

International VIEWPOINT

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**The fruits of Gorbachev's first party congress
Biggest workers' demonstration in Belgian history
Debating the lessons of Nicaragua in East Europe**

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INTERNATIONAL VIEWPOINT

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

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International VIEWPOINT

THE REPORTS of the Belgian general strike on the facing page are a good illustration of what we said in the editorial of our last issue about the acceleration of world politics. At the same time, this exemplary struggle in a small country is another argument for expanding the magazine rather than cutting back.

The capitalist offensive against the gains of the working class is world-wide, and it is necessary to look at all countries to get a clear picture of the fightback. Unfortunately, however, we are going to have to cut two issues of *IV*, one in July and another at Christmas. Who knows what might happen at those times in some part of the world? So in our last issue we launched a fund drive to try to eliminate the need for cuts and open the way for expanding the magazine.

The cuts amount to 3,000 British pounds or 4,500 US dollars per year. If we can get that sum in contributions by the end of the year, it will remove the immediate pressure to make cuts and hopefully put us in a position where we can consider expanding.

We appeal to our supporters to remember the *IV* fund drive, in particular since no radical publication in these times can survive long without fundraising. All contributions are welcome and every contribution encourages another.

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Biggest demo in Belgian history

IT WAS the biggest demonstration in the whole history of the Belgian workers' movement. An equivalent demonstration relative to the size of the population would be one of 1.2 million workers in France, Great Britain and Italy, or of 1.5 million in West Germany.

The demonstration on May 31 in Brussels was essentially proletarian in character — in spite of the 13 per cent unemployment rate and the demolishing of several traditional working-class bastions. It shows that the Belgian working class and the workers' movement are keeping intact their potential for struggle against the attacks of capital.

This demonstration delivered a stinging refutation to all those who think that we are witnessing a permanent decline in "working-class culture." Such a forest of unfurled red flags has never been seen before. The "International" resounded innumerable times, taken up especially by thousands of young people who were mobilized for the first time.

The new feminist, ecologist and pacifist currents were in evidence and all to the good! But they were caught up by the powerful force generated by such a demonstration of proletarian strength.

The demonstration was utterly unified. It followed a two-week strike in the public sector, conducted in a disorganized fashion. With a sure instinct, the working class seized upon the call of its biggest mass organization, the trade-union federation FGTB, to show its willingness to act "all together," and it unified both public and private sectors on a broad inter-professional base. It avoided anything that would have set Catholic against anticleric, Fleming against Walloon.

The demonstration was more militant than had been anticipated. The two slogans for which the Socialist Workers Party (Belgian section of the Fourth International) and other far-left tendencies had fought for two weeks — "Down with the Martens-Gol Government" and "General Strike" — prevailed. Many contingents carried anticapitalist slogans. This demonstration confirmed that in several capitalist European countries we are seeing the old apparatus retain a predominant influence over the working class, while at the same time their direct grip on the masses is significantly weakening.

To this immense, combative, fervent, intelligent throng, demanding the continuation of the struggle, the current leaders gave no battle cries, offered no perspectives. Their freedom of action is severely limited by their desire to enter the government themselves in order to try their hands at managing the crisis. □

Ernest Mandel



Belgian workers celebrate May Day for a month!

ON MAY 31 in Brussels a massive demonstration of 150,000 people was the most recent in a series of strikes and mobilizations against the austerity measures proposed by the government. Three general strikes have been held since the beginning of May despite reluctance on the part of some of the national union leaderships to really lead the resistance or to build united national action between the Socialist and Christian trade unions.

HILARY ELEANOR

The Belgian government, led by Prime Minister Wilfried Martens, is proposing an austerity plan aimed at saving 200,000 million Belgian francs (4,444 million US dollars) which would result in thousands of job losses. The working-class response to these proposals has been remarkable, not least because mobilizations against the austerity plan began before any official announcements had been made. Workers began to fight back when newspapers started to leak the outlines of the proposals.

At the beginning of April, 18,000 miners in Limbourg, Flanders, began to take action against the threat to 3,000 jobs. On April 21 they began all-out strike action to secure an

agreement for no pit closures or job losses (see the report in *International Viewpoint*, No. 98, May 5, 1986). Public-sector workers also moved into action quickly when they realized that the austerity proposals would seriously threaten their jobs.

● May 1: The Socialist federation of public sector unions (CGSP) showered demonstrations with leaflets calling for a strike. This was only one of many actions nationally which prepared the 24-hour general strike on May 6.

● May 6: The strike was successful, with no trains, trams or buses running. Post, telecommunications, radio and television were also paralysed. The most important event was the esta-

blishment of a common front between the CGSP and the two Christian union organizations — the media and communication union (SCCC) which includes railway workers, and the federation of public sector unions (CCSP) which includes government employees.

A real determination to fight

But united action had yet to be realized in the state education sector. Here, the CGSP left it up to the regions to decide whether or not to strike, with the result that only the teachers in the Antwerp region joined the May 6 strike. Other regions held information meetings and demonstrations, neither of which were followed up.

Among the rank and file there was a real determination to fight. Railworkers at Charleroi organized a cross-sectoral meeting of the Socialist-led Belgian general workers federation (FGTB) which declared: "we won't wait for the end of the month to act". A national demonstration against the austerity measures was planned for May 31. Under pressure, the FGTB leadership decided to call a 48-hour strike in the week preceding May 31.

● May 7: A demonstration of teachers in the private sector rallied 15,000 people in Brussels. This was a major blow to the politics of austerity, given that traditionally this sector supports the government. Better still, the demonstration was supported by the CGSP.

● May 12: After the bank holiday weekend, a 24-hour strike was called for May 16. This time, the CGSP teachers built for the strike across the whole movement. Even though the Christian CCSP were still reluctant to build united actions, the strike was more successful than on May 6.

● May 23: The 48-hour strike was sustained on May 23 and 24. In Wallonia (the French speaking part of Belgium) there was a total strike in the public sector, but support in the private sector was weak. In Flanders (Flemish-speaking Belgium) a minority joined the strike but they were very militant. Massive pickets were held to stop members of the Christian unions from working, resulting in the police intervening in a number of cases.

● May 24: The government finally made its austerity plans public. They have been careful not to adopt any measures likely to rub the Christian unions up the wrong way and push them towards united action with the

Socialist unions. That said, the austerity plan is very severe, and proposes abolishing 28,000 jobs. The cuts will affect mainly education, the civil service and social security and will be accompanied by reductions in pension, health and unemployment benefits. In the area of social security, more people will be expected to pay the patients' contribution, which is extended to include treatments such as X-rays and dental care that have been reimbursed in the past. Women in particular will be hit by the proposal to severely reduce — or even in some cases abolish — benefits for unemployed people who are cohabiting. The attacks on benefits also affect workers in the private sector, but these are less evident.

Following the publication of the austerity plan, the Christian unions, as foreseen by Martens, backed down. On the railways, the SCCC withdrew their strike call and announced that it would no longer pay strike benefits. Consequently the dynamic of the struggle of the railworkers — who constituted the most advanced section of the mass movement — dried up. Only the railworkers in the Henault province, where the Socialists lead the union, continued to strike.

● May 31: The national demonstration in Brussels had been planned for two months by the FGTB and the Socialist parties. Even though the national leaderships left it up to the regions and federations to mobilize, over 150,000 people turned out to show their opposition to the austerity plans.

A national union official was

The Limbourg miners at the forefront of the fight against redundancies (DR)



reported as saying on May 31 that the demonstration would mark the end of the month of strikes and mobilizations as far as the Socialist unions are concerned. But the fightback has led to a radicalization in the Socialist parties in Flanders and Wallonia, and in the FGTB, and local strikes and stoppages will continue. On June 2, the Socialist FGTB made a call for further national protests.

There are two major problems now facing the mass movement against the austerity drive. One is the reluctance of the Christian unions to participate in united action, although they are now also demanding negotiations with the government on the budget reductions. The second problem has been the difficulties in mobilizing workers in the private sector. So far there have been very few strikes in the private sector — at Cockerill Sambre, ACEC and Caterpillar.

The Belgian section of the Fourth International, the Socialist Workers Party (POS/SAP) predicts that unless there is a cross-sectoral call for action, the private sector won't be mobilized.

Even so, the dynamic of the mass movement in Belgium against the austerity proposals is such that it will be very difficult for national union leaderships or the Socialist parties to just turn off the tap when it suits their own interests. In the context of a European situation where there are few major fightbacks against the austerity drive of the ruling classes, the development of the struggle in Belgium will be an important one to watch. □



"We don't want football, we want food!"

EVEN AFTER the earthquake in Mexico last September, one of the first declarations of the government was to affirm that the World Cup would go ahead. The first grants made towards reconstruction were allocated to the hotel industry.

ERIC MICHELOT

Today, 20,000 victims of the earthquake still live in makeshift camps set up in the streets in some parts of the city. The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) is feeding an underhand campaign of slanders against the Unified Coordinating Committee for the Disaster Victims (CUD). One of the makeshift camps was hit by arson several weeks ago.

In the better parts of the town, the police have been given a new mission: evicting the innumerable beggars, street traders and entertainers that the crisis and unemployment have thrown onto the streets. In passing, the cops never fail to misappropriate the merchandise: part of the police tradition.

For many months the front of the cathedral at Zocalo (the central square) has been besieged by hunger strikers and various demonstrations by workers, peasants' organizations and doctors. Twice at dawn the police have violently evicted the demonstrators.

The World Cup side of Mexico is best symbolized, without doubt, by the Neza stadium in the heart of Nezahualcoyotl, a huge shantytown of over three million inhabitants, a veritable town within a town. All the surroundings of the stadium have been repainted and repaved in a hurry, when for years the local people have been demanding improvements in water and electricity services. To cap it all, the local council has sent bills for the equivalent of 20 days minimum wage for each metre of wall redecorated. The local people refuse to pay and are mobilized around the slogan: "No queremos goles, queremos frijoles" — "We don't want football, we want food".

The tourists don't see any of this. One of the objectives of the World Cup is to restore a good image to Mexico. The president has gone as

far as to place inserts in *The Times* signed in his own hand. The government also hopes to get a little respite from this episode, because today it is engaged in trying to implement drastic austerity policies.

The minimum wage has lost 40 per cent of its purchasing power in the last ten years. Twenty-five per cent of this has been lost during the presidency of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado. This decline is one of the most pronounced in Latin America. As well as adding to unemployment, it manifests itself in a profound erosion in the living standards of the great majority of the population.

Dollars, deregulation and privatization

The government, badly hit by the fall in the price of petrol, has chosen to go for double or nothing. Therefore last month they took three measures which surpassed anything that the International Monetary Fund could have recommended. The first was to make it possible to open bank accounts in dollars. This constitutes an important step in making the economy more subordinate to the United States and to the most speculative sections of the bourgeoisie. A law has also been passed allowing the government to privatize public-sector companies and then sell them off cheaply. Very recently it decided to let the smelting works at Monterrey go bankrupt, and to sell its shares to the Mexican airline company. Lastly, the prices of basic foodstuffs (such as tortillas) — until now subsidized by a public body, the Conasupo — have been deregulated.

It seems that the government envisaged an *Azeca* plan, similar

to the unorthodox policies of freezing prices and wages being applied now in Argentina and Brazil. But the new budget cuts indicated that the government did not feel that for the moment it had the necessary means to apply more classic austerity policies.

The peculiarities of Mexican history (the revolution, co-optation of the workers' movement, proximity to the United States, the domination of corporations) don't leave the government any other option than to continue the same frenzied austerity politics. All the traditional means of domination are beginning to crumble little by little.

Paradoxically, Mexico, which has never known an outright dictatorship, has led the way when it comes to developing repressive structures. The May 1 demonstration this year was the latest example. While the official unions were parading in front of the National Palace — which has been transformed into a bunker — with their obscene slogan "Thank you, Senor President", the independent procession, banned from Zocalo, was a victim of a classic police provocation.

The garment workers' union, 19 *septembre*, which was born after the earthquake, revealed the incredible exploitation of women workers in the small workshops in San Antonio-Abad. This union placed demands for recognition on the government, which could not then reasonably refuse them. But less than a year later they made up for it, and the procession of garment workers was particularly singled out for attention by the forces of law and order.

It seems impossible to get any legal changes. The deputies of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT — Mexican section of the Fourth International) voted against an anti-torture bill, because all the measures proposed were insufficient. The government in fact voted against an elementary demand that only confessions signed in the presence of a lawyer have any legal standing.

The World Cup must be an occasion for international democratic opinion to give a boost to the fight led by the National Front Against Repression (FNCR) for the return of the "disappeared" and amnesty for the hundreds of people arbitrarily detained. The campaign to award the Nobel Peace Prize to Rosario Ibarra de la Piedra, the chairperson of the FNCR, will be an important means of taking the struggle forward. □

West German aid-workers kidnapped by contras

AS WE GO to press, the West German aid workers kidnapped on May 17 have not yet been released, although the contras have reportedly asked for a ceasefire in order to return them.

In the early morning hours of Saturday May 17, the 500 or so inhabitants of the Jacinto Vaca village were awakened by machine-gun fire. Between 70 and 100 armed terrorists from the US-financed contra organization, the FDN, staged an attack that had clearly been planned long in advance. They searched the houses, shot two farmers and forced those who had taken refuge under their houses to come out by threatening to throw hand grenades into the shelters.

Twelve members of a West German work brigade fell into the hands of the contras. Four of them managed to get away shortly afterward; eight remain in the power of the FDN.

Who are these eight workers? The West German organ of the contras, *Welt*, in its May 23 issue claims that "the kidnapped Germans were carrying weapons from the Soviet Union. Moreover, some of them were wearing parts of uniforms — jackets, pants and caps."

They include Doris Altenburg (psychologist), Dominique Diehl (medical student), Angelika Goetz (GEW member), Siegfried Ruttig (bricklayer), Astrid Stelter (teacher) and Reingard Zimmer (student). They belonged to a work brigade that arrived in Nicaragua in May. In Jacinto Vaca they were helping to build a new settlement on the outskirts of the area.

This new settlement was planned after the first contra attack in December of last year. It was to help reinforce the local cooperative and shore up the morale of the village population. The work brigade measured building plots, dug holes and laid the foundations for eight houses.

With the help of tools collected in West Germany, a workshop was set up. The settlement project decided on by the Sandinistas and taken charge of by the solidarity movement in West Germany was, among

other things, to provide accommodation for refugees from the nearby area bordering on Honduras and for defectors from the contra ranks.

One of the participants in the first work brigade in Jacinto Vaca in early March said: "We had been active more than a year in the Nicaraguan solidarity movement, and we thought that work in Germany was important but that there we could only get to know the revolution in a theoretical way. Going to Nicaragua meant participating directly in a living process, supporting it in a practical way and defending this revolution by our presence. In fact, we are also a shield against the threat of US intervention. By our presence, we increase the price to be paid for a direct military attack." It was precisely at this role of the work brigades that the contras struck by a deliberate kidnapping of the internationalist workers.

On Whitmonday, about 70 German work-brigade members occupied the West German embassy in Managua. They demanded that the embassy intervene actively to secure the release of the kidnapped workers.

In particular, they demanded that the ambassador send a telegram to US President Reagan, who has not only proclaimed himself a contra but is also the one who holds the decisive strings and provides the money. The ambassador refused.

One of the occupiers reported: "He thought that such a move would only annoy the Yanks, and refused to wake up the American ambassador by telephoning him. If we had not been there, he would probably have gone for a swim. He was very nervous and talked too much. He knew, he said, that what they were doing was not enough, but that there were political reasons for that."

In Bonn, the minister for economic cooperation, Warnke (Christian Social Union, the rightist Bavarian wing of the Christian Democrats) described

the occupation as an attempt to influence the policy of the West German government through pressure. (This gent, of course, found only hard words for the friends of those kidnapped. The government is involved on the quiet in negotiations with the kidnapers.)

The West German government has long since made its political choice clear. Immediately after the right came to power, development aid for Nicaragua was put on ice. In statements of position, this government has adopted, with only minor differences, the language of the US and the contras, who talk about a lack of democracy and Communist dictatorship in Nicaragua.

If the Foreign Office is taking legal steps today, they are not directed against the kidnapers but against the brigade members. On May 21, Genscher's ministry announced that the government in Managua would be requested to investigate the occupiers. It is possible that charges will be lodged against some of the occupiers whose names are known in Bonn.

The reaction of the internationalist workers in Nicaragua was firm and unambiguous. In order to thwart the contras, a new international brigade was formed. Aid workers from Cyprus, the United States, Kenya, Canada and West Europe are going to Jacinto Vaca as a replacement brigade to continue the work of those kidnapped.

In West Germany, in the meantime, actions have been underway to put pressure on the government. In Frankfurt on May 5, a protest was held in front of the consulate. A resolution by the Hannover Nicaragua committee noted, for example: "The contras are financed, trained and supported by the US. The US, therefore, bears the responsibility for the kidnapping of the work brigade, as well as for the daily terror against the Nicaraguan population."

The statement went on to make the following demands on the West German government:

"Get those kidnapped released immediately by putting pressure on those responsible for this action in the United States.

"Condemn the policy of the United States in Central America.

"Immediately resume aid to Nicaragua.

"Condemn clearly the trade boycott against Nicaragua announced by Reagan in West Germany on May 1, and make a commitment to send machinery, spare parts and other such materials to Nicaragua."

This statement has since been supported by a broad spectrum of signatories. □

COSATU targets one million members

MORE THAN one and a half million Black workers went on strike on May Day this year. This is undoubtedly the most significant stoppage in the modern history of the Black workers' movement in this country. The call for the mobilization, issued by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), demanded among other things that workers should not work on May 1. For several years, along with the upsurge of a new union movement, actions have taken place to mark this symbolic date for workers.

TONY ROUX

A recent enquiry carried out by a study group on questions of work linked to the independent trade union movement — the Labour Monitoring Group (LMG) — testifies in detail to the scale of this strike movement. Notably, the report confirms that under pressure from their employees a certain number of bosses are already in favour of recognizing May 1 as a holiday. Even so, the great majority of bosses maintain the attitude summed up in the adage "no work, no wages".

The strike movement has clearly developed in the principal industrial areas of the country. These four metropolitan regions amount to only 4% of the total area of the country, but in the mid-1970s they concentrated within them 85% of the country's industrial production and 70% of its national product. Some 40% of the economically active population were employed there. This illustrates the extent of the geographic concentration of the industrialization process in South Africa, resulting in the high degree of concentration of the Black proletariat.

The LMG enquiry on the rate of participation in the May 1 strike in these four major industrial regions of the country again brought out that in the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vaal (PWV) zone the number of strikers was highest: 1 million, of which 209,000 were miners. Leaving aside the mining sector the rate of stoppage is estimated at 67% in this region, whilst 90% of Indian traders shut up shop in some areas. The PWV region is a zone of high concentration of industrial activity and of employment. It is also the area where in November

1984 a two-day general strike (stay-away) took place with considerable success. (See IV No. 74, April 22, 1985).

The region of Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage, in the Eastern Cape province, saw the biggest percentage of strikers: about 99% of African workers and "a significant" number of coloured workers.

In the Durban Zone, there were 160,000 strikers — a rate of 61% of the total with African workers representing 68% of strikers and Indian workers 31%. Finally, in the Eastern Cape province the sum of strikers was only 15% of the total. But here a strong disproportion between African workers (51%) and coloured workers (8%) was noticeable.

The impact of the strike movement was also confirmed by employers' sources. The management of the South African industrial and mining conglomerate, Anglo-American, calculated absenteeism to be 83%, whilst the Association of Chambers of Commerce noted that in some places 80% of businesses — above all those owned by Indians — had closed. Over and above the differences in the mobilization according to region, these figures illustrate the progress toward the unity of the oppressed and exploited, African, Indian and coloured, in the present course of mobilizations in South Africa.

May 1 was also the date for united demonstrations held by the various organizations struggling against apartheid — the most striking example being Soweto, where 20,000 people met. The mood of unity and combativeness in the Black workers' movement shows up clearly in this initiative.

At the Soweto meeting Winnie Mandela, the wife of the imprisoned African National Congress leader, declared that the situation had forced her people "to declare the year 1986 the year of liberation. You are the power of this country", she added, "I ask you to close ranks and prepare yourselves for the final assault."

In his speech the secretary general affirmed "that whether the government likes it or not we are going to make May 1 a holiday". He issued a major indictment of the prime minister of KwaZulu, Gatsha Buthelezi, (leader of the Inkatha organization based mainly in the Zulu population), who has just created a rival union to COSATU.

The same day in Durban, in front of 70,000 people, the leaders of Inkatha in fact launched a new union

The victims of apartheid increase daily (DR)



— the United Workers Union of South Africa (UWUSA). It presents itself as a movement sympathetic to free enterprise, denouncing "political unionism" and the "socialist" tenets of COSATU, and opposing the withdrawal of foreign investment.

The Durban demonstrators carried a coffin with the name of COSATU written on it. The launch of UWUSA is the result of a clear wish to divide the Black workers' movement, and to block the development of its radicalization. It corresponds to the interests of a sector of Zulu small capitalists which has grown up as a result of the social differentiation among the oppressed during the last decades, and which has been the main beneficiary of the development of the "autonomous" government of the bantustans. The union is an attempt to turn certain prejudices against the united movement of the oppressed masses.

A war machine against COSATU

Already this organization is being sponsored by institutions linked to North-American trade unionism — the AFL-CIO. Moreover, on April 10, Simon Conco, the general secretary of UWUSA and member of pseudo-parliament of KwaZulu, went to the United States to obtain financial help from North American trade unionists.

The makeup of the leadership of UWUSA is quite indicative of the project of the union. According to the *Weekly Mail* of May 9, 1986, it contains several Zulu businessmen, and officials of Inkatha and certain municipal councils of Black townships.

Paradoxically, the only important defector from COSATU — the ex-leader of the North Natal Paper, Wood and Allied Workers Union (PWAU), Mhlaba Gumede — is not a member of the executive. This is not surprising since UWUSA has received the support of certain bosses who are hoping to make it into a war machine against COSATU.

If it is difficult as yet to assess the impact of the founding of UWUSA on the independent Black trade union movement, it must nonetheless be noted that the figures for participation in the respective public meetings organized for May 1 do not reflect in the least the relationship of forces.

Of the 70,000 people who were brought together in Durban by UWUSA about 10,000 were the occupants of hostels for single workers and only several thousand more were workers. According to Jerry Ntombela, president of COSATU for North Natal

province, out of the 10,000 activists in the union in this region only about 20 have joined UWUSA. Nevertheless, the two main unions could find themselves competing to sign up the least well paid and presently unorganized sectors.

Effectiveness of democratic organization

It is true that a number of those organized by COSATU in the Natal region, and in sectors such as metalworkers and carworkers, are also affiliated to Inkatha. Even so, this does not guarantee automatically the success of UWUSA. On the level of trade union organization in the workplaces and the struggle for the workers' demands, it is these same union members who in the last years have had experience of the effectiveness of democratic organization at the base and in the shop stewards' networks, and for the most part put their confidence in COSATU.

Moreover COSATU has seen its numbers increase by 30% since its foundation last December, and today it claims 650,000 members.

A good example of the workers' involvement in the ranks of COSATU is without doubt a meeting on May 1 that was held in a township in North Natal, which brought together 3,000 workers in a zone situated in the heart of the traditional base of Inkatha.

What is more, this represents a real challenge to the local institutions set up by the regime and administered by

Inkatha — such as the municipal council of this township which had decided to prohibit the meeting. This very council, it so happens, contains several important members of UWUSA.

It is therefore far from apparent that UWUSA can build itself as a real union in the workplaces. This ground is already partially occupied in some sectors, and it must increasingly be so with the application of the resolutions of COSATU's founding conference. These provided for expanding the union into areas which are presently unorganized, for example, agricultural and building workers, and the unification of the components of COSATU into single-industry unions.

The pace of the development of the independent trade union movement in the workplaces will condition its ability to resist both racist power and attempts at division from Inkatha, but also the place that it will occupy in future anti-apartheid mobilizations.

The first test of this will be that of the 3-day strike anticipated for the anniversary of the Soweto revolt of mid-July 1976.

In this context, the question of union fusions to create a single union for each branch of industry, takes on a major importance. In this respect some advances have been recorded.

All these fusions will prepare the way for a strengthening of the union movement, as well as for a deepening of its roots at the base, across the network of shop stewards. At present COSATU has set itself the objective of a million members by the end of 1986. Recent advances give hope that this objective will be achieved. □

Keeping 'law and order' in Johannesburg (DR)



Update on COSATU

WE ARE publishing two articles dealing with aspects of trade-union organization in South Africa. They first appeared in a pamphlet devoted to the trade-union movement, published by the South African Students Press Union. This organization brings together Black journalism students, involved in the democratic movement. The pamphlet, *SASPU Focus May Day Special* reproduced the positions and the objectives of the trade-union leadership of the Congress of South African Trade Unions [COSATU].

One industry, one union

WALK INTO any union office and you'll hear talk of "mergers", "industrial sector talks" and powerful new "industrial unions".

This is not really surprising, because COSATU committed itself — at its first national congress — to forming industrial unions in each sector.

The resolution calls on unions operating in the same sector to form new industrially based unions. It also calls for new unions in sectors where no industrial union exists — like in building and construction, and agriculture.

But what will this really mean, on the factory floor?

And what will happen to the general unions, like the General and Allied Workers' Union (GAWU) and the SA Allied Workers' Union (SAAWU), which have organized workers in many different industries?

Their members will now be passed over to new industrial unions.

GAWU acting general secretary, Amos Masondo, doesn't see this as a problem.

He feels GAWU has always been committed to industrial unions: "We are very enthusiastic about this development. GAWU will be affected by members moving out to other unions — but we don't see this as a loss.

"Rather we see it as a step towards what we believe in. It is in the broad interests of the workers. We are

forming bigger industrial unions and building the power of the working class as a whole."

One merger which is well on the way is in the food sector, where five unions are involved: the Food and Canning Workers' Union (FCWU), Sweet Food and Allied Workers' Union (SFAWU), the Retail and Allied Workers' Union (RAWU), SAAWU and GAWU.

FCWU General Secretary, Jan Theron, explains why it was essential to have a strong industrial union in the food sector:

"The union must speak for all the workers with one voice. If we are organizing workers in the bakeries, for example, then we must also organize workers in the mills which supply the bakeries with flour. Because, after all, it is the same company which owns the bakeries and the mills."

The new food union, which is expected to be launched by the end of May, will be one of the biggest in the country.

SFAWU president Chris Dlamini points out that the combined membership of the unions in the food industry is 50,000 members. But, by the end of the year, he expects that figure to be over 60,000.

Membership figures are growing all the time, especially since the formation of COSATU. Three months after COSATU's formation, paid-up membership in SFAWU has soared from 19,000 to 23,000 members.

GAWU organizers also report massive membership increases.

And, says COSATU's general secretary, Jay Naidoo, COSATU's membership is now well over 650,000 — 150,000 up from the

December figure. COSATU's target of a million workers by the end of 1986 seems well within reach.

All these workers will be organized into industrially based unions.

Another merger well under way is in the paper, wood and printing industry. Sector meetings between the Paper, Wood and Allied Workers' Union (PWAU), GAWU and SAAWU began long before COSATU's launch, and PWAU general secretary Jeremy Baskin described the spirit of the talks as "very positive".

These unions were due to meet at the end of April to set deadlines and a programme for the forthcoming merger.

One important development is a new municipal, local government and public administration union, where three sector meetings have been held since October.

Unions involved are the Cape Town Municipal Workers' Union (CTMWA), Municipal Workers' Unions of SA (MWUSA), Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU), and SAAWU.

TGWU is due to merge with the General Workers' Union [GWU] at the end of May and the new union will work out how the different sectors are best organized.

The resolution allows for on-going evaluation of the viability of the different industrial sectors.

Organizers and trade-union officials know that workers have strong loyalties to their unions.

How will the change to industrial unions affect members, especially of the general unions? Masondo believes that because of the democratic nature of all the unions affiliated to COSATU this is not likely to be a problem.

"GAWU has been and continues to be a democratic union. This means that all the workers have been consulted and informed about the new development", he said.

Dlamini said all unions have similar shop-steward structures through which they have always communicated and consulted with workers on the factory floor.

The formation of industrial unions will be based on these structures. And shop stewards will now be in a better position than ever before to compare notes with stewards from different factories in the same industry.

These shop-steward structures will remain intact and will not be affected by the shift to industrial unions.

A strong industrial union also makes it more difficult for employers to play unions off against each other, and this helps unite workers nationally.

The new industrial unions in COSATU will be bigger and stronger than ever before, giving workers more bargaining power to challenge management and the government. □

Shop stewards play crucial role

ASK ANY unionist who the most important people in the union are and they'll answer immediately, shop stewards.

Shop stewards are workers in the factories chosen to represent union members in the union and before management.

It is from their ranks that the union leadership comes. And it is they who guarantee workers' control in democratic trade unions.

All progressive unions affiliated to COSATU believe in worker control. This ensures the interests of workers are clearly represented by the union.

It also ensures that unions cannot be dominated by a few skilled or well-educated or charismatic leaders.

This domination by a few leaders is found in bureaucratic unions like those affiliated to the Trade Union Council of SA (TUCSA). None draw their leadership from the factory floor or mine shafts.

And none of those unions have strong shop stewards' structures.

But COSATU believes in developing worker control of unions through strong factory floor organization.

At COSATU's launch in Durban, Cyril Ramaphosa of the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) said in the opening speech:

"Workers' political strength depends on building strong and militant organizations in the workplace."

This is written into COSATU's constitution. The preamble states that one of COSATU's tasks is to unite

industrial unions in a national worker-controlled federation.

COSATU vice president and SFAWU president Chris Dlamini believes that much of the work of developing worker control and worker leadership rests on the shoulders of shop stewards in the factories, and shaft stewards on the mines.

"The role of the stewards is to organize all workers, inform them of their rights and advise them how to organize other workers", he said.

"Our slogan is: We don't just recruit and service. We politicize, mobilize and organize. Then the workers service themselves."

To do this effectively, stewards must be accountable to the workers who elect them. Before taking any action or going to any meeting either with the union or with management the stewards must get a mandate from the workers.

Then they must report back before doing anything else.

In the National Union of Mineworkers, this is particularly important. The shaft stewards are responsible for all union activity on the mines including strikes, what demands are made to management over wages or health and safety, and other issues.

Shop stewards have a broader responsibility than just in their factory, says Dlamini.

"They should also try to politicize and mobilize the broader community in which they live, by making clear the gains made through the shop stewards' structures.

"They should explain the structures of the trade union and the nature of its discipline of strict mandate and responsibility."

Through this approach, shop stewards can join community organizations like civics, women's and youth organizations and influence their direction.

They can also do this through area meetings of shop stewards.

The Springs shop stewards' council brings together 200 workers from nine unions every week. Together they represent workers from every large factory in Springs and many of the smaller ones.

The council discusses all issues affecting workers and their families, not just factory-floor issues. Most talked-about issues are housing, May Day, the need for a living wage, maternity benefits, education and police action.

The Springs shop stewards have built their stewards' council into a leadership body in the area.

They said an East Rand civic body should be formed to lead community organization. Soon afterwards the East Rand People's Organization (ERAPO) was formed. Although workers are active in ERAPO, the shop stewards' council is not directly involved.

It has also helped to form the Katlehong Youth Congress.

Students are invited to shop stewards' meetings to tell workers about developments in the education struggle, and to get ideas on forming student representative committees [SRCs] and joint action between workers and students.

Shop steward representatives followed this up in meetings with the school principals and inspectors, who promised to meet their demands. All students were taken back and school fees were not paid.

At a meeting of teachers and students, all agreed that employers in the area should pay for building schools. Teachers and SRCs took the demand to the council, which passed it on to the employers. The council decided this would only be done for organized schools with SRCs.

It was also the shop stewards' council which decided not to bury victims of police action on weekends, but during the week.

This way employers also feel the effects of police action in the townships.

Now COSATU plans to establish shop stewards' councils nationally.

Says Dlamini, "These will be encouraged in all regions because it is the best way to involve students, women, youth and residents in joint struggles on a local level."

Through these and other structures, one of COSATU's main aims will be carried out — "to encourage democratic worker organizations and leadership in all spheres of our society together with other progressive spheres of the community."

It is the shop stewards, therefore, who have the most important role to play in carrying out this COSATU policy. □



Tory defeat strengthens coalition threat

THE OUTCOME of the recent local government elections in Britain was a big setback for Margaret Thatcher's Tory Party, who lost 705 seats to both the Labour Party (LP) and to the Social Democratic Party (SDP)/Liberal Alliance. [See the last issue of *International Viewpoint*, No. 100, June 2, 1986, for full details of the results].

In the second of two articles, Peter Green assesses the impact of these results and their implications for the future.

The May local election results leave British politics more clearly on course for a hung parliament at the next general election, which has to be held before June 1988. The SDP/Liberal Alliance has failed in its goal of smashing the Labour Party and creating a two capitalist party system in Britain.

The Labour Party's strength in the north of England, Scotland and the big cities was confirmed by these results, and by the Fulham parliamentary by-election last month. Two of the three councils won by the Alliance, Sutton in London and Adur in Sussex, were taken from the Tories. In the third, the Alliance won Tower Hamlets in London from Labour only because the rotten old-guard Labour right wing split the Labour

vote by running candidates against the official LP nominees. In general the Alliance has begun to seriously undermine the Tory vote.

Other key results of the elections were the victories of the Labour left in Liverpool and in the London constituencies of Lambeth and Haringey. In Liverpool, where the *Militant*-led council (1) has been under vicious attack by Labour leader Neil Kinnock and the media, Labour gained a seat. One of 11 members of the council who have been threatened with expulsion from the LP for their support for *Militant*, Felicity Dowling, gained 71 per cent of the vote.

In London there were also victories for the Labour left. In Haringey, Black council leader Bernie Grant

suffered vicious racist attacks after his defence of a local Black uprising last autumn. Here Labour increased its vote, with Bernie Grant securing a major personal victory. In Lambeth Labour also increased its majority, in a situation where 31 Labour councillors have been disqualified from holding public office by the courts for their defiance of Tory laws on local government public spending.

The impact of the crisis in education and of the teachers' strikes which took place during the last year was also felt. Labour did even better in the elections for the Inner London Education Authority than in the council elections in the same area.

The election results were interpreted by bourgeois commentators as a severe setback for the Thatcher government. John Biffen, Tory leader of the House of Commons, called for a "balanced ticket" for the Tories for the next general election, and stated that while Thatcher would continue to lead the Conservatives until then, "no-one seriously supposed" that she would continue to lead it throughout the next parliament.

An editorial in the *Financial Times* noted: "If the government has in the end got many of the big things right — such as coming to terms with Europe and the conquest of inflation, or daring to tackle the Irish question — it has made a lamentable mess of some of the smaller ones."

"It spent an inordinate amount of parliamentary time on the relatively unimportant business of the abolition of the metropolitan [large urban] authorities and the Greater London Council. During the Westland affair, which led to the resignation of two cabinet ministers, the government all but ceased to function (2). It then backed down from its plans to dispose of British Leyland to the Americans because of pressure from its own backbenchers" [non-government Tory members of parliament].

The conclusion of this analysis is that a government is needed which maintains the "big things" of Thatcherism but allows some adjustment of the "small things". This is the perspective outlined by the SDP and the Alliance. David Owen, leader of the SDP, has been increas-

The May election results

Party control of local councils in Britain

| | Prior to 1986 elections | After 1986 elections | Change |
|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|--------|
| Labour control | 74 | 91 | +17 |
| No overall majority | 42 | 53 | +11 |
| Conservative control | 75 | 46 | -29 |
| Alliance control | 3 | 6 | +3 |

Source: *Socialist Action*

Gains and losses of seats in local government elections 1983-86.

| | 1983 | 1984 | 1985 | 1986 | 1983-86 |
|----------|------|------|------|------|---------|
| Tories | +128 | -131 | -55 | -705 | -763 |
| Labour | +37 | +46 | -32 | +484 | +535 |
| Alliance | +110 | +143 | +129 | +270 | +652 |

Source: *Socialist Action*

1. *Militant* is a newspaper whose supporters dominate the youth section of the LP, the Young Socialists, and who are also a majority of the Liverpool councillors.

2. A public and very heated dispute broke out in the Tory Cabinet at the end of 1985 over whether the Westland helicopter company should be bought out by a US or a European consortium. This ended in the resignation of the two main protagonists, Michael Heseltine (Secretary of State for Defence) and Leon Brittan (Secretary of State for Trade and Industry).

ingly putting forward policies which would combine the denationalizations of Thatcher, the Tory anti-union laws, and the continuation of mass unemployment with some increased public spending and more support for domestic manufacturing industry. There is a significant section of the bourgeoisie which is prepared to consider this as an alternative to the Tories.

Given the decline of the Tory vote there has therefore been a growing discussion in the bourgeois press on the desirability, or otherwise, of an Alliance/Labour coalition after the next general election. For example, *The Economist* on March 1 wrote: "Labour is not a mass party and never will be again. The local government politicians who will dominate Labour in the 1990s know that. They have joined hands with the single-issue, non-socialist campaigns with the eclecticism of any American power-broker. They might — just might — be convinced that Labour's hopes of government rest on finding common ground with the Alliance. If Mr. Kinnock is as keen on power as he says, he should be telling his party that the days of splendid isolation are over."

Various ideologists advising the right wing of the Labour Party have also been putting forward similar perspectives. *Marxism Today*, the journal of the Euro-Communist wing of the Communist Party, has long advocated a coalition government between Labour and the Alliance. On March 28, the Labourite *New Statesman's* editorial said: "This week, the fifth birthday of the SDP, marks an event of tribal rather than ideological significance. The SDP is celebrating the event. So are some on the left — good riddance to the traitors. But the only tribe that can take any real comfort is the collection of warriors with the blue face paint: the Conservative Party. As long as their opponents remain divided, they stand some chance of winning the major wars."

The Thatcher government has weakened seriously over the last year. The bourgeoisie is attempting to maintain the essential policies of Thatcher in place while recognising that it may be necessary to make some limited concessions in the field of social expenditure. At the general election key sections of the ruling class will continue to support the Tories, but they are now giving much greater attention to the question of forcing Labour into some sort of coalition with the Alliance.

The fight against the Tories and against any form of coalitionism is now even more clearly at the top of the political agenda. □

The CPSU's Congress offers few surprises

TWO FALLACIOUS views of Soviet reality prevail today in the West.

The first presents the Soviet Union essentially as a rigid and totalitarian society. In this view the bureaucracy's control of all social life is the cause of a near-total resistance to change. The bureaucracy has supposedly managed to accommodate everything into its system — the black market, corruption, criminality, economic dysfunctions, the attraction of the Western model of consumption. The apolitical outlook of the population seems to be the ultimate proof of the bureaucracy's success. The system, therefore, can reproduce itself indefinitely.

A good many of the right-wing dissidents go even further in such assessments, on which evidently most of the bourgeois "Sovietologists" agree.

The second view, on the contrary, presents Soviet society as essentially dynamic. Economic progress, the rise in the standard of living and the increasing skills of the workers are supposed to explain both the lack of popular political opposition and the constant pressure for progressive reforms, which the bureaucracy cannot forever avoid. What has been on the agenda since Stalin's death in 1953, according to this view, are successive waves of reforms. And these are bringing the Soviet Union ever closer to the model of socialist society envisioned by Marx and Lenin.

Gorbachev's reforms are viewed as simply the latest in a long series demonstrating the vitality and the basic health of the society. The course of radical reforms and democratization will be irreversible.

This second view prevails not only in the pro-Soviet Communist parties and the Cuban Communist Party. It also shows up increasingly among the Eurocommunists and, indeed, in a growing wing of European social democracy, especially in the Social Democratic Party (SPD) of West Germany. (1)

ERNEST MANDEL

An objective analysis of the Soviet reality and its evolution over the last 30 years leads to the conclusion that both of these views are incorrect. They do not take into account the nature and the contradictory evolution of Soviet society, which consists precisely of a combination of dynamism and immobility.

The dynamism is the result of the economic and social growth, which is very impressive over the long term even though it is slowing down each year. This growth has profoundly changed the country relative to what

it was in 1940, in 1950 or even in 1960.

The immobility is the result of the bureaucracy's iron grip on the state and society. This straitjacket is an obstacle to future growth. It

1. See in particular the comments of the Czech Communist emigre leader, Mlynar, in the West German revue, 'Sozialismus,' April, 1986. On the other hand, in a recent book Zhores Medvedev expresses a more sober and pessimistic view of Gorbachev's goals and methods. ('Gorbachev,' Basil Blackwell, London, 1986.) In a similar vein see Marie Lavigne in 'Le Monde Diplomatique,' February, 1986.

deprives the country — especially the working masses, the youth, the creative intelligentsia, women, national minorities, the "nouveaux pauvres" [new poor] — of a large share of the fruits of past growth.

Today this contradiction dominates the situation in the Soviet Union and will determine its immediate future. It explains the preoccupations, the anxiety, indeed even the anguish of the Gorbachev leadership team. It is the source at the same time both of its populist demagoguery about the need for "radical reforms" and of its inability to achieve such reforms to an extent that could give momentum to economic growth.

"Non-event" or "Reform on the move"?

This contradiction dominated the preparation for the 27th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), as well as the debates of the congress held in March this year. It was to be expected, then, that in broad terms the two parallel interpretations that we have mentioned above would be found in the assessment of the congress by Western analysts. Some of them maintain that it was a disappointing congress, where, in short, nothing happened — a "non-event" as it were. Others see in it the confirmation that "reform" is on the move and that nothing will stop it.

In an earlier article devoted to the first six months of the Gorbachev era, I described the project of the new Kremlin chief as a bureaucratic reform of the bureaucracy. (2) The substance of the 27th CPSU Congress completely confirms this assessment.

The congress was first and foremost a congress of bureaucrats, not of workers and peasants — at least as much, if not more than preceding congresses. Of the 88 speeches given from the rostrum at the congress, only eight — less than ten per cent — can be attributed to workers actually working in an enterprise, and that only in the vaguest sense of the word. Even more significant: although women represented 27 per cent of the delegates to the congress, only seven were able to take the platform — less than 8 per cent of the speakers.

To the Central Committee, composed of 307 members, 15 women were elected. Not a single woman was elected to the Political Bureau composed of 12 members and seven candidate-members. One woman was elected to the Secretariat of the Central Committee without being included in the Political Bureau. In the combined membership of the

Political Bureau and the Secretariat there is therefore only one woman among the membership of 26.

These statistics by themselves should suffice to confirm the judgement of revolutionary Marxists on the CPSU. It is a party of the bureaucracy — it is not a party of the working class. (3) But at the same time, this bureaucracy has lost its job security (at least at the previous level), which it had enjoyed under Leonid Brezhnev. He had come into power, as he himself said, in order to secure the "respect for the cadres," a respect that Khrushchev had sorely tested. Gorbachev, on the contrary, shook up the cadres, pursuing the trail already blazed by Yuri Andropov.

Again the statistics are eloquent. At the top of the hierarchy, the following have been replaced: 5 of the 12 members of the Political Bureau, 10 of the 24 department heads on the Central Committee, 30 of the 80 ministers and presidents of state committees, 4 of the 15 first secretaries of the Communist parties of the 15 Soviet republics, 50 of the 159 regional first secretaries of the CPSU and 138 of 320 members of the former Central Committee. The purge at the summit was a radical one, even if Gorbachev, in his report to the 27th Congress, explicitly rejected the 'demand' (made by whom?) for a purge of the party as a whole.

The bureaucratic nature of the Congress, too, appeared in the careful orchestration of the event down to the last detail — all spontaneity was absent. All the speeches were prepared in advance, read, and distributed according to a deadly dull division of labor. The only moment of relaxation was provided by Gorbachev himself when he interrupted a particularly fulsome homage being paid to him by a certain Kulijanov, first secretary of the cinematographic workers' association (*Pravda*, March 1, 1986). But, even here, who is to say that this incident was not also a prearranged little comedy skit?

Fundamentally, the 27th Congress brought up nothing new. The objectives for the year 2000 were known in advance: to double production, to ensure access to individual housing for all families, to regularize supplies and increase agricultural production in a spectacular way. These goals were simply confirmed by this congress.

The principal means envisaged to get the economic and social growth started again were defined as follows at the plenum of the Central Committee in April 1985:

● A simultaneous reinforcement of the central authority of the plan and the autonomy of the factory managements, with a reduction in

power of the intermediate bodies such as the ministries.

● Greater discipline on the job and, especially, calculating workers' wages on the basis of their individual output.

● The creation of agro-industrial committees to stimulate the modernization of agriculture.

● A broadening of the area of commodity production in agriculture and services, but not in industry.

● Priority to high technology and to the industries that are supposed to promote it — electronics, robotics, electric machines, lasers, biogenetics, scientific equipment — in order to close the technological gap between the Soviet Union and the imperialist countries.

● Top priority accorded to the modernization of existing plants rather than the construction of new ones.

● A crack-down on corruption, the black market, illegal middlemen (*tolkachi*), etc.

There is nothing at all new in this. It even falls short of what was projected by two previous economic reforms, those called for by Liberman at the beginning of the 1960s and by Aleksey Kosygin at the beginning of the 1970s. And, besides, the numerous defects in the Soviet economy, denounced from the podium of the 27th Congress, are literally identical to those denounced by Georgy Malenkov more than 30 years ago. (4)

The stress placed in all the reports on the role of the cadres confirms the impression that it is essentially through greater discipline inside the bureaucracy and a more careful selection of officials that the Gorbachev administration hopes to achieve these objectives. "Make way for the efficient technocrat" is the watchword of the hour. The ritualistic appeals to the "participation of the rank and file" can throw only the most naive off the track. The bogus innocents pretend to believe them when they are not expressing their skepticism in whispers.

It is true that a new proposal emerged in Gorbachev's report: the

2. 'International Viewpoint,' No. 83, September 30, 1985.

3. "Previously the party organized meetings at least once a year. But today, and for several years now, most Communists have no longer participated in any exchanges of ideas within the enterprises." So reads a letter from a reader of *Pravda*, January 7, 1986.

4. As one of many examples, Ryzhkov denounces the fact that more than 300,000 half-built projects have remained unfinished, some of them for many years. Between 1981 and 1984, the production costs of such projects had already exceeded the original estimates by 24%. A worker, GS Kostenko, revealed to the Congress that one brickyard has been in the process of construction in Bamovskaia for . . . ten years! (*Pravda*, March 3, 1986)



The 27th Congress of the CPSU in session: can you spot the woman?

creation of what he calls "councils of worker collectives" in the factories. However, these councils will be appointed, not elected. (5) They will be composed — if indeed they ever see the light of day, which is not certain — of representatives of management, of party committees, of the trade unions and of the komsomols [Soviet youth organizations], of brigades and of "workers and experts" (that is, technicians). The bureaucracy's control is thus assured in advance. We are a long way from genuine, democratically elected workers' councils.

Socialist democracy still only an air bubble

If socialist democracy was mentioned in Gorbachev's report and if this theme cropped up again in several delegates' speeches, the proposals and commentaries on this question were of a vagueness that was more than merely prudent. These proposals were not even trial balloons. They were air bubbles that vanish in an instant.

"We must remember that, for Lenin, the very essence of Soviet power lay in the self-administration of the workers," proclaims Gorbachev with the turn of a phrase. But, the

following phrase specifies: "Self-administration cannot be developed outside of the state institutions, but must occur within them." We are not, then, dealing with new bodies, but with bodies already existing under the bureaucracy's power.

Gorbachev made a no less vague allusion to extending the power of the local soviets, even of "direct democracy," but without further elucidation. But he immediately admitted that all of these institutions have very few material means at their disposal.

Now, as Marx said, "Those who control the social surplus product, control the society." In the Soviet Union the central state apparatus controls the social surplus product. There is no question of the slightest relaxation of this control. Gorbachev proclaimed that long and loud to the enthusiastic applause of the bureaucratic participants at the congress. It was even one of the frenetic peaks of the congress.

There followed another air bubble, this affirmation from Gorbachev: "It is time to implement the necessary corrections to our electoral practices." Which ones? The congress participants and the Soviet masses were left with little to go on. No clarification followed.

"The trade unions are doing every-

thing necessary to ensure discipline at work and to increase productivity," asserts Gorbachev. And he adds: "However, when it comes to defending the workers' legitimate interests, the improvement of working conditions, the effort to avoid accidents, the construction and operation of hospital services, of sport and culture centers, the trade unions are not demonstrating in any of these areas the necessary fighting spirit and persistence. It is clear that such passivity satisfies those officials of the economy for whom production puts the human being in the shadow." (*Pravda*, February 26, 1986). How can that be changed? Through simple ritualistic exhortations? It is a mystery! Once again there is not an intimation of a concrete proposal.

And yet the heart of the problem is clear. Socialist democracy is neither a normative requirement nor an "idea" to be realized in stages. It constitutes an immediate practical necessity for the proper functioning of the economy and Soviet society. Without such democracy, it is impossible

5. It is true that in Gorbachev's native region, Stavropol, the former CPSU first secretary, Razumovsky, who has since been promised a place as department head on the Central Committee, had made a few feeble attempts to allow elections by the personnel of the middle-level leadership in the factories.

for a planned economy to take account of the preferences of the workers either as producers or consumers. Without knowing their preferences, it is impossible to allocate the social product and surplus product with any adequacy whatever. Mobilizing the potential for initiative and heightened consciousness that the Soviet working class harbors consequently remains a mirage. And as for the implementation of the Gorbachev plan, it hangs suspended in air, or it depends upon the good will of the bureaucrats.

The attractions of a market economy

It should be noted in passing that this also explains the attraction that potential reforms, such as a broadening of the market sphere, continue to have, not only for the technocrats but also for a large part of the critical intelligentsia.

Compared to inept and wasteful bureaucratic centralization, the market appears to be the only corrective available, no matter how ineffective, if one rules out the institutionalization of socialist democracy. By this we mean the wielding of power by the workers themselves and particularly the power to decide on the allocation of the social product and to dispose of the social surplus product, with the whole dynamic that this power sets in motion.

In an article recently published in the revue *EKO* — which is edited by one of Gorbachev's chief advisers, the academician Aganbegyan — the sociologist Zaslowskaia touches on the problem of democracy, but she evidently does so in vague terms. The needs and capabilities of working men and women, the objective and subjective criteria that define the concept of justice, are central to her recommendations. So far, so good.

But there is still a question of management and power underlying all these problems. This is especially difficult to deny for one who claims to be a Marxist. And the question of power immediately raises the next question — that of the bureaucracy's privileges, which are guaranteed precisely by its monopoly over the exercise of power. It is impossible to take real steps toward democracy while avoiding this problem. It is also impossible to bypass this problem and at the same time to achieve the acceleration of growth projected by Gorbachev.

The privileges of the bureaucracy began to be publicly denounced more clearly than previously in the period prior to the CPSU's recent congress. The special shops, whose existence

had been denied by the regime's apologists for years, were mentioned in Yevgeny Yevtushenko's famous speech to the Writers' Congress of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR). (6) Some of the speakers at the congress made timid allusions to this.

Gromyko rebuffed them in no uncertain terms in his speech, transforming criticism of a whole layer into a criticism of individual morals and styles of work. This is a common trick of bureaucratic ideology. According to Gromyko, even if the principle of the criticism is justified, it is not admissible to criticize honest communists. But what if honest communists enjoy inadmissible privileges that are felt to be a profound injustice by the mass of workers? Our scrupulous moralist fails to tell us how to react in such a situation. (7)

In the course of a stormy press conference that coincided with the 27th Congress, Alixev, a member of the CPSU Political Bureau and apparently number five in the bureaucratic hierarchy, was taken to task over the special shops. He replied with a cynicism that says much about the lack of tact and sensitivity of the Soviet bureaucrats, not to mention their lack of communist conviction: "The leaders work 24 hours a day. They must have at their disposal shops open 24 hours out of 24." (8)

The leaders work harder than the miners? Longer hours than the truck drivers? More than the textile workers who have to line up in front of the shops for hours and then manage their households in the sexist climate that still prevails in the patriarchal Soviet family, whose days are literally 16 hours long, if not more? What contemptible demagoguery it is to confuse the hours that the shops are open with the goods available and the quality of services offered!

The existence of the *nomenklatura* is now officially recognized. But I venture to predict that its privileges are not about to be abolished!

What is striking in some of the speeches by working men and women at the congress, as well as in some correspondence from workers appearing in the Soviet press, is a widespread — we are even tempted to say universal — discontent with the management of the factories and the industrial complexes among the working class.

One could quibble *ad infinitum* over the "ideological" significance of this discontent. In view of the ignorance of what the working class really thinks that prevails not only in the West but even among the Soviet bureaucrats, it is a subject of vain speculation. On the other hand, the causal, almost direct, link

between the material condition of the working class, the impact of Gorbachev's reforms as well as those of Yuri Andropov, and worker discontent is unmistakable.

These reforms all aim at tying workers' salaries to their individual performance. This performance is much less the function of attentiveness to work, of discipline, of physical effort or even of technical qualification, than it is of economic factors over which the individual worker, even the workers' collectives, have no control.

Such factors include the regular supply of raw materials, the quality of the machinery, the repair of damaged equipment, the choice of technologies, the organization of the work, and so on. The working men and women are systematically penalized in their pay packets because of this dysfunction of the economy for which they bear no responsibility. They resent this state of affairs, viewing it as a profound injustice.

Workers' discontent goes public

The workers are showing this discontent more and more openly. The more that Gorbachev stresses individualized computation of salaries — particularly with the typically Stalinist invocation of a "fight against petty-bourgeois egalitarianism" — the more ground the demand for worker control over production, and even of worker management, will gain.

Some of the examples cited by workers are particularly scandalous. In *Pravda* of March 1, 1986, AS Souchanov, a member of the Mosmetrostoi work brigade, the public works enterprise that is building an extension to the Moscow subway, denounced the irregular provision of construction materials — iron pipes and other equipment — which is causing constant stoppages and delays in the work. He also revealed that the percentage of workers who perform purely manual labor is exactly the

6. The February 13, 1986, *Pravda* published a letter from N Nikolaiev of Kazan, calling for the abolition of the special shops, clinics and restaurants reserved for the bureaucracy. A similar letter appeared in *Sovietskaia Rossiia* on the same day.

7. The ex-assistant secretary general of the United Nations, Arkady N Shevchenko, denounces the exorbitant privileges that the high officials of the Soviet diplomatic corps — including Gromyko — enjoy, in his book, *Breaking with Moscow* (Knopf, New York, 1985). This fellow is a go-getter without political convictions, but his descriptions ring true.

8. This press conference is reported at length in the French daily, *Liberation*, February 28, 1986.

same as it was half a century ago: nearly 40 per cent. And this manual work is performed with the aid of pneumatic drills similar to those of 1935, but of an even more inferior quality.

The same speaker added: In 1981 we were provided with a complicated machine for drilling and excavation, but this machine is seriously defective. It is unusable for 40 per cent of working time. A lot of the jobs it does have had to be done over by teams of manual laborers.

A worker in a flax mill, VN Pletnjova, disclosed in her speech (published in the February 27, 1986, *Pravda*) that her industrial complex, which specializes in the manufacture of domestic linen made from flax, has fewer and fewer customers because of the inferior quality and tastelessness of its products. She added: "They talk constantly of the need to replace the factory equipment, but this rebuilding has been delayed now for several five-year periods. Fewer and fewer workers will accept jobs in the weaving workshops because of the lamentable sanitary conditions and the dust that fills these work-rooms. Because of this, the disproportion between the mill and the weaving establishments is growing continually."

There are still more virulent complaints from 27 workers who succeeded in having their recriminations published in *Pravda* although they were not delegates to the CPSU Congress. In the March 18, 1986, edition, they disclose that although they were highly qualified as electric welding inspectors, they had been employed in the Novomoskov factory — set up to make pipes for running water — in annexes where enamelled porcelain was manufactured.

It was unskilled labor, carried out under intolerable health and safety conditions, without work clothes, without protection from the dust and sometimes without even pay for overtime. And this is in a plant that was officially reconstructed ten years ago but where the same techniques and equipment are being used as "in the time of our grandparents."

But here is the most significant aspect of the business. The complaint was made public. The factory management made its self-criticism. It promised to satisfy all the demands of the workers. Time passed. Journalists returned to the plant. Practically nothing had changed. Their report ended with a vague formula: "There are complicated technological problems that cannot be solved over night." But how "technologically complicated" can it be to provide workclothes and elementary protection for 27 workers?



If we study carefully the economic disputes of the workers in the Soviet Union, we can glimpse a slow resurgence of class reaction, a phenomenon that is much more important than immediate demands and everyday complaints. The negative reaction of many workers faced with the work-brigade system, revealed in a sensation-causing article in the review *EKO*, was caused, according to the official investigation, by the cohesion and collective solidarity of the workers in workplaces, which the brigade system tried to smash and to which the workers are fiercely attached. (9) That is also one of the reasons why they are generally hostile to that part of Gorbachev's reforms that aims at individualizing wages.

Speed-ups and a new Stakhanovism

Gorbachev is trying to rehabilitate Stakhanovism and to restart scarcely disguised similar experiments. But the worker Pletnjova, in her speech to the 27th CPSU Congress cited above, had the courage to denounce the fact that "some organizers of competition fix the norms at artificially high levels . . . and make the fastest workers help by means of maneuvers. But the results are attributed [and rewarded] exclusively to those high-powered workers. This is where these astounding records come from." This is exactly the secret of Stakhanovism, which this worker justly considers to be contrary to the tradition, to the interests and to the sense of justice of the proletariat!

The social discontent of the Soviet working class appears particularly

serious as seen through the speeches made at the 27th Congress, including the speeches of the principal officials. They confirm that the provision of supplies of good quality is irregular and insufficient, creating a serious inflationary pressure. They confirm that housing conditions are far from satisfactory. They reveal serious gaps in health matters. (10)

Especially stressed is the indifference of the plant managers and the local political leaders to the needs and demands of the masses of workers. A miner, ZhM Chatalov, in the March 1, 1986, *Pravda*, revealed the fact that in his mining basin 150 million roubles (1 rouble = 0.71 US dollars) had been invested in production and "not a single one in cultural or sports facilities for the miners." (11) The worker GS Kostenko recalled in the March 3 *Pravda* that during the twelfth five-year plan, 10,000 housing units should have been built for the workers of Glavbamstroi, which is constructing a new railroad line to serve northern Siberia. But only 1,000

9. 'EKO,' No. 8, 1985.

10. According to a public opinion poll conducted by the Institute of Sociological Investigation of the Academy of Sciences in 1985, and reported in the journal, 'Moscow News,' (but not in the Russian language Soviet press), 45% of the persons polled considered that medical services functioned less well than ten years ago, 52% said that shops were less well-supplied and 54% replied that public transportation was worse. (BBC World Service, January 17, 1986)

11. The only party veteran to take the platform at the 27th Congress, ex-miner (today the topmost inspector of the Stakhanov-Shakhtostroy Trust) KG Petrov, complained in the March 2, 1986, 'Pravda' that one pneumatic drill with reduced vibration, invented by the Siberian Institute of the Academy of Sciences, had not been mass-produced and not been put into service. Why was there so little concern for the health of the miners? he asked.

have been put up. The result is an enormous turnover in the work force. A third of the workers change their job each year because they are unhappy about their living conditions.

Many speakers at the CPSU Congress disclosed that it is the current practice to consider social expenditures as nonpriority or "residual" items, that is expenditures to be made by the industrial units and complexes only to the extent that there are resources left over after the so-called economic expenses have been taken care of. The Congress confirmed especially the existence of an enormous mass of poor and forgotten people in Soviet society. This phenomenon in itself would amply justify the revolutionary Marxist thesis that the Soviet Union is a very long way from socialism.

Gorbachev reveals that in the Soviet Union there are more than 50 million retired people. To the retired, one must add the millions of disabled, severely injured and widowed persons. Premier Ryzhkov has set a goal for the next five-year plan of a minimum income of 50 roubles a month for each inhabitant. At present, it appears that some 40 million Soviet citizens do not have even that miserable income, although the minimum for subsistence has been fixed at that level since 1967 and confirmed by law since 1976. (12) A decent standard of living requires some 200 roubles a month for each person.

The new director of ideology in the CPSU Political Bureau, JK Ligatchov, has announced that "a stable climate of sincerity and of honesty, of party principles and truth" must be created. (13) The very people who enjoy enormous material advantages over the "*nouveaux pauvres*," the workers, the laborers and the simple ordinary peasants on the collective farms have the nerve to reproach a large part of Soviet society for "closing themselves off in the narrow world of self-interest and egoistical gratification." This is the formula used by that arch-conservative Markov, bureaucrat-in-chief of the writers, to condemn the Soviet neo-realist novelists and filmmakers, who attempt at least to portray Soviet society as it is.

Have we not reached the pinnacle of hypocrisy and incoherence here? On the one hand the powers that be are constantly calling for "profit-sharing," while insisting ponderously that each must be paid according to the work performed and seeking to increase production by promising to raise wages conditional upon that increase in production. On the other hand, these same bureaucrats are castigating those who "count every rouble", all the while jealously guard-

ing the enormous heaps of roubles that so generously the bureaucracy accords itself. Is not that the primal source of the climate of insincerity, hypocrisy, mendacity and cynicism that generally prevails in the Soviet Union?

To explain the disappointing insipidness of the CPSU 27th Congress, the sycophants of the gang in the Kremlin pull out two contradictory arguments: Gorbachev has not yet overcome all resistance within the apparatus, especially in the middle and lower levels, and therefore, real reform measures can only be introduced after new political battles. And then — instructed by the negative example of the overly hasty Khrushchev, Gorbachev, skilled administrator that he is, would prefer to perform less spectacularly, but more effectively. Real reforms, then, will be introduced gradually.

The necessity for "revolutionary changes"

Leaving aside the large dose of deception (including self-deception) that such interpretations of the 27th Congress comprise, the contradiction is unmistakable between the modesty of the decisions made and the crying need for renovation, for radical reform and radical change, which was declared throughout the congress. The government head Ryzhkov even spoke of the necessity of "fundamental changes" and of "revolutionary changes."

How can we not emphasize the rather disillusioned remarks of the new Moscow party chief, Yeltsin, who protested: "Why do we bring up all the same problems at every congress? Why has that obviously foreign word, 'stagnation,' come into the party vocabulary? Why, after all these years, have we not succeeded in eliminating the roots of bureaucratism, of social injustice and of abuses of power?" Then comes the disappointing answer: "Because some party officials don't have the courage to assess in time and correctly the situation and their own role." (14)

Do we really think that a great country of 260 million inhabitants could be mired in stagnation, massive corruption and social injustice simply because "some party officials" lack courage? Who could believe this fairy tale?

Is Gorbachev pulling out all the stops to obtain at least the modest reforms that Brezhnev could not or did not wish to accomplish? Is all of his talk simply a populist attempt to shake up the apparatus and nothing more? Will it remain just talk in the face of the inertia and the muscle of the apparatus?

The Soviet citizens are less afraid of criticizing. The objects of their criticisms are countless. But we are no longer dealing with just individual criticisms. In his speech to the congress, Gromyko admitted that critical letters to the press are sometimes signed by hundreds of workers. So this is no longer a matter of letters, but of collective petitions that constitute a form of para-political or political debate.

Gorbachev's outcries, then, are only an echo of broader outcries that are rising up from the depths of Soviet society. After the long Stalinist winter, after Khrushchev's brief thaw, this upsurge will of necessity be slow and contradictory. But it is this rise that will resolve the fundamental contradiction in the situation mentioned at the beginning of this article. And from it we must await salvation, a genuine new advance in the construction of socialism.

An event that took place on the fringes of the congress, and which is in some ways symbolic of Soviet society as a whole, sums up this potential. Near the beginning of the congress one of the "official" speakers had championed the unrealistic project of diverting some of the great Siberian rivers — a project that was of Stalinist origin but which Gorbachev had initially taken up as one of the pillars of "his" solution to the agrarian crisis. At the end of the congress, and on the fringes of it, without any vote taken or collective opinion expressed, the project was withdrawn. Was there an unheard outcry or a faint echo of subterranean protests? The answer is clear.

The tragic catastrophe at Chernobyl makes the upsurge in ecological awareness in the Soviet Union one of the driving force in the repoliticization of the masses of people. "That concerns each and every one of us," said many Siberians about the diversion of the rivers. "That concerns each and every one of us," the citizens of Ukraine will say about Chernobyl. "Let us look to these things that concern each and every one of us." That is the next step, and there will be more and more of them in the Soviet Union. □

12. Mervyn Matthews, "Poverty in the Soviet Union," *The Wilson Quarterly*, Autumn, 1985.

13. *Pravda*, February 28, 1986.

14. *Pravda*, February 27, 1986. Yeltsin added that he had not had enough courage to talk about these things at the previous congress. The kind of courage required appears more clearly when one recalls that Ivan Khudenko, who had been authorized to experiment with new forms of management of the collective farms, stepped on the toes of some local bureaucrats. He was dragged before a tribunal and died in prison in 1974. This example could be multiplied. On this subject see the article by Stephen F. Cohen in *The Nation*, May 3, 1986.

"Nicaragua will not disarm"

MANAGUA — More than 100,000 people marched to this city's Plaza de la Revolucion on May 1, demonstrating their support for the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and repudiating Reagan's policy of support for the contra mercenaries. Under a blistering midday sun they heard President Daniel Ortega say that Nicaragua will not disarm itself or negotiate with the US-backed counterrevolution.

HECTOR TOBAR

Ortega's declarations came amidst a rapidly changing diplomatic climate, in which Nicaragua has become increasingly isolated. The Sandinistas have, in the past few weeks, come under strong pressure to sign the most recent peace treaty proposed by the Contadora nations — Colombia, Venezuela, Panama and Mexico.

Under this Contadora proposal, all Central American nations would be required to observe "a moratorium on the acquisition of new weapons." The proposal does not, however, make any demands on the United States, which could continue to fund the counterrevolution even if the Contadora treaty were signed.

Central American nations, which themselves are under strong US pressure, are pushing for the signing of the treaty on June 8. Recently elected President Oscar Arias of Costa Rica called this a "sacred date."

Nicaragua was the only country willing to sign a much different version of the Contadora treaty in September 1984. The Reagan administration dismissed the Sandinista offer at that time as a "propaganda ploy."

In his May Day speech, Ortega said that Nicaragua wants peace and is willing to discuss the remaining points of the Contadora peace treaty. But it "cannot sign or execute this act as long as the direct and indirect aggression, or aggression in any form, by the United States against Nicaragua, does not cease."

"The United States spends billions of dollars on weapons that endanger the lives of the men who work the land," Ortega said, "but raises a scandal when Nicaragua resorts to international solidarity so that the

people can have the arms necessary to defend themselves against Yankee aggression."

Ortega concluded that the FSLN and the government of Nicaragua will "continue to defend the right of the Nicaraguan people to arm themselves."

The mood in the Plaza was one of celebration and defiance. The festivities had begun the night before in Managua's working-class neighborhoods with bonfires and "socio-dramas," popular street theater with political themes.

Marchers began to leave for the Plaza in the early morning, arriving in contingents representing trade unions, schools and neighborhood committees. In the Plaza itself people danced and formed human pyramids to raise the red and black flag of the FSLN above the heads of the crowd.

Ortega's speech was interrupted several times as the crowd raised fists in the air and chanted "no pasaran" ("they shall not pass") and "un solo ejercito" ("one unified army"). The strongest reaction was to Ortega's reaffirmation of the FSLN's commitment never to negotiate with the US-backed contra mercenaries.

A student and part-time employee of the Ministry of the Interior who attended the celebrations agreed with Ortega. "Reagan has already said he is a contra. So we won't talk to the contras, but to Reagan, the 'jefe' [chief] of the contras."

The contra war continues to wreak havoc on Nicaraguan society. More than 14,000 Nicaraguans have died since 1980 as a result of the war. The war claimed 1,811 victims in the first four months of this year alone.

On May 9, four teachers and three

merchants were assassinated by contra mercenaries in two ambushes near Chontales in Northern Nicaragua. Attacks against trained personnel and technicians are common.

Despite the widespread repudiation of US aggression, strong divisions exist among Nicaragua's various political parties and trade unions. This introduced a certain sour note into the preparations for the May Day demonstrations, for which the pro-Sandinista unions proposed that all of the working class should join together.

Talks for a unified May Day celebration began in January with the participation of the Sandinista Workers Federation (CST) and several non-Sandinista labor federations, including the Council on Trade Union Unification (CUS), the Federation of Trade Union Unity and Action (CAUS), the Nicaraguan Workers Federation (CTN), and the General Workers Federation-Independent (CGT-I).

The CUS is a right-wing confederation known to have close ties to the CIA-financed American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD). The CTN is affiliated with the conservative People's Social Christian Party. The CAUS is led by the Nicaraguan Communist Party (PCN). Each of these groups has approximately 1,000 to 3,000 members.

The CGT-I, affiliated with the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN), is the largest non-Sandinista labor confederation, with 17,000 members. The CST and other Sandinista unions have approximately 202,000 members.

An unholy alliance

The non-Sandinista unions withdrew from the talks almost immediately, protesting the presence of other Sandinista trade unions in the committee. The CUS, CAUS, CTN and CGT-I then formed the Committee for the Celebration of May Day — Martyrs of Chicago. The unions led by the PCN and PSN, two pro-Moscow Stalinist parties, thus found themselves allied with the right-wing, pro-capitalist trade unions.

This alliance between the far right and "ultraleft" is not uncommon. In a recent issue of *Avance*, the official organ of the PCN, party leader Eli Altamirano "saluted" the right-wing parties, the PSN, and the Catholic hierarchy for having a favorable attitude toward a dialogue with the contras, whom he euphemistically called the "Nicaraguans in arms." Altamirano added that "the

thesis of national dialogue is the most patriotic thesis that can be defended in our country today."

Eventually, though, talks between the "ultraleft" and right-wing trade unions opposed to the Sandinistas also broke down. As a result, at least three demonstrations were held on May Day.

Apart from the official Sandinista demonstration, the CTN held a Catholic mass, led by Cardinal Miguel Obando. The CAUS and the CGT-I joined in a rally at the Plaza Ana Maria. Both opposition rallies drew approximately 1,500 people.

These same political parties are represented in the National Assembly, which has recently concluded the first step in the elaboration of a new constitution. The Sandinistas see the constitution as a formalization of the revolutionary power conquered by the people in July 1979. The final version of the constitution is scheduled to be voted on later this year.

The drafting of the constitution has been strongly opposed by the US government. In fact, the Reagan administration has stated that direct talks between the United States and Nicaragua can only resume if the National Assembly is dissolved and new elections are held, this time including the *contras*.

The Independent Liberal Party (PLI), a capitalist party with two deputies in the assembly, has already withdrawn from the constitutional process, and other parties are under heavy pressure from the US Embassy to follow suit.

The capitalist opposition has argued that the social and political conditions for the elaboration of a constitution do not exist in Nicaragua.

The leader of the PLI, Vigilio Godoy Reyes, opposed the idea of a

public discussion of the constitution altogether. "There can be no freedom of expression regarding the constitution while a state of emergency is in effect," he said.

"Freedom of expression exists in Nicaragua," replied Jose Luis Villavicencio, the FSLN's parliamentary fraction coordinator in the assembly. "But freedom of information is regulated. *La Prensa* would like to do to our revolution what *El Mercurio* did to Allende in Chile — confuse the masses and undermine the government. We cannot permit that." *La Prensa* has been censored by the government because it continues to publish stories aimed at sabotaging Nicaragua's defence efforts.

But in spite of this opposition, the elaboration of the constitution continues. The main points of a draft prepared by the National Assembly and approved by the FSLN on May 8 will be discussed in 84 public "town meetings" scheduled to begin this month.

The draft of the constitution, according to Villavicencio, is modeled on the Swedish parliamentary system. The future government would be based on an elected president, assembly and municipal councils.

The drafters of the constitution specifically rejected creating a national governing structure based on the mass organizations, unions and Sandinista Defense Committees (CDS), that is, a national council of organs of people's power.

Asked why the drafters chose not to even represent the mass organizations directly in the new form of government, Villavicencio responded that it was "merely a juridical question." He said the unions and mass organizations would be represented indirectly through the elected legis-

lators of the FSLN.

The capitalist parties have nonetheless opposed the draft. They claim it leaves the main structures of Sandinista power intact — despite its recognition of the principles of political pluralism and the mixed economy. Many conservative leaders, for example, have called for fundamental changes in the nature of the Popular Sandinista Army, which they say functions as the armed branch of the FSLN rather than as a national army.

It seems highly unlikely, however, that the FSLN will permit any fundamental changes in the structure of the armed forces while the country is in a state of war. Moreover, the creation of a mass popular army is currently at the heart of the Sandinista's conception of revolutionary democracy.

In a speech to a congress of Brazilian sociologists last March, FSLN Commander Tomas Borge pointed out that in Nicaragua "There is no more radical or consistent way to be democratic than the Sandinista slogan: All arms to the people."

Indeed, since the beginning of the US war on Nicaragua, over 300,000 rifles have been given to the workers and peasants. These arms can be seen everywhere carried by members of the Sandinista Army, the Reserve Military Police and the People's Militias. Workers and peasants guarding their factories and farms also carry guns and are allowed to take them home.

"If our government didn't have the support of the people, if it weren't a democratic government, don't you think these guns would be turned against the government?" asked Villavicencio. The question did not require an answer. □

More than 80,000 people participated in the May Day rally in Managua (DR)



Debate on Nicaragua

THE SECOND issue of Czech *Inprekor*, published on May 1, 1986, contains a series of articles on Nicaragua. Included in this dossier is an open letter to Nicaraguan president Daniel Ortega from Czechoslovakian human rights activists, who have previously signed statements defending Nicaragua against US aggression.

This open letter is reproduced here, along with a response to it which was published in French *Inprecor*. (Translation by Intercontinental Press).

JEAN-PIERRE RIEL and HUBERT SANDOR

In the countries of so-called "real socialism", they always refer to Nicaragua as "a small country exposed to imperialist aggression and fighting for its dignity", and so on. But who really cares about it? Who has the intellectual courage to ask whether, despite the official propaganda, it isn't in fact true that this is a small country strangled by the US government and "fighting for its dignity"?

Who now have the simple courage not to limit themselves to introspection, but rather to try to act to correct what appears to be bad, and in so doing, to encroach on the regime's private preserve: its monopoly over politics?

Ten Czechoslovak citizens had that courage in the letter we are publishing here. We are making this letter known because it raises real questions and is of interest to all those in the world who support the revolution in Nicaragua.

We state first of all that we are in agreement with the basic points of the letter:

Yes, "the fight for human dignity and freedom, the fight for social justice and the fight for equal rights of peoples and nations are one and the same struggle; the emancipatory battles in Eastern Europe and Latin America are part and parcel alike of that struggle".

Yes, too, to the idea that the main strength of a revolution lies in the conscious mobilization of its "free supporters".

Yes, also, to the assessment that any internal evolution that implies a negation of the ideals, under the pretext of "saving" the revolution, can only lead sooner or later to the de-

mobilization of the population and the establishment of a bureaucratic dictatorship, a "new system of repression and manipulation".

We are convinced, based on the record of Stalinism, that industrialization and the satisfaction of the needs of a society that starts out neo-colonialized and largely backward are accomplished at a considerable price in material, human, cultural and political terms if the state apparatus is left uncontrolled.

In other words, in our view economic and political democracy is not simply a balm for the spirit — something good for the developed countries.

Democracy is certainly difficult to achieve in the "backward" coun-

Matagalpa market (DR)



tries, but it is also urgent. Even if it cannot fully exist in a society that is still poor and where there is inequality on the social and cultural planes, democratization of all aspects of people's daily life, their growing, collective and individual responsibility, must guide the acts and measures undertaken by a revolutionary government.

We are convinced that this is a revolution's best defence against its internal and external enemies.

But we also fully recognize the right of such a society to defend itself against its aggressors. All the so-called developed and democratic societies have censored calls for desertion during wartime [such calls were made by the magazine of the Nicaraguan bishops, which was prohibited by the government].

In defence of the laws recently enacted by the government of Nicaragua, Jean Ziegler, representing the Socialist International, pointed to the draconian legal measures [prohibition of the right to strike and the right of assembly] carried out by his country, Switzerland, during the last world war, even though it was officially neutral.

A country at war

Before discussing in detail this or that measure adopted by the government of Nicaragua, we therefore feel it is indispensable to point out that Nicaragua is at war. And not solely against an armed external intervention: the real maintenance of forms of mixed economy allows speculators to use the formidable weapon of money, when that is rare

and mobilized for the front. *Radio Catolico* was not closed for stating that "freedom is a great gift from God", but rather for repeatedly broadcasting homilies against military service.

Radio Catolico's "pacifist" propaganda should not bring down any administrative repression, but only on one condition: that the others, the contras, also limit themselves to propaganda. But the contras wage war, not sermons. In this respect there is a division of labour within the perspective of developing a real civil war.

Overall, our disagreement with the text of the open letter is undoubt-

edly more a question of a concrete evaluation of the situation in Nicaragua than a disagreement over principles.

The state of emergency is not, or is barely, applied in Nicaragua, which still lives within the framework of a pluralism of the press and the media that is quite remarkable for a poor country, and one at war. This is, moreover, a country that, in contrast to Vietnam for example, is very largely open to the activities of international commissions of inquiry from all sides.

No one of good faith can, in the present circumstances, deny the Sandinista government the right to

decree the state of emergency, that is, certain forms of limiting freedoms, including prohibiting strikes or meetings. But at the same time, the independent organization and free mobilization of the actors of the revolution is the only solution not only to establish a future society that is worth the trouble, but also to win the war now.

This raises a terrible, almost insoluble, difficulty. Was it necessary to make such a general formulation of the prohibition of the right to assembly and the right to strike, a formulation that in the hands of a Stalinist regime would surely mean the death of the revolution? Even

Open letter to Daniel Ortega

ACCORDING to a Voice of America broadcast on November 1, 1985 (the Czech language 6 am transmission), the Nicaraguan government ordered a two-day suspension of broadcasting by the independent radio station *Radio Catolico* so as to punish the station for having transmitted a recent sermon by the bishop of Managua which included two sentences which Voice of America claimed were the cause of the government's ban. The first sentence states that freedom is a great gift from God to mankind, while the second maintains that it is wrong and against the will of God to take away one's neighbour's freedom.

We are signatories of the appeal by European intellectuals "Nicaragua has the right to peace", the text of which has been sent, along with a list of Czechoslovak citizens who appended their signatures to it last May, to the Nicaraguan Embassy in Prague. Some of us are also signatories of a declaration signed jointly by people in the USA and Eastern Europe [which was published in the *New York Times* on December 1, 1985].

Both of these texts call for non-interference in the affairs of Nicaragua and specifically for a halt to the sending of material assistance to the anti-Sandinista armed resistance. In varying degrees the texts express support for the courageous people of your country; they also refer to national independence and the right of nations to decide their fate in all independence. With the knowledge we have of the situation in Latin America, including Nicaragua, we can well appreciate that the question of human rights can and must assume a different aspect in a country suffering from material poverty which is furthermore the victim of an economic embargo and military incursions, in contrast to a country like Czechoslovakia, for instance, whose superficially well-functioning economy ensures its citizens a general level of prosperity and a fair consumption of material and cultural commodities — at least, from the point of view of people in the Third World.

The fact that activists from different citizens' campaigns here insist so strongly on the implementation of political, civil and cultural rights, and that they fight for a more democratically run society as well as their society's greater independence from the Soviet Union, might viewed in this way seem strangely eccentric. We could of course understand such a misconstruction of our demands, but there is no way we can reconcile ourselves to it, since the fight for human dignity and freedom, the fight for social justice, and the fight for equal rights of peoples and nations are one and the same struggle: the emancipatory battles in Eastern Europe and Latin America are

part and parcel alike of that struggle. And it is out of our feelings of solidarity with the oppressed that, on the occasion of this regrettable action against *Radio Catolico*, we wish to express our grave concern over developments in Nicaragua in the field of human rights and regarding the future of democracy in your country.

The recent declaration of a state of emergency, as a result of which numerous personal liberties and rights, including the right to strike, have been abolished or curtailed, cannot be justified in our view solely in terms of the military incursion by anti-Sandinista units operating from Honduras and Costa Rica. The counter-revolutionary onslaught will either be defeated by the free supporters of the revolution or the revolution will perish. In such a case it does not seem to matter too much if its defeat will be caused by outside intervention or an internal development which negates all the revolution's ideals and which, with the so-called aim of "saving the revolution", gradually sets up a bureaucratic dictatorship, a new system of repression and manipulation with empty slogans and full jails. There are many who are able to find something positive even in such a development. In Latin America, for instance, there are those who point to the "positive" side of just such a development in Cuba.

However, we live on a different part of the planet, and our purpose here is to convey to you the historical experience of Europe and particularly of its Eastern half, whose lamentable situation (and not only in the field of human rights and political democracy, but in economic terms too!) is especially glaring in comparison with Western Europe. It is paradoxical that in countries that have carried out national democratic and social revolutions in the name of the rights of working people, of the proletariat, and of the free development of every member of society these rights are fewer (that is if they exist at all) than in countries where those revolutions have not occurred.

These are the questions which strike us when we contemplate the future of the Sandinista revolution. We protested against American support for the military attacks on your revolution because we consider that US policy on Nicaragua is detrimental to the cause of human emancipation. But now that we feel that this cause is being seriously jeopardized from within, it is to you that we address our sincere concern.

Jiri Dienstbier, Zuzana Dienstbierova, Ladislav Hejdanek, Eva Kanturkova, Lubos Kohout, Vaclav Maly, Milos Rejchrt, Jaroslav Sabata, Anna Sabatova Jr., Petr Uhl.

though it is used only as a threat against the supporters of the counter-revolution. All the reports that we have seen confirm that so far this is how it has been used. But from the vantage point of external support, the Sandinista government has provided sticks with which to be beaten, making defence of their regime more difficult in the countries where the struggle for human rights is an essential precondition for gaining support.

Defence through mobilization

The Nicaraguan revolution does not seem to us to be threatened at present by a bureaucratic dictatorial course. And it needs to defend itself, including with arms. It can find its best defence in the mobilization of the social layers that suffered misery

under the Somozaist dictatorship. And we should not hide the fact that this mobilization is ever more difficult due to the growing difficulties of daily life. This involves choices and therefore conflicts, not only with the segment of the population that ardently hopes for a social and political order that would perpetuate their privileges and that finds hypocritical support in the "free world", but also with layers of the common people who are weary of so many privations.

For its very defence, the revolution will have to deepen, not repress, democratic rights. It is true that the measures recently taken provide the legal possibility for such repression. But to judge the Sandinista regime on the basis of that possibility is as dangerous as judging the regime of the late Stalin by the constitution that he bestowed on the people and which, as everyone knows, was "the most democratic in the world".

US strategy in Nicaragua is clear to maintain an economic blockade and military harassment, so that the population's material gains are reduced to nothing; and then to brandish the weapon of democracy while praying that a segment of the population grows tired and awaits the aid of "the American big brother".

There it is. All this means that on the basis of a common philosophy the signers of the open letter, starting from their experience in Eastern Europe, shine another light on what is happening in Nicaragua.

We feel that their light is useful for ours, because history teaches that in the name of the struggle against immediate dangers, the risk is great of mortgaging the future. Even so, you must fight for there to be a future. We are convinced that this is the thrust of the present struggle of the Sandinistas, even if they have made errors and may make more of them in the future. □



Gains and contradictions of the economic situation

IN THE DAYS following the revolutionary victory of July 1979, the confiscation of the businesses and private lands of deposed dictator Anastasio Somoza and his followers gave birth to a nationalized sector called "Area de Propiedad del Pueblo" (APP - People's Property Sector). This also included the financial system, insurance and all natural resources. At the same time, a cooperative sector was promoted, mainly for small- and medium-scale agricultural producers.

The article below looks at the progress made by the Sandinistas since the revolution in rebuilding their economy and the problems that they still face.

JEAN-PIERRE RIEL

As well as establishing the APP, the Sandinista leaders also affirmed the necessity of maintaining a significant private sector. Profound transformations were imposed on the latter: the most archaic forms of exploitation were abolished, active participation of workers in the running of their workplaces was instituted and at the same time trade unions were encouraged. By means of credit, production contracts, wage and price controls and some control of foreign trade, the state was able to exercise indirect control over the private sector.

Six years later, in July 1985, Tomas Borge, a Sandinista leader and minister of the interior of the Nicaraguan government, said of this particular system of mixed economy:

"Rather than being the product of a conscious wish, this was a necessary response, first of all tactically, then strategically . . . to an exceptional combination of adverse factors". (1)

For the Sandinistas, the possibility of going for a rapid and generalized nationalization of the economy could not be seriously contemplated. The major reasons for this were the demands of reconstruction at the end of the civil war, the geopolitical environment (in the "backyard" of the United States) and the effects of dependence and underdevelopment after four decades of the dictatorship.

Some of the newly nationalized concerns - those where capital was

already concentrated and wage relations developed - were able to lay the basis for some modernization and accumulation, but this was far from sufficient to provide the foundation of a new development strategy. How could substitutes be found quickly for the two-thirds of agricultural exports that were concentrated in three products: sugar, coffee and cotton? These sectors alone provided 75% of export income and a good 80% of the accumulated surplus, occupied 45% of cultivated land and represented more than a third of capital and of productive investment.

A rapid and large-scale restructuring of this sector would have involved risks of disorganization and impoverishment. What is more, neither the peasants, the embryonic industries nor the service sector would have been able in the foreseeable future to provide an equivalent surplus. In reality, only external financing could provide the supplementary resources that were vital in the short and medium term.

It is in this context that the Sandinistas chose to accept two major constraints which, ever since, have weighed heavily on the tempo and the nature of the economic changes: the repayment of the foreign debt and the maintenance within the state of large private landholdings essentially engaged in the agricultural-export business.

Breaking immediately with the world market and denouncing the

debt accumulated by Somoza in isolation would have meant having to rely completely on the Soviet Union and its allies for all sources of finance - and the limits of this relative to the needs were well known. In the short term, political isolation and economic collapse would have been inevitable. A rapid dismantling of the large agricultural estates would have meant forfeiting the only available foreign currency income. Moreover, it would involve taking the initiative in breaking up the alliance made with the anti-Somoza wing of the bourgeoisie in the course of the fight against the dictatorship and precipitating new social confrontations.

Today, the nationalized sector accounts for 40% of the gross domestic product, and the private sector of large- and medium-sized estates about 30%. But if you include the small landowners and the cooperatives, the private sector still represents 60% of total production.

The cooperative sector is still extremely small: at the end of 1985, agricultural cooperatives represented a little less than 10% of cultivated land. In industry and commerce, cooperatives are still in an embryonic stage.

While its growth is still limited, the cooperative sector is strategically central in the long term. The objective is for cooperatives to become dominant within the peasant economy.

"Alliance for production"

These outlines of the mixed economy have emerged over time, more as a product of the economic and political constraints of the day than of a theoretical model. According to the repeated declarations of the Nicaraguan leaders, the mixed economy is not seen as a stage on the road to a total collectivization of the economy. On the contrary it is an attempt to stabilize society in the framework of an "alliance for production" with the most economically dynamic and politically and socially open-minded sections of the bourgeoisie. It is also an expression of the political will to preserve a framework that contributed historically to speeding up the fall of the Somozaist dictatorship and which was the instrument of the original struggle against underdevelopment.

1. Tomas Borge made identical remarks in an interview in the Nicaraguan magazine 'Pensamiento Propio', reprinted in 'International Viewpoint', No. 84, October 14, 1985.

For Commandante Jaime Wheelock, the minister of agrarian reform, such coexistence between revolutionary control and the "productive" bourgeoisie is possible: "With this plan, we must establish whether or not the bourgeoisie are prepared to continue production, whether they will restrict themselves to this role as a productive class; in other words, whether they will confine themselves to exploiting their means of production, using them to make a living, and not as instruments for power and oppression. I think that this is possible in Nicaragua. . . . I think that in the conditions existing in the Third World . . . it is possible to find methods of social organization in which a dominant revolutionary force can maintain modes of production and the nuclei of production relations that are not dominant but subordinate". (2)

The extent of North American military aggression during the last three years makes it difficult to make an assessment of this orientation. Such attacks now serve the purpose of reinforcing Reagan's economic embargo and the international crisis to smother Nicaragua economically and keep the revolution from implementing its programme for developing the country.

Half of the state's budget has to be allocated to defence spending. In 1985, in addition, the servicing of the external debt represented more than half of export revenue. (Although exports have remained a stable quantity physically, they have fallen in value when calculated in dollars.) (3)

The growing war zones have now

spread to the vital economic regions: the north, which provides a substantial portion of the food production, and the central region, which produces coffee and meat.

Taking into account these constraints, two economic successes and two glaring failures can be noted.

One achievement has been the agrarian reform, which, outside the war zones, has progressed slowly but has accomplished more diversified production and higher productivity.

The other big success has been the reorientation of the flow of trading and international finance. New suppliers and new markets have been found simultaneously in the countries belonging to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON), in Western Europe and among the countries of the Third World (the Middle East and Latin America). Where external finance is concerned, the debt has been spread between international institutions, the Western European countries, COMECON and the oil-producing countries. But the now systematic use by the United States of their right of veto in international institutions is obstructing all financial negotiations.

A big setback is the failure to revive industry, which lost its traditional markets with the collapse of the Central American common market and has been bogged down by its out-of-date productive plants. Although industry no longer really employs more than 14% of the active population, this problem largely explains the stagnation of productive employment in the towns, and particularly in Managua. (4)

Above all, attempts to control distribution, commerce and speculation have failed. The economic, social and political implications of this require a more detailed analysis.

During the first two years of the Sandinista government, the immediate tasks of reconstruction were of such a scope as to push the growth rate above that of the rest of Latin America. The owners of the means of production, the large landowners, had their income guaranteed on condition that they accepted the loss of political power. On the other hand, the standard of living of the poorest sections of the population increased, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The social base of the revolution was the first to benefit from the considerable efforts made in the fields of education, health and food supplies.

From 1981 to 1983, the first attacks carried out by the United States obliged the revolutionary government to make a dramatic change in import policy. Only those imports were continued that were given priority for the sake of economic development. The middle layers, whose way of life led to their consuming most of the imports, were the most severely affected. By contrast, the overall standard of living of the masses was maintained and the prices of the components of a "basic food basket" were controlled.

To achieve this result a system of subsidies was applied to necessities, reducing their price to the consumer. Everyone throughout Nicaragua could take advantage of these subsidies for a limited quantity of goods per person. It could then be less expensive for peasants to buy their food this way,

Worker at a nationalized textile factory in Managua (DR)



2. Jaime Wheelock is one of the nine members of the national leadership of the FSLN. He has headed the National Institute for Agrarian Reform (INRA) since its creation in the days following the overthrow of Somoza, and he combines this responsibility with that of director of the Ministry for Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform. In a book called 'Between crisis and aggression: the Sandinista's agrarian reform', Wheelock sums up the principal objectives of the agrarian changes made in Nicaragua.

3. The Sandinista people's army has to maintain 50,000 people in uniform, that is to say 11.6% of waged urban and rural manual workers. The Agencia Nueva Nicaragua (New Nicaragua Agency), in the March 8, 1986, issue of their weekly information bulletin published in Paris, notes that "non-official sources report that national defence will absorb 70% of the state's budget. According to official calculations, in 1985 the various American aggressions — military, commercial and financial — cost Nicaragua 608 million dollars, that is 26.1% of the gross domestic product (GDP)."

4. "While the primary sector and the secondary sector in 1985 represented respectively (according to the figures of the Planning and Budget Secretariat) 25.1% and 17.3% of the GDP, the tertiary sector reached 47.6%, which illustrates the weight here of unproductive activities." (From 'Agencia Nueva Nicaragua Bulletin', Paris, March 8, 1986).

because the selling price was sometimes lower than the production cost. From 1984 on, the growing expense of the war and its effects on the economic situation made it impossible to continue to uphold the standard of living of the masses. In that year, it is estimated that the buying power of the minimum wage declined by 30%.

The economic measures taken at the beginning of 1985 reinforced this trend. The subsidies on basic goods, having become too great a burden on the budget, had to be progressively eliminated, thus ensuring price rises. (5) Inasmuch as spending on such products was an important proportion of the expenditure of families on moderate incomes, it was the poorest sections of the population who suffered the consequences of these measures.

It was proposed at the same time to increase the wages of productive workers and open up food centres reserved for them alone. Wages were indeed raised, but at a pace clearly slower than the rise in prices. As for the food centres, they were too often set up and run in accordance with administrative criteria far removed from people's day-to-day needs.

Decline in living standards

This decline in the standard of living is all the more worrying because it has not affected all sections of society equally.

In Managua, none of the problems associated with the informal sector — the sector parallel to the official economy, concerned above all with trade and commerce — are on their way to being resolved. (6) A large component of this sector are profiting from inflation and taking advantage of supply problems to hoard and speculate.

What is involved is not just shady practices of easily identifiable layers of the bourgeoisie, but a problem that has deep and multiple roots.

The population of Managua is growing at a rate of 6% a year, notably due to the rural exodus. The city now has one million inhabitants, representing a third of the country's population. Now, as we have seen, the number of productive workers remains stable. The uncontrolled rise of the urban population, therefore, is swelling the percentage of those engaged in one way or another in the informal sector.

It is estimated that more than half of the economically active population of the capital are self-employed as street vendors, craft workers or odd-jobbers. The discrepancy between this



For the 50th anniversary of the death of Sandino (DR)

sector and that of productive workers is such that an ice-cream peddler can expect to earn three times the official minimum wage.

Conditions are made more difficult all the time because of North American aggression. But the source of the most flagrant inequalities lies in the compromises deemed necessary by the Sandinista leadership to maintain a mixed-economy system.

With a few exceptions, the anti-Somozaist bourgeoisie, dispossessed from political power and from control of the state apparatus, have rapidly come to refuse to collaborate positively and actively in rebuilding the country, or to take their place loyally in the "alliance for production" that they themselves proposed.

Since 1980, the Nicaraguan private sector has received a larger slice of government credits (54%) than the public sector (46%). Certain enterprises have benefited, and continue to benefit, from substantial tax advantages and even subsidies in dollars. But during this period the overwhelming majority of productive investments have been made by the public sector.

Taking advantage of the declining effectiveness of the controls instituted by the state — due largely to the war — a number of the beneficiaries of these funds have injected them into speculative areas.

The cost of this parasitic behaviour and sabotage — encouraged daily "in the name of liberty" by the newspaper *La Prensa* or the independent radio stations such as *Radio Catolico* — adds to the expense of the defence effort.

It is becoming constantly more intolerable economically, but also socially and politically.

It is essentially the rural and urban working class that has to bear the burden.

Previously, the Sandinista leadership had appealed mainly to the political consciousness of the workers and peasants, explaining the dangers threatening the revolution and its fundamental gains. At the same time, they spared no effort to get the bourgeoisie finally to take a constructive attitude.

The choices made in favour of political and trade-union pluralism have not been called into question. They required the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to take the lead in providing explanations, in convincing people of its orientation and in promoting a sustained growth of the mass movement.

But a revolution cannot for long continue to demand that those it recognizes as its social driving force accept a fall in their real income and an increasing decline in their living conditions, if sacrifices are not also imposed on the private landlords and the businesspeople who speculate.

It is only by new advances in the latter direction that what Tomas Borge regrettably called the "confusion in the minds of the masses about the mixed economy" will be dispelled. (7) □

5. See 'IV', No. 84, October 14, 1985.

6. On the scope of the informal sector, see 'IV', No. 84, October 14, 1985.

7. Ibid.

AROUND THE WORLD



France

'Télé est a vous?'

THE PROPOSAL of the new French minister of culture and communications, Francois Leotard, to sell off the main public TV channel, TF-1, has shaped up as the first major battle over the rightist government's policy of privatization.

On May 21, 50 per cent of the personnel of TF-1 participated in a one-day strike against privatization. Thousands rallied at the Eiffel Tower to protest against the proposal.

Today, the French public broadcasting service employs 18,000 people, divided among three channels (TF-1, Antenne-2, and France Regionale-3); a public broadcasting department, TDF; a TV production company, the Societe Francaise de Production (SFP); a national radio corporation, Radio France (which includes also Radio France Internationale and Radio France Outre-Mer, an overseas territories service); two computer management agencies (GIRATEV); and a communications service, FMI.

This figure of 18,000 employees in French public broadcasting compares with 24,000 employees of the two BBC channels in Britain.

In all, the French public broadcasting system has an annual budget of 14,000 million francs, about 2,000 million US dollars. For the sake of comparison, the turnover of the major US TV network, CBS, was 360.6 million dollars in 1985.

The proposed sell-off of TF-1 was clearly intended to be the wedge for a much wider privatization. For example, about 50 per cent of the SFP's orders come from TF-1. That is only one indication of the snowball effect that the privatization of TF-1 would have.

What the TF-1 workers feared in particular was that privatization would lead to layoffs, since the American networks have been reducing their staffs considerably in the context of the economic crisis and lower advertising revenues.

The government, moreover, apparently chose public broadcasting as the first battleground of privatization for ideological reasons. In this area, it thought it could present a sell-off to private capitalists as an extension of individual freedoms. Leotard claimed that his proposal would "increase the spaces for free-

dom and healthy competition in the country's communications system."

In fact, the major buyer is likely to be the press mogul Robert Hersant, who has not distinguished himself as a contributor to the expansion of human freedoms, any more than Rupert Murdoch.

So, the rightist government's attack on public broadcasting has tended to rebound. Before the proposal for selling off TF-1, public opinion polls showed a majority favorable to privatization. Now they show a major shift against it. That has led other sections of public workers threatened by privatization schemes, such as postal and telecommunications workers, to tend to rally around the defence of public broadcasting.

The unpopularity of the privatization scheme is also shown by campaigns in defence of TF-1 launched by mass-circulation magazines such as *Telerama*, *Evenement de Jeudi* and *l'Autre Journal*.

Furthermore, the rightist partisans of "liberty" could not hide their reactionary big teeth. For example, the secretary of state for tourism, Jean-Jacques Descamps said on May 17: "The TV is the most socialist, the most rotten economically and socially."

After the May 21 strike in Paris, the regional broadcasting personnel took the lead in the fight, which is being led by an "Inter-Union Coordinating Committee of the CGT and CFDT" (the majority union in the industry) and the National union of journalists (SNJ), as well as an action committee formed at TF-1 called "La Tele est a vous" ("The TV

Belongs to You").

On Saturday June 7, 10,000 people rallied in the Place de la Republique in Paris against the privatization. There was also a significant demonstration in Toulouse. Other actions are proposed later in June.

The fight in defence of public broadcasting in France also has an international significance, since it comes in the context of attacks on public broadcasting in a series of European countries — for example Britain, as well as Sweden, where there is a proposal to open TV to advertising for the first time. □

Nicaragua

Exemplary healthcare

INFANT mortality in Nicaragua has been reduced by a third, from 120 to 80 per 1,000 live births. This advance was noted by UNICEF, the United Nations children's aid organization, in its "Report on the Situation of Children in the World in 1986," as the most spectacular gain that could be pointed to in the underdeveloped countries.

In 1984, 60% of children under one year of age were vaccinated against chicken pox and 76% against polio. UNICEF attributed these results to the health policy of the Sandinista government. In only four years, the number of clinics has tripled, providing free medical care for 80% of the population. □

[From the May 29 issue of Was Tun paper of the German section of the Fourth International.]



Protest for the 'disappeared'

"HECTOR and Rosario are here!"
"Down with the army's amnesty!"
"Justice!"

These slogans rang out in front of the National Palace in Guatemala City. A lot of the people were squinting to hold back the tears. The five speakers wept openly when they talked about Hector and Rosario and the other 38,000 people who have "disappeared" in Guatemala.

It was the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo [GAM - Mutual Aid Group] that was demonstrating. This group was formed on June 4, 1984, as "a small light of hope in the long night of terror and death."

GAM says that it was love for a spouse, a relative or a friend that made it necessary to raise the demand for an investigation and an accounting for the "disappeared" people.

The demonstration commemorated Hector and Rosario, two leaders of GAM that were murdered. Hector Gomez Calito was found on March 30, 1985. He had been murdered and tortured.

On April 4, 1985, Rosario Godoy de Cuevas, her two-year-old son and 21 year-old brother were murdered. Their bodies showed marks of whips and were badly lacerated.

The demonstration expressed both sorrow and determination. The marchers, mostly Indians, carried two big wreaths of flowers bearing the names of Hector and Rosario. They also carried pictures of their murdered leaders.

The whole demonstration was filmed by a rotating camera on top of the entrance to the National Palace. Around it circulated heavily armed soldiers and members of Guatemala's secret police, largely built up by Israel, which is also the main military support of Guatemala.

"We did what we had to. We had to know about the disappeared people. Despite precise questions, the new president Vinicio Cerezo has not given us any answer," one of the speakers said.

Another demonstrator recounted: "Between January and March, under a democratic government, 300 people have disappeared. That is a little less than before, but the disappearances are continuing under this government.

"In 1984, 3,000 people disappeared. But the only information the authorities offer is 'your son has gone to the US to make money, he has gone off with the subversives,



or your husband has found another woman.'"

The woman demonstrator continued: "The amnesty law, or Decree 8-86, that we are protesting against involves exonerating the military for any crimes committed since 1982. That is why we are demanding justice."

The demonstration broke up after an hour. Later, in the afternoon, a memorial mass was held for Hector and Rosario.

A few days later, I met two GAM members in their home near the university. They were two sisters who had lost their brother. San Carlos was murdered in 1981 at the university by the military. Soldiers stormed onto the campus and shot down 15 students. The women and I went into a little room in the middle of the house so that our conversation could not be heard outside.

"The organization has 50-60 members that show themselves publicly. Altogether, we have several thousand members active in different ways."

The younger sister closed the window. She was worried that someone might hear us.

"Yesterday, a policeman was here," she said. "He did not say anything. He just looked around."

I asked: "What is the importance of the European trip that your chairperson, Nineth Montenegro, has just undertaken?"

"For us, it is very important to spread information about our work

and about the situation in Guatemala," the elder sister said. "We hope also that we can get support for our work from other countries."

I asked: "Won't it be dangerous for Nineth Montenegro to return to Guatemala after her trip?"

"We hope and we trust that she will be able to return without difficulty. Members of parliament in Great Britain, France and West Germany have nominated GAM for the Nobel Peace Prize. The organization is worthy of it." □

Goeran Jacobsson

[From the May 22 issue of *Internationa*len, the paper of the Swedish section of the Fourth International.]

West Bank

Secure chickens!

THREE residents of the Arab village of Artas in the Gush Etzion area on the West Bank appealed to the Israeli High Court of Justice on May 22 to return lands to them that were confiscated immediately after the 1967 war. According to the May 27 *News From Within*, bulletin of the Alternative Information Center in Jerusalem, the land was originally seized for what the Israeli government called "security purposes." But a few years ago, it was transferred to Jewish settlers who have built houses and chicken coops on it. □

International solidarity needed after Bujak's arrest

IN THE WAKE of the decision of the International Monetary Fund Board of Governors to admit Poland, the Polish political police arrested the main underground Solidarnosc leader, Zbigniew Bujak.

CYRIL SMUGA

On the same day, the police arrested other known activists in Warsaw — Konrad Bielinski, a member of the underground regional leadership of the union; Ewa Kulik, editor of *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, the main underground journal of Solidarnosc, with a weekly circulation of several tens of thousands; and Henryk Wujec, a former elected leader of Solidarnosc in Warsaw.

Wujec was a member of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) and founder of the first workers' journal in "People's Poland," *Robotnik* (which ceased publication in 1981). Unlike Bielinski and Kulik, Henryk Wujec was not underground. This roundup threatens seriously to weaken the Warsaw regional leadership of Solidarnosc.

This blow against Solidarnosc was struck at a time when the very right-wing Warsaw correspondent of the Paris daily *Figaro* was writing: "The Polish government hopes to be able to get the population to accept unpopular but necessary reforms by hiding behind Western experts."

Bujak's arrest was a severe blow for the Polish workers' movement as a whole. This former worker at the Ursus tractor factory in Warsaw made contact with the KOR at the start of 1980.

When the Polish government raised food prices in July 1980, he led the first strike in Ursus. At the time, he tried to organize a workers' commission modeled on the Spanish ones.

Elected chair of Solidarnosc in the Warsaw region, he was also a member of the union's national leadership.

In the fall of 1981, he tried, like the unionists in the Lodz region, to impose social control over distribution in order to combat shortages.

Managing to escape arrest at the time of the December 13, 1981, crackdown, Bujak was one of the founders of the Provisional Under-

ground Leadership (TKK) of Solidarnosc. To the general-strike strategy advocated in particular by unionists in Lower Silesia, he counterposed that of building a counter-society ("an underground society"), which was supposed to force the bureaucracy to negotiate.

To the detriment of building coordination among the factory organizations, this line favored developing other areas of resistance. It was



opposed to any perspective of a central confrontation with the bureaucratic regime and accentuated the divisions within the Polish social movement.

One of the consequences of this has been the recent emergence of political currents within the social movement, in particular a revolutionary socialist current known as the Workers' Opposition, whose perspectives focus around generalizing workers' struggles.

But while Bujak's authority was widely challenged by the Solidarnosc cadres, he remained in the eyes of all the symbol of determined resistance to General Wojciech Jaruzelski's normalization schemes.

Within the TKK, Bujak was the last national leader elected before the imposition of the state of war, and thus he symbolized the continuity of Solidarnosc.

Bujak's arrest comes in the wake of a long series of other arrests of underground leaders. Three union leaders in Lower Silesia (Wladyslaw Frasnikiuk, Piotr Bednarz and Jozef Pinior) were jailed in 1982-83. The Cracow union leaders Stanislaw Handzlik and Wladyslaw Hardek were arrested respectively in 1982 and 1983.

The Poznan underground leader, Janusz Palubicki, was seized in 1983. The Gdansk leaders, Bogdan Lis and Bogdan Borusewicz, were picked up respectively in 1984 and 1985. And finally Tadeusz Jedynek of Upper Silesia was taken in 1985.

All these arrests have weakened not only the TKK but the movement as a whole. These leaders, properly elected in 1981, represented the continuity of the resistance movement.

Today, the TKK has been reduced to two underground activists, Jan Andrzej Gorny from Upper Silesia and Marek Muszynski from Lower Silesia. Since neither was in the leadership of the union movement before December 1981, their symbolic value is less.

The Communist Party bureaucrats meeting in Warsaw in preparation for their upcoming congress greeted Bujak's arrest with an ovation. But if Jaruzelski hoped to reduce Solidarnosc to impotence by this roundup, his hopes were immediately dashed.

In Warsaw, Wroclaw and Gdansk, the news of Bujak's arrest provoked spontaneous demonstrations. On the same day in Cracow an antinuclear demonstration of several thousand people, organized by the independent organizations, took up the demand for Bujak's release.

Despite increasing repression, the mass resistance to the bureaucracy is continuing and needs international solidarity more than ever. □