way. Fifteen years ago, the term "sexual harassment" did not even exist in the United States. In 1991, during the hearings, every senator had to say that if the charges were true, Clarence Thomas was unfit for the Supreme Court. That's quite a change.

When reporters asked Hill, "How could you have continued to work with him?" "How could you have kept quiet for so long?", women knew the answer because so many of us have done the same. What were our reasons? We felt we had no choice. We needed the job. We accepted our humiliation as "natural" or inevitable. We pretended we didn't really hear what was said, we repressed the words or even the actions for years, and went on with our lives.

Sometimes the man was our boss. Sometimes he was a co-worker. Sometimes, the harassment was limited to verbal abuse. Other times, we were physically threatened. Sometimes, we were the only woman targeted; other times, every woman was fair game. Occasionally, the harassment would suddenly

stop. In other cases, it continued and we quietly changed jobs.

After the hearings were over, Lucille Dickess, president of the clerical workers union at Yale University, said, "Few women find sexual harassment acceptable. But most of us accept it. We shrug it off; we hope it will go away; we figure it's just a part of the job — like typing or filing."

A 1989 study by the American Federation of Teachers indicated that nearly three out of four working women experience sexual harassment at work.

Despite its prevalence, however, sexual harassment is still largely perceived as a personal problem and is often handled by its victims in an individual way. Women's most common response is to quit their job. And those who choose to fight are often fired.

According to the same American Federation of Teachers study, "One out of four sexual harassment victims is fired as a result of harassment and another four out of ten victims decide or are forced to quit their jobs because of harassment."

Though some men responded to the Thomas hearings with questions about what they can or cannot say or do, the definition of harassment is clear. Harassment is any repeated or unwanted verbal or physical advance, sexually explicit derogatory statement, or sexually discriminato-

ry remark made by someone in the workplace. It offends the recipient, causes her discomfort, or interferes with her job performance. In the United States, sexual harassment is considered sex discrimination and it is against the law.

But this law is relatively new. As recently as 1980, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission first identified two types of sexual harassment. Most understand the obvious kind: sexual advance, non-compliance, retaliation.

In these cases, it's easy to see the true nature of harassment.

The threat of sexual coercion is explicit. As one victim explained, her boss told her, "You're going to screw me or lose your job". Another woman, applying for a clerical position in a medical office, described her "interview": "The doctor came in and put his hands between my legs and asked me how badly I needed the job".

Indirect harassment

But harassment may not be straightforward at all. The victim may try to ignore the advances and then find that she is not offered overtime, that the good jobs go to someone else, that her work which has been praised is now criticized. The job that looked so promising has turned sour: it becomes a nightmare. There is no way to get him to stop and no future in staying without complying.

One woman relates her experience: "Last night I tried to overdose on sleeping pills. I live in a small community where I also work... Immediately after I started working there, my boss, the owner, kept asking me out. As long as I kept saying no, my bonuses kept going down. I finally started dating him. I was pressured into an affair with this 49-year old married man. I am so ashamed.

CLASSIC PICK-UP LINES



Stopping Sexual Harassment: A Strategy Checklist

(These suggestions on how to fight sexual harassment, from *Stopping Sexual Harassment: A Handbook*, published by *Labor Notes*, are based on the situation and laws in the United States).

1. Prepare yourself.

Before you begin to fight sexual harassment, get copies of anything in writing about the quality of your work. During an investigation, the employer may claim that you were fired because your work was poor.

2. Confront the harasser

Inform the harasser that his intentions are unwanted.

3. Put it in writing.

If the harassment continues, write a note, telling the harasser to stop. Date it. Keep a copy.

4. Keep a record.

Write down every incident, including date, time, place, witnesses. Write down your response word for word. If you have to defend yourself, evidence will be crucial. It's your word against his. Any way you can corroborate your testimony will help.

5. Get support.

Victims of sexual harassment feel isolated. You can break the isolation by talking to co-workers and friends. And by taking co-workers into your confidence, you may end the rumor mill, get emotional support, and find witnesses who can corroborate your story.

6. Get witnesses.

If incidents of harassment occur when someone else is around, have them write up what they observed and sign the statement.

7. Research your options. Exhaust the "in-house channels".

If there is a union, contact your union representative. Tell him or her exactly what happened. The rep might simply have a talk with the supervisor or co-worker informing him that his behaviour is discriminatory to women, is not suitable to the work environment and will subject him to union action.

If the harasser persists, the union should go over his head to the boss or the labour relations staff.

If you need to take further action, check the contract. Sexual harassment is sex discrimination under the law. Therefore, any union representative can grieve sexual harassment under the anti-discrimination clause of the contract.

If the union rep doesn't take your problem seriously, don't give up. Instead, try to organize with other women — form a women's committee if your local doesn't already have one — and make it clear that you will work to defeat any rep who thinks women's problems are a laughing matter.

If there is no union, be sure that you complain to someone over the harasser. Your case can be thrown out of court if you did not give the company an opportunity to stop the harassment.

The Enforcement Agencies: there are guidelines for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) that encompass sexual harassment as a form of sex discrimination. But this may take several years.

Going to court: You can take your case to court under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act which outlaws discrimination on the basis of sex. Some courts have ruled favorably, but you must have an ironclad case, patience and money.

Sexual harassment cases are difficult to win, but only by speaking up and fighting back can women ever hope to end discrimination. ★

"During the times when I was dating my boss, my bonuses would go sky high. When I refused to see him, my paycheck would go so low I could not pay my bills or sustain myself... I cannot sleep or eat. I have lost 40 pounds which I cannot afford to do. I am skin and bones. I am a nervous wreck".

She complied with the harasser's demands. We read her words, so we understand that she is a victim of sexual harassment.

To an observer, it might look like she was getting what she wanted. Looking in from the outside doesn't tell you that she

tried to commit suicide. It doesn't tell you that her boss threatened to kill her if she complained. It doesn't tell you that her father told her not to report her boss because the publicity might hurt her brother's medical practice.

There is a second kind of sexual harassment which is more subtle: environmental harassment. This involves working in a sexually hostile or intimidating atmosphere. The harassment can range from lewd jokes to nude calendars or even obsessive staring. This is particularly difficult to prove through the courts. And many people do not understand how this

constitutes harassment.

Tery Floren, a firefighter and editor of *Firework*, the monthly newsletter of Women In Fire Suppression, explained, "The most common reaction, when I objected to sexist literature being displayed in the restroom, was, 'You said you wanted to be just one of the guys — now you're asking for special treatment, saying we can't put something up because it offends you...' It's ironic that the male workers' acceptance of a woman as a co-worker and equal should hinge, in this instance, on her acceptance of other women as less than people — as sexual objects...."

"Don't stand back and cry"

Sexual harassment will persist until women demand change. As one victim said, "Don't stand back and cry. Scream out. Let people know what's going on." Only by fighting back, by organizing in the workplace and the community can we begin to take the steps necessary to end sexual harassment.

Professor Anita Hill had the courage to speak out against Clarence Thomas. This is positive and women should not feel discouraged because her allegations were dismissed. Joyce Miller, President of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), said, "The very serious charges, job-threatening sexual harassment made by a professor of law, should not have been summarily dismissed". This is absolutely true, and women should be angry about the treatment Hill received.

At the same time, as Miller points out, we should not feel that Hill's testimony was a waste of her and everyone's time. By speaking out against sexual harassment, by taking that risk, she reminded us of two things. First, it is important to fight the symptoms of women's oppression — like sexual harassment. And second, this fight, like all battles to end sex discrimination, is not about sex — but about power.

The fight to end sexual harassment can be won only if we also fight the larger system of women's oppression that makes sexual harassment possible. This means that we also have to fight women's second class position in the workforce, our low wages, and our lack of authority in the workplace and in unions.

When the Thomas hearings were over and the vote was counted, Anita Hill refused to comment on her defeat. Instead, she said how glad she was that the issue of sexual harassment had been brought to the forefront of national debate. "Women who have experienced the same thing have written and said how for the first time they could talk about it. And that's important", she said.

The secret is out. Yes, millions of people saw Hill's charges dismissed and Thomas appointed to the Supreme Court. But millions also had a crash course on sexual politics. ★

We must stay subversive!

ELEUTERIO Fernandez Huidobro is one of the original leaders of the Tupamaros National Liberation Movement (MLN) of Uruguay, and was imprisoned for many years by that country's military dictatorship. Huidobro spoke to *International Viewpoint* about the perspectives for the Latin American left today. The interview was conducted in Montevideo in September 1991 by Ernesto Herrera and Braulio Chavez.



work in the street as part of the economically active population. Evidently, there is not an economic category for minors. But if we stroll through the streets, we see that children do participate in the lumpen-capitalist system in this country. Emigrants are also excluded from the concept of marginalization. Obviously, it is one thing to say that 10% of the active population in Uruguay is unemployed and another to say that more than 10% of those who have had to leave the country are unemployed.

■ Are there different categories within the left?

Yes, there are some on the left who cannot adapt to the real world, a world in which, in my country, capitalism is the utopia that has failed more than all the other utopias. We are at the point where we have to stretch all analytical categories to the extreme. I'm surprised when I see the United Nations Commission for Latin America (UNCLA) use the term "poverty"; this term is insufficient. They later used the term "extreme poverty" which is also insufficient. I think they now talk about "indigence". Soon they'll be talking about the "walking dead". And all this is treated in a cold, matter-of-fact way!

There are new classes, sectors, or groups who have emerged and whose presence must now be taken into account. I recently spoke with a teacher who works in a *cantegril* (a slum in Uruguay); he told me that he had obtained three pairs of shoes for three children who were walking around barefoot in the middle of the winter. The next day, the father, a worker was forced to sell the shoes in order to buy food.

A teacher in an isolated provincial town told me: "In order to provide breakfasts for the children we have to organize festivals and sell alcohol! Plus, we subsidize the pay of the cleaning ladies at the school out of our own pocket." What can we do? The bourgeoisie no longer send their children to public school because they have private schools. They say to the teachers and principals: "If you want to feed the children" [which is the only way to get them to come to school] "sell alcoholic beverages. And if you don't want to supplement the salaries of the cleaning ladies, no problem, the schools won't be cleaned." But the cleaning ladies tell the

TWO important developments have recently taken place. On the one hand there have been meetings of the Latin American left in Sao Paulo and Mexico City where Stalinist, Maoist, Trotskyist, Castroist, Guevarist forces, and so on, have participated in the same conference.

These meetings, which would have been inconceivable two years ago, represent a step forward. But on the other hand, we are witnessing a degeneration of a good part of the left, which has rejected many of its former conceptions in the name of "modernization". Marxism has been called into question as a scientific method. What do you think of these two developments?

I think on principle that any discussion is positive. It's a good thing that people coming from different currents can sit down together and discuss; if somebody has confidence in their ideas, the debate is revolutionary.

But as far as the other aspect is concerned, the word "renewal" is in fashion, in a very superficial and frivolous sense. But Marxism, class struggle and all the ideas that flow from them are so stubborn that they cannot be easily dispensed with. As far as the heterodoxy of the left is concerned, I think that the collapse of socialism — or what was called the socialist camp — confirms Marxism, even if some think the opposite. And I would stick with the slogan that socialism will be worldwide or will not happen at all. That has been confirmed in a most striking manner. It has been confirmed in spite of the theoretical boasting that socialism could be built in one country. It has been clearly confirmed by the dramatic situation that

Cuba and Nicaragua are experiencing, as well as that of the Salvadoran comrades. This is undeniable. All these developments support Marx even if others think that they refute him.

The question of the class struggle is one that has been posed even more sharply in my country, as it has been throughout Latin America; but it has taken a new form. For example, yesterday, a right wing journalist said in relation to the question of the arrival in Italy of Albanians that these refugees should be sent to the United States and Europe so that they can understand the problem of poverty in the Third World.

He also said that in the struggle between the East and the West, the people in the East were under the illusion that the West was a paradise and that they are now realizing what this paradise really is! But they don't realize that in this paradise there are people who don't even have a place to die. And this same journalist wondered when the Soviet and Hungarian emigrant will begin to arrive.

In Uruguay, social violence is becoming more significant than political violence. When we carried out the armed struggle, we launched an operation in the La Teja quarter (a slum of Montevideo) and we stayed there all night. But we counted on a favorable political situation. Today, violence does not have a political content, it has a social content. And even the so-called left that talks today about renovation, of importing technology, and so on, ignores it.

I recently read a sociological analysis by a former anarchist concerning the economically active population (EAP) in Uruguay. In his class analysis, this researcher does not include children who

1. See *International Viewpoint* no. 212, September 16, 1991.

2. The public educational system in Uruguay was one of the most developed in Latin America, before the dictatorship. The rate of literacy was more than 95%.

3. In an interview in the Uruguayan newspaper *Brecha*, the Sandinista commander Victor Tirado Lopez said: "I think that the cycle of anti-imperialist revolutions, in the sense of a total response, military and economic, to imperialism, is in the process of coming to an end. It is necessary to search for other options" (*Brecha*, March 30, 1991).

teachers that without this work they won't be able to live.

The "renewers" and the "europeanist" left who forget how the capitalist system works are blind to this situation. They talk about a capitalism that does not exist.

These same teachers gave me a UNCLA report, as well as one by an organization linked to the Christian Democracy dated 1986, concerning children who grew up in the slums. According to these documents, Uruguay has not yet reached the level of poverty of certain other countries, in spite of the high level of malnutrition, and the development of biologically inferior people who are smaller, have physiological and motor disorders as well as learning problems and so on.

One has the impression that we are going back 500 years in time to the period of the Conquest and colonization. Soon they'll be asking whether these people are in fact human beings and if they have souls. If they are no longer considered human beings, then they are sub-humans who can be left to die. For me, all this is tied to social classes, to the class struggle, to social categories that are as old as they are new. All of a sudden there is a sort of return to the time of Marx, of industrial expansion, but also of extreme poverty. But there are also things that Marx could not see. I've been re-reading *Imperialism, the highest stage of Capitalism* by Lenin, and suddenly I had the idea that a book should be written about post-Gulf capitalism, on the rotten capitalism that has decided to let three quarters of humanity die. It doesn't even exploit these three quarters. They are superfluous.

■ **You speak of post-Gulf capitalism. This is an interesting term. After the electoral defeat of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), Commander Victor Tirado Lopez drew a balance sheet of ten years of the Nicaraguan Revolution, suggesting that the era of anti-imperialist revolutions as we knew it is over. Is it really possible to overcome the situation of misery and agony which you have described without confronting Imperialism?**

Absolutely not. The only thing that Tirado said that seems to me correct is that we can no longer talk of imperialism in the way we have in the past. I think that Stalinism transformed the international class struggle into a struggle between states. We did not know that in the United States there are also social classes. We thought that imperialism was one homogeneous whole. This was what Stalinism taught the Uruguayan left. I have never heard the Uruguayan Commu-

nist Party (UCP) speak of the North American working class.

The Vietnamese revolution showed that this was not so and that there were internal contradictions; many North Americans participated in the victory of the Vietnamese revolution. This stereotype also covered Europe. In Europe there were supposedly no contradictions. All the countries were considered imperialist and a French bourgeois politician like Chirac was the same as a French worker. This outlook was the heritage of Stalinism.

Today we Latin Americans must have enough scientific and Marxist intelligence to see that we have powerful allies in Europe. We need to develop our work in such a way that we can link up closely with comrades in the United States or Europe. I recently travelled to Germany where I asked, somewhat facetiously, in order to criticize the way that we had thought about solidarity with these countries, "when will we create the first solidarity committee with the German revolution?" because until now there have only been solidarity committees with Central America.

The capitalists have two possibilities. They can opt for a bloodbath, in the knowledge that their model and their utopia only concerns a minority. If capitalism were to keep its promises in India, in Latin America and so on, it must change model. But, during the Gulf War, we had the proof that it will not be thus: it was the first world war against a Third World country.

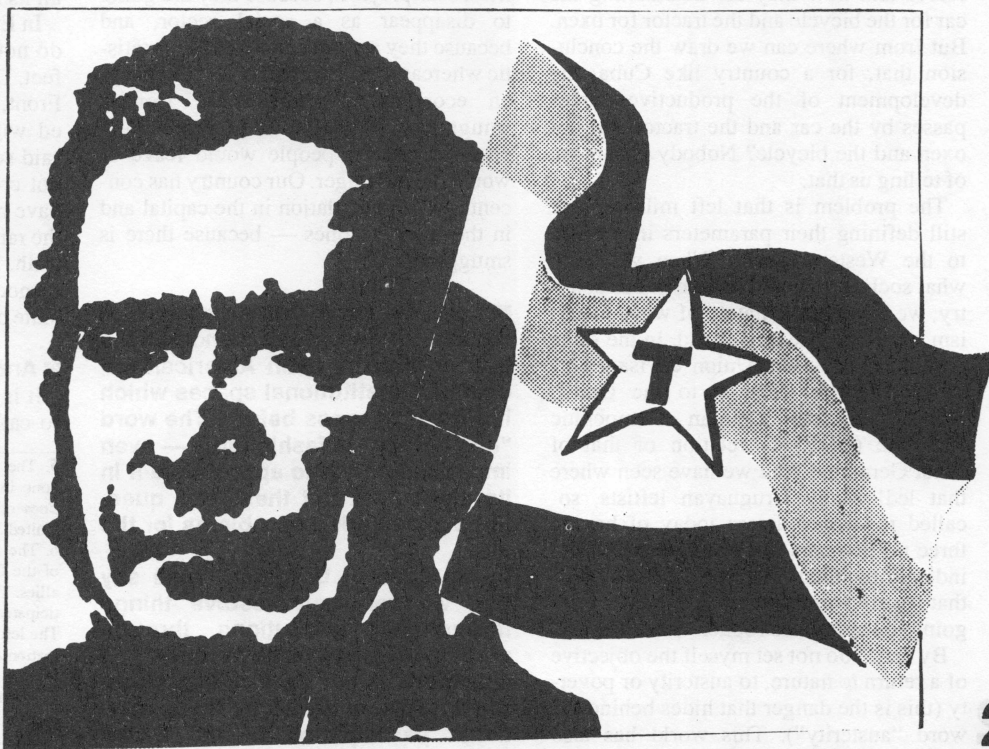
The other alternative is that posed in a utopian manner by the Pope, when he said "If this is capitalism, I want no part of it". But if this position is carried to its logical

extreme, one arrives at socialism. To avoid all these deaths, it is necessary to devote all the military expenditure to the development of humanity, the rich countries must help the poor countries, it is necessary to plan the world economy from an ecological point of view. If all this is carried through to its ultimate consequences, one will arrive at the world socialist revolution.

■ **Some on the left, like the "renewers", say that the different strategies for resolving the crisis have been defeated. Some groups on the Latin American left which have waged armed struggle — like for example the M-19 in Colombia⁴ — say that after the Sandinista defeat it is impossible to consider a perspective of power without a prior democratization of capitalism, of the state, and without a development of the productive forces. Because if not, what do you do when you are in power? One of the questions posed by certain groups on the left is that of the reinforcement of the institutional participation of the left.**

Today, the left in Uruguay has an institutional presence that it has never enjoyed before, and is on the verge of expanding it still more at the next elections. The big problem is knowing whether the analysis that we have made until now — according to which capitalism has decided on a policy of genocide — was correct. We must be subversive: that is the balance sheet the left must draw. In this case, the solutions

4. The M-19 gave up the armed struggle in 1989. It subsequently participated in the government, in the ministry of health, among others. See IV 185, 186, and 197.



proposed by some comrades are completely utopian. I do not criticize them because they are not revolutionary enough, but because they are not viable. Reformism has no perspective in countries like those of Latin America or the Third World, in the world which capitalism is building.

■ But what alternative can we propose then?

When I say that we must be subversive it is in the face of public disorder. But we must also subvert our own categories. I think that it is necessary to make two kinds of analysis. If we are faced with two worlds that are increasingly separating from each other, even if there remain some channels of communication, we must make a class analysis of the north — world "A", where there are undoubtedly class contradictions — and another for world "B". World "A" exploits and oppresses world "B" and it has even already decided to make it disappear. But, in world "A", there exist class contradictions which are going to sharpen. We must elaborate a project which takes into account these two situations: of new political alliances, new analyses of the social subject of the revolution, of the development of the productive forces, and so on.

Look at Cuba, which, after 30 years of revolution and faced with energy dependence on the socialist camp — nobody knows if this latter will continue to supply petrol to the country — has decided to use bicycles for transport. It is necessary to make a great self-criticism in this area. Once, when one discussed with the comrades of the Cuban department of Latin American Studies, they said that socialism was the development of the productive forces and now they are abandoning the car for the bicycle and the tractor for oxen. But from where can we draw the conclusion that, for a country like Cuba, the development of the productive forces passes by the car and the tractor and not oxen and the bicycle? Nobody is capable of telling us that.

The problem is that left militants are still defining their parameters in relation to the Western world. When we think what socialism would be like in our country, we think immediately of what socialism would be like in Holland. In the same way that the Soviet Union envisaged its development in relation to the United States, and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in relation of that of West Germany. And we have seen where that led! Many Uruguayan leftists, so-called renewers, dream today of having three million cars in Uruguay; this would indicate for them that we are developed, that we are a great country, even if we are going towards catastrophe.

By that, I do not set myself the objective of a return to nature, to austerity or poverty (this is the danger that hides behind the word "austerity"). This world has also

been formed by that four fifths of humanity which today lives in the direst poverty. As one of my friends who lives in these conditions puts it: "Look, you can eat all the chickens which are left in the garbage except those which have turned green". I wonder how many economists of the Uruguayan left, who work in universities, know this piece of information which is vital for thousands of people? Because it is necessary to go in the municipal garbage dumps and see the groups of kids who fight each other like seagulls for the remains of food. And this is part of post-Gulf capitalism.

Obviously, when we speak of capitalism we do not speak of European capitalism. But only a small part of humanity lives in Europe, and what of the other capitalism, which is just as much capitalist? It is a capitalism *sui generis* that they are ashamed to take into account in their surveys, but which certainly exists.

In Colombia, the two drug cartels handle \$9 billion a year: that is equivalent to the gross national product of Uruguay and they are also the only Latin American multinationals! And it is this that they call the marginalized, informal economy! It is a part of the post-Gulf capitalist system, because of its social and political implications.

What will be the future of our "frontier economy"? Some days ago I took some maté with some *bagayeros* [people who live off the trade in contraband commodities at Uruguay's frontiers with Argentina or Brazil]: they understand very well the Mercosur project⁵, because they are going to disappear as a social sector, and because they are not counted in any statistic whereas they are a part of the Uruguayan economy. Without these frontier smugglers, Uruguay would be something else, very many people would leave or would die of hunger. Our country has concentrated its population in the capital and in the frontier zones — because there is smuggling.

■ Let's get back to the problem of the institutions and of democracy. It is true that the Latin American left occupies institutional spaces which it did not possess before. The word "democracy" is fashionable — even imperialism tries to appropriate it in its discourse. But these two questions pose serious problems for the left.

In the case of Uruguay, some say that we can only resolve things through the institutions, through participation in the government, as citizens and not as a social class. What risks are posed by the institutional participation of the Broad



Front (FA) and the Movement of Popular Participation (MPP)? How should the Latin American left approach the problem of democracy?

I am surprised to see a comrade of the Fourth International ask me such a question, because the defence of democracy has been one of the great standards of that organization!

I think that we must demand democracy and not leave it to be taken up by the bourgeoisie. The bourgeoisie is intelligent, it drapes itself in all the clothes it can find. When I said that we must be subversive, I tried to criticize the so-called renewers, because they are not sufficiently renewers, they are made of plastic, they are superficial. It is necessary to carry democracy through to its ultimate consequences; popular power, direct power, the organization of the people in the neighbourhoods. We will be renewers, but until the end; we need to question this bourgeois democracy in all its meanings and under all its forms.

In Europe, the people do not participate, do not vote; if they do so, it is with their feet. During the last congress of the Broad Front, the great majority of militants voted with their feet. Thus, these militants said something important to us: "You are not credible, you are not useful to me, I have no interest in coming to discuss with the rank and file committees". There is the truth. I think then that we should demand democracy and carry it through to its ultimate consequences.

■ And on the institutions?

It is precisely this sector of the left, the so-called renewers, that believe we should

5. The Mercosur is an attempt to create a free trade zone in the countries of the Southern Cone, on the lines of the process currently underway between the United States, Canada and Mexico. See IV 205.

6. The reformist majority of the Broad Front consists of the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and their allies. The Christian Democrat Party (PDC) which participated at the end of the dictatorship, left it in 1988. The left is grouped in the Movement of Popular Participation (MPP) comprising the MLN, the Popular Party for the Victory of the People (PPVP), the Socialist Workers Party (PST — Uruguayan section of the Fourth International) and independent sectors of the revolutionary left.

The rights of Street traders

THE problem of itinerant traders marked the Second Congress of the Broad Front (FA) — which brings together the whole of the Uruguayan left — held in August 1991, in the presence of 1,700 delegates.

Montevideo, the Uruguayan capital — where nearly half of Uruguay's 3 million inhabitants live — has been governed by the Front since the 1990 elections. The mayor of the city, Tabaré Vazquez, has seen his popularity among the people confirmed. At the same time, the right on the municipal council has launched a campaign against the measures that it has just taken concerning itinerant traders.

While the decree issued by Vazquez limits the number of sellers per block of houses — a useless and unjust measure because it cannot deal with the growing marginalization of the population driven into this trade — it also institutionalizes the right of the unemployed to work in the street. At the beginning of 1991, according to the official figures, 15.8% of Uruguayan families lived in a state of "critical poverty", whereas 22.3% lacked basic amenities (housing, running water, health, education, and so on).

The FA congress also discussed the bourgeoisie's central project for the Southern Cone, the Mercosur. Since 1985, the new "democratic" regimes of the region have begun to sign protocols of integration. The Uruguayan president of the time, Sanguinetti, had tried to get involved in this process, after his attempts to sign privileged agreements with the United States had failed. But Uruguay was only able to co-sign one of the 14 accords signed between Argentina and Brazil, that concerning transport. When Bush launched his initiative for the Americas, Argentina and Brazil proposed the setting up of the Mercosur to be in a better position in the future negotiations, particularly in relation to the United States.

The Mercosur does not concern eventual accords of cooperation and of reciprocity: it amounts to the demarcation of zones of free trade, through the introduction of equal customs duties between the signatory countries. Each country has drawn up a list of protected products whose mechanisms of protection will be progressively abolished up to 1995 (800 products for Uruguay). Starting from that date, the majority of Brazilian, Argentinian and Uruguayan products will have no protection: starting from the year 2000 Brazil and Argentina will suppress all customs protection and starting from 2005 it will be the turn of Paraguay and Uruguay. However, those accords which existed previously between the two great regional powers, Argentina and Brazil, will not be affected by Mercosur: this will aggravate an already very unequal situation to the detriment of the poorest countries (Paraguay and Uruguay).

The majority of the Uruguayan employers have taken advantage of this treaty to begin a process of industrial reconversion and to introduce direct and indirect measures of adjustment against wages, threatening thousands of workers with redundancy. The government is using the treaty to accelerate the privatization of enterprises and services (1.2 million workers are employed in the public sector). During the congress, the FA also divided on this debate. With the exception of the revolutionary left, grouped in the Movement of Popular Participation (MPP), the majority of the FA split on the question, some sectors advocating de facto acceptance of the project under the pretext of "realism".

(Information compiled from *La Unidad* and *Southern Cone Report*). ★

framework of capitalism, could get an overwhelming majority? If such was the case what, in your opinion, should be done?

In this case, it would be necessary for the whole of the revolutionary left of Uruguay to come together to see what it should do. That would be a very delicate situation and we could not stand by with our arms folded. But I think that this reformist current will try to reach an agreement. That will depend also on the relation of forces at the congress.

■ What is your balance sheet of the participation of the MPP in Parliament?

In general, I think that it is positive, above all if one takes account of the unfavourable situation today. We have been able to discuss with our parliamentarians. In the municipality of Montevideo [controlled by the Broad Front] we have had a lot of discussion, even if many things remain to be clarified. There are some people in the municipality who think that the 1994 elections are already in the bag.

But it is more complicated. For example, the municipality has mainly confronted the bourgeoisie on the question of the itinerant traders and on centralism — whether the municipalities have the right to resolve their own problems. The bourgeois parliamentarians speak of the itinerant traders as something which dirties the city, as if these people had no right to any private property. It is a capitalism which is not rational; it refuses the right of private property to the itinerant traders. If somebody had told me, some years ago, that the principal problem of the municipality would be that of the itinerant traders I would have said they were mad. But today it is this affair that bothers the municipality and above all the most reactionary sectors of the bourgeoisie. On this subject, we want our parliamentarians to be intransigent, that is to support to the end the just demands of the itinerant traders.

■ Do we need a new Internationalism?

One of the first conclusions to be drawn is that it is necessary to work on the basis of a new internationalism. We cannot remain enclosed within frontiers. We need an internationalism which coordinates the efforts of those who work in world "B" and those who work in world "A". As to its content, it is necessary to analyze all the international organizations which have been created, their gains and their errors.

We need an international which is inclusive, for everyone, and not ideological, as the Fourth International is to a certain extent. Obviously, there need to be practical agreements, a definition of principles and, starting from there, those who agree will be integrated. But I am sure that it is necessary to do it; we live in a world of internationals. ★

become a simple current of opinion, that everything is concentrated in the political supermarket which is Parliament, enclosed behind four walls. And they say it clearly. When we explain that it is necessary to consult the rank-and-file, they treat us as demagogues. They want to be political mandarins, while the rank-and-file finds out what has happened but does not participate. They ask the rank-and-file to stay home and do nothing.

So far as the institutions are concerned, I think that we are obliged — and this is a

positive thing — to fight also on this terrain, without losing sight of the fact that we cannot restrict ourselves to its narrow framework. This fight should go hand in hand with the extra-institutional struggle and is subordinate to it. I insist, we cannot cease to be subversives.

■ On the forthcoming congress of the Broad Front (see box) do you think that this current of so-called renewers, which speaks of reforming the state, of increasing productivity, and of remaining within the

What future for the new "Commonwealth"?

THE SHAPE that relations between the republics of the former USSR will ultimately take is still far from clear. But the recognition of Ukrainian independence by some Western states, following the referendum there on December 1, and the Brest agreement of December 8 among the presidents of Russia, Ukraine and Byelorussia to create a "Commonwealth of Independent States", referred to also as the "Slavic Commonwealth", raise many complex questions about the nature of the national and independence movements in the former USSR. The purpose of this article — written on December 19, 1990 — is very modest: briefly to raise some key issues that must be clarified before one can adopt a socialist position in relation to the unfolding events.

DAVID SEPPO

ONE MUST surely begin by asking whether the Soviet Union was an empire, and if so, what was the specific nature of the imperialist relations within that country? It is quite common to identify the centralized bureaucratic domination emanating from Moscow with Russian domination and Russian economic exploitation of the other republics. In practice, the privileges enjoyed by Russians were twofold: preference, shared with other Slav peoples, in recruitment to the higher levels of the central administrations (in the republics themselves, preference was generally given to the indigenous people — Russia had no real republican administration), and the use of Russian as *lingua franca* in the USSR.

All this varied greatly both geographically and historically and would require a detailed analysis for each republic and ethnic group (for one thing, under Brezhnev, in many regions, Russian and other minorities were themselves the objects of discrimination). But it is generally true that, apart from these two admittedly very important areas, the Russian people suffered from the same degree of political oppression and economic exploitation at the hands of the bureaucracy as the great majority of non-Russian peoples. And in the last years, Russians' hatred of the "centre", so skillfully exploited by Yeltsin and the liberals, has been at least as great as that of the other peoples.

Non-Russian nationalists have made

political capital from the claim that "Moscow" exploited their peoples. But although "Moscow" is geographically in Russia, it should not be identified with Russia. Russians in virtually every region of the Russian republic itself make the same claim, and with justice: "Moscow exploited us". If one were to calculate inter-republican exchanges in world prices, it might well turn out that Russia was a net subsidizer of the economies of the other republics, since it produces the bulk of raw materials and other exportable goods capable of earning foreign currency (oil and gas, precious and non-precious metals, wood and paper, diamonds, and so on). These were exchanged within the Union (and inside Comecon) at prices much lower than those of the international market.

It is true that the shops of Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev and other capitals and big cities were better stocked than those in the rest of the country. But this practice, like that of the bureaucratic prices and privileges themselves, related to a political decision which had little — indeed nothing — to do with national or ethnic considerations.

The Russian nationalists, like those of the other more industrialized European republics, claim that they have aided the least developed republics, which are largely Muslim. This is undoubtedly true if one calculates prices on the basis of the world market. But do these prices represent a criterion of justice? All the peoples of the USSR have contributed economi-

cally to the industrial development of the European regions. By the same logic, the inhabitants of the oil-rich area of Tyumen, in Siberia, within the Russian republic, could say that they had helped all the other regions and demand their independence. But it is not likely that Yeltsin, who has done so much to dismantle the Soviet Union in the goal of bolstering his own power, would be ready to recognize such a demand — when it comes to the territory of Russia, he is no longer a partisan of self-determination.

Socialists support the right to self-determination as a fundamental democratic right. For the same reason, under *perestroika*, most Soviet workers began to support the sovereignty of the various republics: they had the impression that the governments of these latter, elected by universal suffrage, were closer to them and would thus be subject to democratic control. But many workers — including, initially, the majority of people in the Baltic republics — while opposed to bureaucratic hyper-centralization, did not want to see the "centre" dismantled. They wanted it to become more democratic and to be reformed so that it exercised only those powers which were voluntarily delegated to it by the republics.

Paradoxical referendum results

This was the meaning of the apparently paradoxical results of the referendum of March 1991, where an overwhelming majority of Ukrainians, for example, voted both for Ukrainian sovereignty and for a renewed union.

The people wanted a union formed from below and not from above, but which would however be a genuine union, with real powers, including the power to redistribute wealth. Gorbachev, who resisted the popular pressure to democratize the central state, bears the principal responsibility for the disintegration of the Soviet Union. At the same time, the popular sentiment of opposition to the "centre" has been exploited and manipulated by the leaders of the republics who wished to build and/or preserve their own power. This power, in practice, is itself far from being democratic and, with time, it becomes more and more authoritarian — this is in the logic of things, to the extent that these republican regimes are incapable of checking the economic decline, and inasmuch as their reform programmes have a fundamentally anti-popular nature.

The surprising transformation of the President of the Ukraine, Leonid Kravchuk, is a case in point. Until the August putsch, towards which he adopted a very equivocal position, this former Communist bureaucrat, a belated supporter even of Ukrainian sovereignty, opposed outright independence and secession from the union. After the putsch, he suddenly

became a fierce independentist, refusing to sign the proposed union economic treaty and rejecting any form of central state, which he equated with "totalitarianism". Kravchuk also interpreted the December 1 referendum as a rejection of any central state and said he had to obey the popular will. Yet, the referendum did not in fact pose the question of a new union treaty. Moreover, Kravchuk's professed concern for democracy did not prevent him from negotiating and signing the Brest agreement in total secrecy and without any popular mandate.

Not only was that agreement reached by a fundamentally undemocratic procedure, but it had strong racist overtones, as President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan implied, since only the Slavic republics participated. They then invited the other republics to adhere to this *fait accompli*, refusing them the right to negotiate its terms as equals of the Slavs. After protests by the non-Slav republics, the three co-signers appear to have backtracked, but the message is clear: in any new "Commonwealth" there will be no commitment, as was the case, at least formally, in the USSR, to political equality among the republics or to social justice through redistribution of wealth.

The Minsk agreement appears as just one more gesture by Yeltsin and his entourage calculated to undermine trust among the peoples of the former USSR with a view to ensuring that there will be no renewed, democratic union. The talk by Yeltsin's spokesman after the putsch of a revision of borders with the Ukraine if the latter opted for independence was also probably no slip but a calculated move to encourage Ukrainian public opinion to oppose a renewed union. The new/old Russian elites have the most to gain, followed (a long way behind) by those of the Ukraine and Byelorussia, from a "commonwealth of independent republics" in which relations will be regulated solely by relative political and economic power and market prices.

Does any of this correspond to popular interests? These are after all the ultimate criteria for socialists. In my opinion, the situation regarding the nationality question resembles, and is closely related to, that of the economy. Socialists, of course, welcome the demise of bureaucratic domination in all its forms. But this does not mean that they automatically embrace what comes in its place as progress.

This is obvious when the bureaucratic-administered nationalized economy is

replaced by a capitalist economy based upon private property, because such a transition involves not only the transition from one system of exploitation to another, but also the loss of real and formal rights of workers (to a job and to economic security in general, including an expanding social wage in the form of free medical care, education and subsidized basic goods and services). Even the loss of rights that were entirely formal is a real loss, since these rights lose their legitimacy, and it becomes much more difficult to fight for them politically.

Formal commitment to equality

The same is true for national relations, where, despite the bureaucratic domina-



tion, there was nonetheless a formal, and even to some extent real if limited, commitment to equality and social justice. The basic thrust of Yeltsin's policy and of the other members of the "Slavic commonwealth" is to put an end to even that limited progressive practice and to declare the formal policy itself illegitimate and undesirable.

All this, in both the economic sphere and that of nationality relations, is being done under the democratic banner of eliminating the vestiges of "totalitarian rule". Socialists should not be fooled. The most conscious strata of the working class of the republics are not. I will conclude with some excerpts from interviews with workers conducted in October.

Aleksandr Utkin of the Independent Miners' Union (IMU): "We've held a series of conferences with union representatives, and the basic situation that emerges is that the only thing that can save our country (I close my eyes and I cannot picture the map of Russia, only that of the USSR) is a common economic space. But those in charge of recreating that space are politicians primarily interested in solving their own political problems through economic blackmail. This is, for

example, what lies behind the Ukraine's refusal to sign the economic treaty. Our members are the victims of these intrigues".

Aleksandr Sergeev of the IMU: "The miners in the Donbass, who are mainly Russian and Russian-speaking, struck in the spring for Ukrainian sovereignty. They were applauded by the nationalist parties. But when the Donbass miners said they wanted to stay in a single organization with the Russian, Byelorussian and Kazakhstan miners, the nationalists turned against them. The problems will be serious there. In the Eastern Ukraine, we have a couple of organizations, but it is harder to work there, since the nationalists say that the IMU in Moscow is dominated by 'Moskali' [pejorative term for 'Russian']".

Anatolii Artemenko, a Ukrainian railway worker, delegate to the Congress of the Union of Work-Collective Committees in October: "I am worried by the fact that full sovereignty was supported by that group of Communist deputies that before had opposed sovereignty. The decision of the

Ukrainian Supreme Soviet on sovereignty puts us in a difficult situation. We now have to support it, because if the workers come out now in support of the interests of the Union [that is, Gorbachev and the central bureaucracy], then later generations will not understand us. So we have to support the Supreme Soviet in the referendum.

"But their goal is really to usurp power on the territory of the Ukraine, to move away from the centre, to save their positions. After the referendum and the presidential elections, we must demand new general elections. If we succeed in organizing ourselves, we should be able to influence the elections and allow into power only people that in practice demonstrate a commitment to the workers' interests.

"My boss didn't want to let me go to the congress in Moscow. He said: 'You should be going to Kiev, not to Moscow'. To which I replied: 'The path to Kiev lies through Moscow'. On the huge territory of the collapsing USSR, all the workers have the same tasks and the same goals. If they do not co-ordinate their movements, if they do not press together against the state and force it to carry out their will, nothing good will occur. Each enterprise will be privatized by the affairistes of the 'shadow economy' and by the former nomenklatura in their own interests". ★

Privatization in one district

AMID the collapse of the Soviet Union, both old bureaucrats and new "democrats" have been scrambling to appropriate public property. Yuri Marenich is a Section Director at the Central Institute of Mathematics and Economics of the Academy of Sciences of the (former) USSR. He was elected to the October District Soviet (council or parliament) of People's Deputies in Moscow in March 1990, and is a member of the soviet's presidium and chairman of its Economic Commission. The following interview with him, in which he gives a graphic insight into the methods used by the "democrats" in his soviet, was conducted by David Seppo in Moscow on October 27, 1991.

DRAMATIC events occurred last weekend in your district soviet; deputies barricaded themselves inside against the police. What exactly happened?

Last July, Moscow's Mayor, and leading liberal, Gavriil Popov, decided to dissolve the executive committees of all the city's district soviets. Without executives, the soviets are of course powerless to carry out decisions. The August putsch delayed action, but last week Popov ordered the city's takeover of our executive committee's building. It just so happens that the soviet is also housed there, and Popov offered us nothing else. So we physically had to defend the district soviet's property.

■ What is behind the general campaign against the elected soviets that is being conducted by the liberals, or the "democrats" as they like to call themselves, including Yeltsin, Popov and Sobchak, mayor of St. Petersburg? Ilya Zaslavskii, former chairman of your soviet, who is close to Popov, stated not long ago that the slogan "All Power to the Soviets" was progressive in the spring of 1990 but has since become reactionary.

They needed the Soviets to take power from the Communists. They ran their electoral campaigns under the slogan: "Having won power, we will demonomopolize property and manage the economy through the market." But once they had got the power to manage the public's property, they found themselves facing a tremendous temptation to grab this property for themselves. This was made easy by the possibility of combining jobs in government institutions with posts in private firms dealing with the govern-

ment.

Briefly, those in charge of supervising privatization simply transferred the district's property to companies they themselves head. They now hold tremendous centralized power, no longer as government office-holders, but as private owners of most of the district's real estate. So they don't need the elected soviets. On the contrary they have become downright inconvenient.

■ Can you explain more concretely what they did?

All the members of the soviet's executive committee set up private companies that they headed. One firm took over the soviet's information services; another its legal services; a third took over all the real estate, its sale and leasing rights on the territory of the district. As such, they leased buildings and land to other companies or used them as contributions to joint enterprises.

In return they generally take 40% of the profits of these enterprises. Since any new company needs premises, they have no choice but to accept the conditions set by this monopolistic firm, called UKOSO, and to pay in 40% of their profits. What you have here, in fact, is the old command-administrative system, but with the difference that now the monopoly is private, not a state monopoly.

■ Are you saying that UKOSO transferred to itself, free of charge, this huge chunk of real estate in the very centre of Moscow? I find that difficult even to conceive.

It's quite simple. Since the 1930s, we've had a system of transferring property without payment. But it was all state property and the transfer was from one state agency or enterprise to another. All

the parties were acting in the name of a single owner, the state. Now, however, we also have private owners. But they have used the same procedure to transfer real estate from the district soviet, a state body, to a private company, UKOSO, as if they didn't understand that this is something totally different.

■ But that's outright theft.

The strange thing is that, strictly speaking, you can't call it theft, since no criminal act occurred. In practise, we have no law forbidding such conflict of interest.

Here's just one documented example. A three-storey building in Moscow's centre with 1150 sq. metres of space, whose formal value is set at 53,000 roubles (though a new economy car sells on the black market at 150,000 roubles) is "written off" as if it were of no value or use to the district, and transferred to UKOSO for free. On the very same day, UKOSO sells it for 6.7 million roubles plus 311,000 "hard currency" roubles (about 80 times the value of the ordinary rouble).

■ So the district received no income at all from the privatization of its property.

Yes, that's why the conflict arose. Not only is the people's property being given away free of charge, it is being appropriated by the very people entrusted to manage their property. I cannot say there aren't any exceptions to this pattern; I am talking about what I have personally seen and what is documented.

■ How much has already been privatized in this manner?

The executive committee's order transferred all the property that the district managed to UKOSO. A part of the buildings and land in the district are under the jurisdiction of state enterprises and other state agencies. These too have been transferring some of their buildings to UKOSO, but at least they seem to demand guarantees for their tenants; if the building is torn down, the tenants have to be offered other apartments.

■ As I recall, Zaslavskii promised in his electoral campaign back in early 1990 that he would not allow such conflicts of interest.

The promise was even published in a local paper. But once elected he radically changed his attitude. Then, when he had finished "privatizing" the district's property, he gave an interview on the radio in which he warned that the economic basis of a new dictatorship is being created, not of the classic Communist type, but no less totalitarian.

■ And he didn't feel any need to explain why he himself had condoned and participated in what he was now condemning?

A person generally behaves in accor-

dance with interests that arise from his concrete situation. Thanks to the confusion created by the "war of laws" [between the now defunct Soviet centre and the republics] — he found himself in a position to become owner of someone else's property.

■ What did you, as an elected deputy, do?

I fought from the moment I learnt of the possibility of combining posts in the executive and in the private sector. That was in May 1990. We still didn't know the people in the executive, but they all openly declared that they would be on the board of directors of UKOSO, and we know that in virtually all civilized countries such conflict of interest is outlawed. You realize the tremendous wealth involved and the temptation.

So before anything even happened, we opposed the very principle of combining posts. And the answer was edifying: "How can you even suspect that such upright people would violate the people's trust? What happened to the presumption of innocence?" Zaslavskii said he personally would monitor the process, and he requested that the soviet mandate him to preside over the executive committee between sessions, even though this is not allowed by our constitution.

The deputies refused, and his slate of candidates for the executive failed to win the required votes. So he called a meeting of the Democratic Russia caucus (the main liberal coalition that supports Yeltsin) which had 76 of the soviet's 148 deputies — you certainly can't attribute any of this to some design of the "evil Communists". The caucus decided to ask the soviet for a vote of confidence in the chairman, Zaslavskii. The rules state that if such a vote is won, then the whole executive slate is automatically confirmed. They won the vote.

■ What are some concrete examples of conflict of interest?

The chairman of the executive committee, Gusev, heads the board of directors of the Urban Construction Centre, a private firm doing business with the district. Its board of directors also includes the vice chairman of the executive committee, Vseyakov, who also heads UKOSO.

■ You said that Zaslavskii, when he presented proposals for the executive committee, didn't hide his intention of allowing these people to combine their posts with positions in private companies dealing with the district government. What exactly was said?

On May 17, 1990, Shota Katel'bauze and Yuri Agel'son, two candidates for the executive, told the soviet that they were setting up their own company and that they would demand that the executive allot them funds from the soviet's budget

and give them office space. They magnanimously offered to forego their salaries as members of the executive.

■ It seems incredible that they would be so open about this.

People here are used to the idea of combining political and economic management posts. Under the old system it was common for a minister, the head of a huge economic complex, to be a member of the party's central committee. The CC apparatus was charged with monitoring the activities of the ministries, keeping them honest and making sure the state plan was respected. Of course, this greatly undermined the party's real ability to supervise the functioning of the economic administration, but at least this occurred in a regime where everything was state property, and it was impossible to directly appropriate real estate and factories on a massive scale.

If you tell an ordinary citizen that Zaslavskii or Vasil'ev or someone else allotted an elegant four-room state apartment for their own use, they would be enraged at such an abuse of office. But tell them that one of these has received as his private property a whole building or the whole district, and they simply won't believe you, because such a thing could never occur over the course of the last 70 years. People see all this as public property, and when you tell them that it has already been privatized, it doesn't sink in. Only when they receive orders to vacate their apartments and when the special forces come to evict them, will they finally grasp how they have been plundered.

Actually with the acceleration of developments after the putsch, people are beginning to understand more. But we, the soviet deputies, who are now being told "we are hindering the work of government", we understood from the start. And so, we were dangerous, and they decided to get rid of the soviets. They have become owners, and as owners, they say "How dare you interfere. This is private property."

■ Did a majority of the soviet oppose this?

At first we were a minority. But we soon became a majority when the active transfer of real estate to UKOSO and the Urban Construction Company began. At the time, the constitution required two thirds for a quorum — in our case 99 people; but we could only muster 98. Zaslavskii has created round himself a small, loyal group, linked to these companies, and they simply boycotted the sessions. Finally the law was changed to make a 50% quorum, and we immediately removed Zaslavskii from his post as chairman of the soviet. But he refused to leave his post and transfer the soviet's affairs to the new chairman. The deputies had to declare a six day hunger strike to dislodge him from his office.

■ And what did the city's mayor, Popov, do during all this?

He came out in support of Zaslavskii, claiming that it was a struggle of conservatives against democrats.

■ But Zaslavskii was violating the law.

In our country today the concept of "revolutionary necessity" dominates. At the very start, in June 1990, just after the Russian Supreme Soviet and Boris Yeltsin, its chairman, had been elected, the combination of posts in government and private business was declared impermissible. But it turned out that that was meant only for functionaries of the old apparatus and not for the new "democratic" office holders. So the rules apply selectively, that is, it is a lawless state, as before.

This is a conscious policy, in my view. For example, after we published a report on the goings-on in our district in *Moscow News*, Shakhrai, the Supreme Soviet's representative, declared that combining posts is immoral and that a law prohibiting it was being prepared. This declaration had absolutely no effect on Zaslavskii. And I can say categorically, I can show you documents, that prove that these practices are rampant, not only at the district level, but at the city level and higher. The chair of the city's executive committee, Luzhkov, is also the head of a private firm that deals directly with the city. Indeed, Zaslavskii and his colleagues justified themselves by citing the city government: "Why should we not have the same rights?"

■ Are you saying that this is going on everywhere?

I don't have documents from other districts. But I am positive that since the interest and the possibility of acting on it exist, this is happening everywhere. This is a key factor in the current disintegration of the country into feudal-type principalities. Those who hold power in a district, city, region or republic hold power over its property and want to fence this power off from outside interference. The power holders at higher levels, of course, oppose this, since they lose a part of the property they could appropriate.

It sometimes reaches the absurd point where individual villages declare their sovereignty. But this is quite understandable. The chairman of the village soviet stands to become the owner of all the property on its territory. Why should he share it with those in the district government? He tries to defend his property, sets up boundary markers, posts guards. In order to gain popular support for what is really a struggle for property among office holders, they try to give it a national, religious or other colouring.

■ What happened to Zaslavskii after you got rid of him as chairman of your district soviet?

After the price rises

ON JANUARY 2, 1992, the Russian government of Boris Yeltsin freed prices on most products, forcing other governments in the Commonwealth of

Independent States (SNG) to follow suit, no matter what their intentions regarding pursuit of their own independent economic policies.

The Russian plan represents a full-scale attack on the living standards of working people: The monthly minimum wage has risen to 342 roubles, while a kilo of smoked sausage may cost 100-150 roubles and a kilo of beef 90 roubles. This scheme, drawn up by vice-premier Yegor Gaidar and supported by Western economists such as the notorious Jeffrey Sachs of Harvard University, creates a potentially new political situation at least in Russia, since it is the first major anti-working class reform carried out by the victorious "democrats".

On January 8, 1992, Poul Funder Larsen talked about the initial reactions to the reform with Alexander Buzgalin, a Marxist economist and leader of the group "Communists for a Party of Labour".

I T SEEMS that the first reactions have been comparatively calm — not sparking off the type of strike actions that Pavlov's price reform of April 1991 did in Byelorussia, for example.

There is much discussion among people about the new prices, but so far it is mostly words. This reaction didn't come as a great surprise, because already for some time, people have been forced to pay sums much above the fixed state prices to get any goods. The state shops were empty, so you had to go to commercial shops, the markets, or buy things in the large illegal or semi-legal street trading. In that sense there was no radical change on January

2. However, I think we may see stronger reactions later when the stocks of goods that people have hoarded in their flats are gone.

■ Before the reform, several Soviet commentators pointed out that speculators have accumulated enormous stocks of goods, which would only be released after January 2.

In the present period the speculators are obviously in clover. We now have three systems of trade: State-directed trade, private trade (cooperatives and so on) and illegal trade, which is booming. However the frontiers between these three systems are blurred. The freeing

and that we, therefore, should not interfere.

■ You told me that you life had been threatened.

This wasn't a direct threat. During one session of the soviet, one of the group around Zaslavskii came over and asked me if I wasn't worried about dying from a heart attack or some other mortal illness. The other deputies took this seriously enough to select six people to accompany me home, just to make sure I didn't "fall ill" on the way.

Right now I am writing up this experience as a book. I figure that publicity is the best insurance policy in our circumstances. ★

of prices must be seen in the context of a bureaucratic monopoly of the economy. There is no sign that it will pull society out of the economic crisis. The Institute of Forecasting of the Academy of Sciences predicts that the steep decline in productivity and in overall production will continue throughout the winter and spring.

■ What kind of organized protest has there been in the few days after the reform took effect?

The right wing, the so-called "patriots", organized a demonstration in Moscow featuring people like Shirinovskiy and Nevzorov, and supported by, for example, the United Front of Toilers (OFT).¹ In the short term the right wing will probably grow — they are putting forward simple slogans about patriotism and social justice that appeal to the mass of people, who are passive and looking for a new leader, "a good Tsar".

Our demands for workers' self-organization require a higher level of activity.

However, the Party of Labour, in which we participate, is constantly trying to launch activities — pickets and so on. We have called for a protest demonstration in Manezh Square near the Kremlin for January 12.

■ Presently, the Yeltsinites seem far from united about what to do — symbolized, for example, by the campaign of Vice-President Rutskoy against the price reforms of Yeltsin and Gaidar. What does this mean?

There are in fact two splits within the Yeltsin camp. One "opposition" is led by Moscow's mayor, Popov, who recently threatened to resign, Shevardnadze, Yakovlev and others. They do not have a political platform clearly separate from Yeltsin's, but are struggling for a more favourable share out of power.

The other, and more important, opposition, comes from Rutskoy. He is pursuing a demagogic, populist line — you could say he puts forward the same type of ideas that Hitler did in the early 1930s, though in a more "civilized" fashion. He calls for law and order, for a strong Greater Russia and attacks the profiteers, but in reality he has a pro-capitalist orientation.

He is building an alliance behind this, which includes the leaders of big state enterprises and layers of middle-ranking bureaucrats.

I think that Rutskoy could be emerging as the new Russian leader. ★

Continued from preceding page

He was immediately given a job in the mayor's administration. Then he became co-chairman of the city's Democratic Russia organization, that is, he took on a post analogous to that previously held by Yu. Prokoviev, former first secretary of the Moscow city committee of the now defunct Communist Party. And now Popov is lobbying hard for Zaslavskii's appointment as chief prosecutor of Moscow.

It is well-known that the mayor has marked our October district down as a testing ground for market innovations. Zaslavskii and Vasil'ev used to tell us that they had the full approval of the mayor

1. Shirinovskiy ran against Yeltsin in the Russian presidential elections in June 1991 on an outright chauvinist programme. Nevzorov is a well-known conservative TV producer. The OFT is a neo-Stalinist organization.