

international

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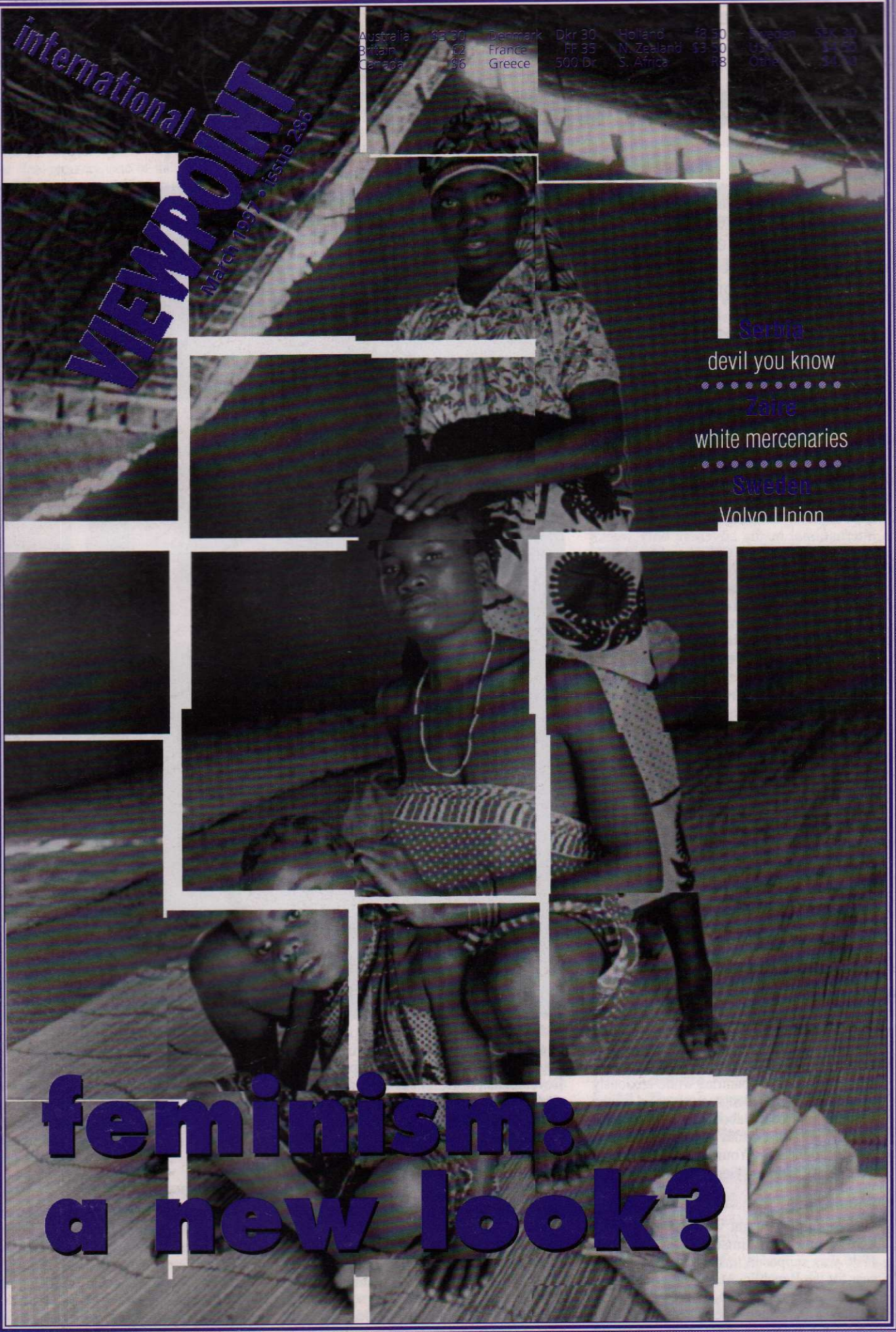
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The Asian miracle evaporates

Should the possibility of collective stupidity be factored into the Marxists analysis of the class struggle? If recent action taken by the Korean government is anything to go by, perhaps it should be.

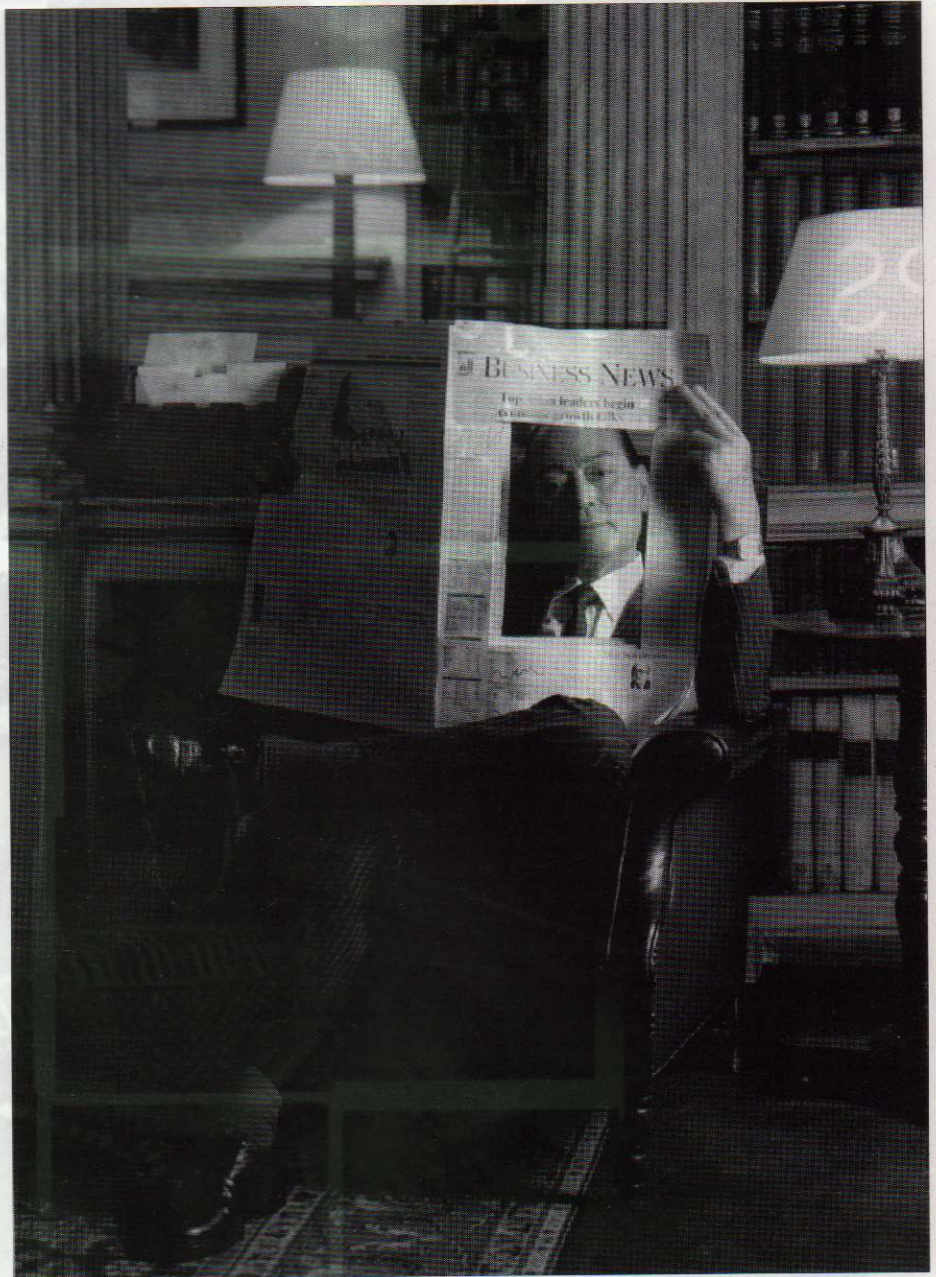
Terry Lawless

[Seoul] — What other name but stupidity can be given to the ramming through of a whole series of legislation in a secret seven minute pre-dawn session of government legislators, which immediately touched off the worst social crisis yet faced by the Kim Young-Sam regime, bringing unprecedented bad international media coverage only weeks after Korea joined the OECD and posing the threat of the biggest general strike in the nation's history? What other name for this action by the political officers of a government supposedly committed to budget deficit management which by its political heavy handedness lost more output in three weeks than in the whole of the previous year? What other name can be given to a government which managed to achieve the greatest degree of union solidarity yet seen in Korea, jolting the conservative and state-sanctioned Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) into an official general strike call in active collaboration with a still-illegal rival organisation?

Perhaps, however, stupidity is merely another name for the ultimately global limitations to political action placed on each national bourgeoisie in the context of a neo-liberal world order. The reason for these "stupid" actions may simply be that the effects of joining the OECD are anticipated to send huge shock waves throughout the Korean economy, bankrupting many firms and businesses and reorganising many local and national markets. The stern measures taken, from this perspective, are unavoidable if Korea is to continue to tread the fine line between competing for a share of key markets with the G-7 countries while anxiously warding off the challenge represented by the substantially lower labour costs in some of the emerging economies of South East Asia. As President Kim Young-Sam said in his New Year's address: "Someone had to do it."

Optimism...

The remark might well have surprised Kim Young-Sam himself a year ago, for 1996 was supposed to have been a banner year for the Republic. At long last, the thirty-year old dream of the former President General Park Chung-Hee was to come true: Korea was to join the ranks of the advanced



countries by becoming a member of the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). All the old arguments about developing countries not being able to afford democracy (which apologists for the eighteen year rule of President Park repeat to this day) might safely be set to one side.

As part of the process that President Kim calls "settling accounts with history", two of the country's former Presidents, Roh Tae-Woo and Chun Doo-Hwan, responsible for the 1979 coup d'état which followed Park's assassination and the 1980 Kwangju Massacre, were put on trial. Chun was even initially sentenced to death. A second set of elections were held which appeared to confirm the implantation of civilian government,

despite the persistent rumours that President Kim's 1992 election campaign had benefited by money it received from Roh Tae-Woo's slush money fund. Korea even succeeded in winning the co-hosting rights to the 2002 World Cup with its long-time imperialist oppressor, Japan.

... and harsh reality

Despite all this, 1996 will be remembered by the Korean bourgeoisie as the year things began to go wrong. An 80% fall in the price of semiconductors was the first of a number of unexpected blows, slicing into the profits of *chaebols* (conglomerates) like Samsung, Hyundai and LG (formerly Lucky Goldstar) and creating knock-on effects in

the auto, steel, electronic and petrochemicals industries. Samsung, which reported a profit of 2.5 trillion Won (\$3 billion US) in 1995 saw that figure reduced by a third in 1996.

Growing pains

The steel industry, one of the other main pillars of the economy, is facing major problems. On January 24 1997, Hanbo Iron and Steel, the second biggest steel producer in Korea, was taken over by four banks following its inability to pay off about 5 trillion won to its creditors. The banks will temporarily provide additional money to complete the world's fifth largest steel complex in South Chungchong Province, although the company's long term future and the short-term financial health of the banks themselves are in doubt. Hanbo ranked 14th in terms of total assets and 18th in terms of annual turnover among Korean *chaebols*; it seems set to become the biggest bankruptcy and possibly the biggest corruption case in Korean history. There are rumours that the son of Kim Young-Sam is implicated in the extension of credit to a company that patently did not warrant such financial trust. To compound the problem, the OECD recently predicted a global overproduction in steel for the turn of the century, and criticised the ambitious expansion plans of Korea and China. As a result, the Korean government has just turned down a request by the Hyundai Group to build a new integrated steel mill.

The 1996 trade deficit was \$20 billion, twice as high as the previous year. Reasons for the deficit included importation of crude oil to support a 9.8% growth in annual energy consumption, increased imports of a range of manufactured goods, and trade imbalances like the \$657 million deficit with Japan in auto parts. There were rumours of the impending take-over by Samsung, the third biggest motor industry *chaebol*, of the seventh, Ssangyong, which has seen mounting losses. Despite a continuing boom in construction, the insolvency rate in the motor industry jumped from 1.9% in 1994 to 6.6% in 1996, when there were 196 bankruptcies out of a list of 2,958 registered firms.

The weakness of the Japanese yen made Korean manufactured goods less attractive, and helped to drive down the value of the Won by 10% against the US dollar. The Korea Stock Price Index (KOSPI) went into free fall, in part due to foreign investment sell offs. It lost 300 points, or a third of its value, over the course of 1996. And despite a still internationally strong growth rate of 6.8%, there were problems with inflation. The rate for 1997 is already anticipated to be 4.5%.

Unemployment

Worst of all perhaps for this nation of hard workers, the unemployment rate continued to creep up. In November 1996 it was 2.2%, and expected to rise, particularly among young university graduates who are coming onto the job market at a time of uncertain transition. The prevailing bourgeois wisdom is that many Korean companies will need to start shedding workers if they wish to remain competitive as Korea opens some

markets to the rest of the world. This corporate restructuring will be accelerated by the highly ambitious changes in the financial sector, which will allow banks, security firms and insurance companies to trespass on each other's domains starting in April 1997.

Entry into the OECD

On December 6 1996, Korea became a member of the OECD. As part of the requirement for greater transparency and international accepted standards of labour relations, the Kim Young-Sam government had set up a Presidential Committee to revise the labour laws. The essential changes that were to be made included a number of provisions which would begin to undermine the high levels of job security presently enjoyed by Korean workers. The new labour law would make it easier to lay off large numbers of workers during periods of restructuring or corporate take-over, introduce the concept of "flexible" work schedules (whereby workers would be available to work at any time during a monthly calculated schedule, thus effectively eliminating overtime pay) and allow for the use of scab labour during strikes.

There were also further provisions which would have ensured a greater level of political freedom for the Korean working class, basically bringing conditions into line with the G-7 countries. At present, Article 12 of the Trade Union Act makes it illegal for unions to engage in any political activities. Three key provisions of the new proposals were the acceptance of the right to form more than one union in a given workplace; the right for third parties (including political activists and parties) to intervene in labour/management disputes; and the right of unions to engage in political activity, up to and including the formation of a workers party. In addition, there was talk of some kind of recognition being offered to civil servants and teachers to form labour associations, which would still fall short of complete union rights.

These changes would have meant that the government had resigned itself to recognising the legality of *Minchu Nochong*, the Korea Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU), which formed after a militant breakaway from the Federation of Korean Trade Unions (FKTU) in 1995. The FKTU currently organises about 1.2 million workers and the KCTU 750,000. The KCTU was instrumental in the waging of a number of key strikes in the summer of 1995, particularly in shipbuilding and car manufacturing. As a result, workers' wages increased by approximately 12% last year. It had been anticipated since last summer that the KCTU would offer some kind of generalised resistance to those aspects of the changes which were detrimental to labour, as union leaders had indicated over the course of the Commission's sitting. When the Commission concluded its investigation without reaching a compromise, President Kim asked that a new document be drawn up which he wished to see passed by the National Assembly at the end of the current parliamentary session.

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Parliamentary Politics

For one week before the extraordinary secret pre-dawn session, currently the subject of a constitutional challenge, the two opposition parties had been waging a filibustering campaign at the National Assembly. This involved a sit-in and the actual physical restraint of the elected members of Kim Young-Sam's New Korea Party (NKP). The opposition wished to see entry into the OECD subject to an extended debate. Following the

April 1996 elections, the NKP had a wafer-thin majority in the National Assembly, because of the secret recruitment of aligned and non-aligned members of parliament. In the week before the secret December 26th session, the United Liberal Democrats were further outraged



by the defection of three senior members of their party to the NKP. So tensions between the parties was quite high.

The main opposition parties, the National Congress for New Politics, led by Kim Dae-Jung, and the United Liberal Democrats, led by Kim Jong-Pil, an old crony of President Park, were set to continue their resistance, at least into the New Year.

It was a great surprise for Korean citizens, when they woke on December 26, to find that some of their legislators had been busy passing twelve pieces of legislation in absolute record time, including a Bill to restore the Agency for National Security Planning, the Korean secret police, which they had decided not to consult the opposition or the nation about. The new labour bill had been modified substantially, retaining all those aspects favourable to management and delaying the implementation of the provision relating to multiple unions in workplaces until the year 2000, thus effectively delaying the legal recognition of the KCTU for another three years.

The Dynamics of the Strike Wave

The reaction of KCTU to the passage of the legislation was instant. As news spread of the session, key sectors of the workforce began to walk out. The industrial town of Ulsan in the south-east of the country was exemplary. Ulsan contains both the largest shipyard and the largest car plant in the world. Altogether, Hyundai has ten factories located here. By December 27, the town was closed down. The three biggest shipyards, Korea Telecom and the major car maker unions at Hyundai, Kia, Daewoo and Ssangyong, also set their tools down on the first day of the strike. This same day the FKTU organised a rally of 10,000 workers in Seoul.

By Saturday December 28, depending on how one counts heads, there were between one half and one million workers on strike as the FKTU asked its members to join in, extending the call for a stoppage until December 31. Fourteen general hospitals, including Seoul National University Hospital, were providing only emergency service. Big industrial cities like Changwon,

Masan, Ansan, Kwangmyong and Kwangju were all seriously affected. The subway workers in Seoul and Pusan were set to go out, although they would be replaced by scab labour. And the taxis and buses declared they would go out on December 30. However one adds it up, it would seem that the events of these first few days represented the biggest organised strike in Korean history. By Monday December 30th, the government, sensing that things were getting out of hand, threatened to arrest twenty of the key union leaders, including seven members of the KCTU who chose to camp out in Myongdong Cathedral, the centre of the Korean version of liberation theology. On the last day of the year, stock prices reached their lowest level in four years.

Kwon Young-Gil, the chair of the KCTU, strategically called a halt to the labour actions in order to allow for the uninterrupted enjoyment of the New Year and to give the government time to think through its foolishness. Meanwhile, the telecommunications and television broadcasting unions threatened action if the law was not rescinded by January 3rd. Bank workers threatened to walk out on January 4th. It is important to stress that at no time were certain key industries shut down in order to minimise public inconvenience: these included railroads and other utilities. Semiconductor and electronic production were also largely unaffected.

Third wave

The general strike resumed after a two day holiday. It is difficult to make exact estimates: the KCTU reported 90,000 workers at 44 businesses while the KCTU announced 150,000 from 553 trade unions as the strike resumed. On January 6th 230,000 more workers were supposed to join in again. The action then began a slow build up to the general strike which was set for January 14-15th. Once again, this would have involved up to a million workers: 250,000 from the KCTU and 750,000 from the FKTU. On January 10, the arrest warrants for the twenty union leaders were produced, while Lee Hong-Koo, the NKP chair, suggested a television debate. The KCTU rejected this as the strike momentum was still very strong.

On Monday January 13th the Trade Union Advisory Committee of the OECD and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions were warned not to interfere in Korea's internal affairs after they sent representatives to rally with the unions. However, the general strike proved not to be as effective as the unions had hoped. Taxis and banks were working for the most part in Seoul on January 15th. There was, however, much more solidarity in Pusan among the taxi unions. On January 17th, the first arrests took place as the government sensed that the unions had lost the initiative; and the KCTU belatedly accepted the offer of a TV debate.

By Monday January 20th most workers were back on the job following a KCTU announcement on the weekend. The KCTU announced that every Wednesday there would be a one-day strike, excluding the

public sector workers, until the law was annulled. In the event of its passage into law on February 18, the union organisations have threatened another general strike.

On Tuesday January 21st, Kim Young-Sam met with the two opposition parties and announced that the disputed labour and spy bills would be revised. He also suspended the arrest warrants for all the union leaders, and indicated that the five leaders being held would soon be released. On this same day the union advisory board to the OECD stated that Korea's new law did not mean their international standards.

Some Conclusions

The parliamentary opposition was timid and belated. Little or nothing can be expected from the opposition parties led by Kim Dae-Jung and Kim Jong-Pil. The government's slight change of heart was the result of the action of the Korean working class. Once again, Korean democracy was safeguarded by the unions.

The ruling NKP has lost a lot by its actions. This may well now change the outcome of the Presidential elections in December which President Kim's hand-picked NKP candidate might have otherwise been expected to win.

These events were Korea-specific, although they may yet foreshadow similar upheavals elsewhere. They represent the first attempt by one of the Asian tigers to make a permanent transition to the big league. As the labour law revision demonstrates, this can only be done at the expense of the working class. However, the paradox is that economic growth and concentration like that in Korea has also created a highly organised and militant working class which can successfully organise to protect its interests.

The secretive nature of the law revision also reveals quite clearly the inability of the political leadership in Korea to break with the successful bad habits of the past. The attempt to revive the secret police shows the deep mistrust that bourgeois circles continue to have of Korean workers and students.

It is possible to win a battle and still lose the war. But it is still unclear whether President Kim Young-Sam has even won the battle. The close co-operation of the two union organisations is a very positive outcome of a sloppily waged bourgeois offensive. The Korean bourgeoisie is in search of a new miracle. There are a lot of new kids on the block — Indonesia, China, Malaysia — who may prevent this new miracle being found. Breaking out of the national framework to seek international investments and profits may lead to the emergence of old fashioned problems like high unemployment and more failing businesses in Korea, particularly with the onset of a new generalised world recession. Similar difficulties and maybe a similar fate await the bourgeois leaderships of Singapore and Taiwan, should they embark on a similar course. ★

We published a chronology of the general strike in South Korea in last month's issue (#285).

Milosevic's manoeuvres

The Serbian Socialist Party has dominated politics ever since the Communist league dissolved itself in 1990. Manipulation of the electoral law and the media are only part of the explanation.

Catherine Samary

The population sees Milosevic as their best defender in an international context which they perceive as characterised by "anti-Yugoslav" and "anti-Serb" conspiracies. The crisis of the explosion of the Yugoslav federation is intimately linked in peoples' minds and in practice with the mechanics of the "transition" from one system to another. After all, the war for territory and property was carried out in the name of a redefinition of the ethnic frontiers.

The socio-economic transformations underway across central and Eastern Europe have been slowed down in Serbia, partly as a result of the economic sanctions imposed on the country, and partly through the conscious choice of the regime.

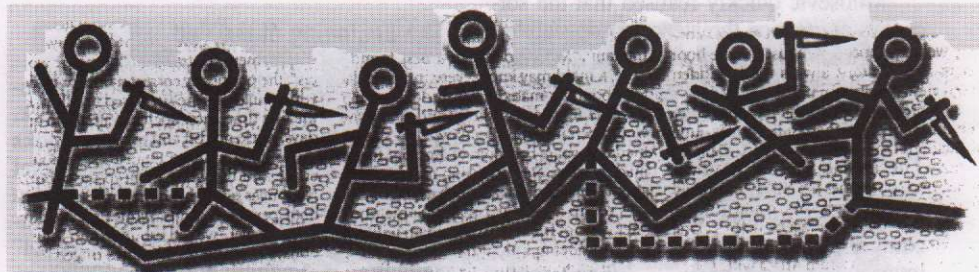
The moment for taking stock, and making changes is fast approaching. There is a huge gap between the old promises of a state that would gather in all the Serbs, and the policies which have been followed. Hundreds of thousands of frustrated Serbian refugees and a miserable host population have witnessed the obscene enrichment of war profiteers.

The Serbian regime is not exhausted. Milosevic's political savvy creates a certain room for manoeuvre, particularly faced with heterogeneous and rather unattractive opposition proposals. This reality explains the apparently contradictory results of the federal and municipal elections held at the beginning of November.

Municipal problems

On 3 November 1996 the ruling Socialist Party and its allies in the "Left Alliance" won two thirds of seats in the Yugoslav federal elections (Yugoslavia now comprises only Serbia and Montenegro). The centre-right opposition coalition Zajedno ("Together") received a much lower vote than it had hoped. Surprisingly, several days later, Zajedno won municipal elections in fifteen cities, including the Serbian and federal capital Belgrade.

The annulling of these results provoked daily demonstrations of 10-100,000 people. A heterogeneous crowd united in the demand for a state that respects the rule of law, including the results of elections. Blocs of student marchers not only demonstrated their vitality at these daily demonstrations, but were keen to distinguish themselves from the



opposition parties, which include liberal democrats, nationalist and royalist currents (supported by the Orthodox Church, which would like to play a larger role in state affairs) and the extreme right.

Although they have mainly taken their distance from Serb nationalism, younger people are still unable to face, and evaluate Serbia's past. Their preference for "apolitical" demonstrations expresses this weakness. A weakness which, however, is a great force in the short term. After all, the struggle for the creation and recognition of independent organisations and for democracy is the main struggle at the moment. This is the struggle which makes it possible to boost and generalise the mobilisation. And this is a struggle where victories are possible.

As for the development of a credible, alternative left force, that is more difficult to imagine in Serbia than elsewhere. The ruling parties are in open crisis, which is affecting all "left" currents: Stalinist and social-democratic neo-Communists, old and new apparatchiks, and the non-parliamentary left. Of course, this differentiation would be accelerated if the Socialists and their allies lost power...

Sophisticated voters...

Faced with such imponderable dynamics, the population voted to express a range of aspirations which are not met by any one political force. In the federal elections, people voted for internal and external stability. In the municipal elections, they voted against the corrupt incumbents.

There is a town/country difference in voting behaviour. The pauperised urban middle classes voted for the opposition, while the regime's main social base was in the countryside, and among blue collar workers in the state enterprises. Peasants and workers, many of whom grow vegetables on a small patch of land, are worried about losing the meagre advantages offered by the social security system, and the goods and services which the official trade unions still distribute. As a result, the independent trade unions which support the opposition (and often support privatisation proposals) have remained marginal and divided. Their appeals inviting workers to join the opposition demonstrations went unanswered.

The liberal opposition accepts Inter-

national Monetary Fund thinking about how to reform the Serbian economy. So, despite the ruling parties' responsibility for the disastrous socio-economic situation (more than 60% of the population live below the poverty line), the "devil you know" seems to offer ordinary Serbs more protection than the opposition.

Many Serbs also credit Milosevic with the implementation of the Dayton Accords. In other words, with stopping the war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, and achieving the end of sanctions against Serbia-Montenegro.

As for the Zajedno opposition, leader Zoran Djindjic had appeared in public alongside the ultra-nationalist Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic. The Bosnian Serb SDS party openly supports the opposition to Milosevic in Serbia.

...and a pragmatic leader

Slobodan Milosevic is a pragmatist, capable of pulling various strings, one at a time, or all simultaneously. In the late 1980s, he rose to power by appearing more reassuring to the population than the nationalist opposition, which was turned towards the royalist past. Milosevic made his first steps up the power ladder by supporting purges against the corrupt party-state apparatus. He had a pro-Yugoslav discourse, but spoke of the necessity of redefining the federation to the benefit of the Serb majority. When Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence in 1991 Milosevic still hoped to keep Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina inside the Yugoslav federation. Meanwhile, Serb Renaissance Movement leader Vuk Draskovic was calling for "a Greater Serbia... wherever there are Serbian graves" and making strongly anti-Muslim and warlike speeches. The nationalist and anti-communist right began to form their militias.

In 1989, Milosevic began to steal part of the nationalists' thunder, re-imposing central control on the mainly Albanian province of Kosovo (cradle of the first Serb state in the middle ages), and presenting himself as a defender of Serbian minorities everywhere; from Kosovo to Croatia and Bosnia.

In 1991 the Yugoslav army withdrew from Slovenia (after a 10-day confrontation) and that republic became independent. After the subsequent purges, the Yugoslav Army became a vast reserve force for the various

★ Serbia

far-right militias who used ethnic cleansing strategies to try to build Serb states in Croatia and Bosnia. During this period, Milosevic consolidated his power in Belgrade through an alliance with the extreme right Serbian Radical Party of Vojislav Seselj.

Milosevic quickly realised that the sorcerer's apprentice threatened to de-stabilise his regime. The president's partner, Mirjana Markovic, created the Union of the Yugoslav Left (JUL), which pushed the Socialist Party to break its alliance with the far right in 1993. The JUL denounced the crimes of Radovan Karadzic's Bosnian Serb nationalists, and proclaimed its attachment to the multi-cultural tradition of Titoist Yugoslav Communism.

The JUL consciously sought to stabilise the Socialist Party regime, by shifting responsibility for war crimes to the far right, and by exploiting the traditional methods of clientelism and corruption among the managers and ministries. The JUL also addressed itself to the most socially disadvantaged sections of the population, in the countryside and the state enterprises. JUL propaganda increasingly included denunciation of IMF pressure, and attacks on the liberal opposition as "serving the west, and paid by the west". Unfortunately, this is largely true.

Slobodan the statesman

From 1993, Milosevic shelved any plans for a Greater Serbia, and supported the international peace plans against his former ally, Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic.

The evolution of Milosevic's politics have divided and disturbed the opposition on more than one occasion. When Milosevic broke with the far right, the left opposition current New Democracy (pro-self management, anti-war) joined his coalition. The regime's new pacifist line disoriented the liberal democratic Civic Alliance, and the Serbian Renaissance Movement, which had switched to an anti-war position when Milosevic had been in favour of war.

The opposition bitterly regretted that they were no longer the favoured interlocutors of the western powers. They decided to make a coalition with Serbian supporters of Radovan Karadzic, in a front against Milosevic.

In Spring 1996, this provoked a split in the Civic Alliance, with half of the leadership and most of the youth forming a small social democratic current which is hostile to any further unprincipled opposition coalitions, with opposition to Milosevic as their sole unifying feature. This new current accused the Civic Alliance of wanting to eliminate the social measures introduced by the Yugoslav regime, and to privatise social property. They are the eighth such small group to articulate such a position.

After the Dayton Accords and the end of the war the major powers have relied on Serbia and Croatia, the strongest regimes, to try to stabilise the region. This meant dealing with the regime in place. To what extent do the massive anti-Milosevic demonstrations of recent months threaten to change this scenario?



The beginning of the end

The crisis is already provoking the decomposition of the majority power block. The Socialist Party of Montenegro looks more like Poland's ex-Communist Social Democrats than their "big brother" party in Serbia, which, in turn, is much more enthusiastic about the idea of a "Chinese model" combined with limited political pluralism. Montenegro's privatisation law is much more liberal than Serbia's. The smaller republic's rulers have already provoked concern in Belgrade with their desire to control Montenegro's foreign currency income (the Montenegrin coast is Yugoslavia's main tourist centre). The Montenegrin leadership is exploiting the current crisis to expand their own room for manoeuvre and their own autonomy. They even threatened to "re-examine" the Yugoslav federal arrangement if the municipal election victories of the Serbian opposition were not respected.

In Serbia itself, the social democrats of New Democracy threatened to leave the government coalition if these opposition victories were not recognised. Even the Socialist Party is polarising: the mayor of Belgrade resigned in protest... and was then expelled from the Socialist Party. The most inflexible neo-Communist part of the coalition, led by Milosevic's spouse Mirjana Markovic is playing an active role in the purges which are now beginning.

In short, the Socialist Party is in transition. The army has stressed its neutrality, and the general staff seems to be playing a conciliatory role. No repressive measures have been taken against those units which declared their support for the opposition, and the general staff has promised Belgrade's students that the army will not intervene. In 1991 Milosevic sent tanks to break up demonstrations.

All is not sweetness and light. Most of the low blows of the Milosevic regime have come from the paramilitary groups and the police, rather than the army. Nothing excludes such "incidents" in the future.

Faced with growing public protests, Milosevic adopted a strategy combining concessions and threats. He refused to admit that the regime had played any role in annulling the municipal election results. Meanwhile, regional leaders of the Socialist Party in Belgrade, and the far-right Radical Party have continued to support the electoral commission's decision to annul the Zajedno victory in the Belgrade municipal elections. But the regime has proposed that Belgrade be placed, provisionally, under central administration, so that the electoral law can be changed, and new elections organised. In other words, Milosevic is pretending that the law was respected, but that it was a bad law, and it will be changed.

At the same time, the ruling party is tightening discipline. The "bad apples" purged include the Socialist Party boss in Nis, Serbia's second largest city. Wherever Zajedno's victory is to be recognised, local Socialist Party leaders are blamed for the electoral mess. As well as these "hard-liners", the purge is also striking some Socialist Party bosses considered "too soft", including the Mayor of Belgrade, who dared to condemn the electoral commission's initial fraud.

Endgame?

The United States sees Milosevic as, if not too socialist, then certainly too independent. Will Clinton increase support for the opposition? Zajedno is doing everything it can to prove itself to the western powers as an alternative government. The coalition recently even came out in favour of the Dayton Accords. It may even adopt a more flexible position over Kosovo, where the Albanian-speaking majority continues a massive civil disobedience campaign in defence of their civic and national rights.

Milosevic faced a dilemma. Admitting opposition victories in fifteen large towns, including Belgrade, is admitting that there was massive electoral fraud. Admitting only a few partial "errors" by the electoral commission would mean another loss of international credibility. But reversing the fraud would give the opposition considerable power, especially since much of Serbia's media is controlled by local government. This would weaken Milosevic's position in next year's parliamentary and (Yugoslav) presidential elections.

The solution Milosevic chose was to ask the Serbian parliament to approve a law which recognised the validity of the OSCE commissions which, formally speaking, Milosevic had invited to Serbia to examine the election results.

He will presumably proceed with piecemeal concessions (including a compromise over the speed and extent of privatisation in Montenegro). His goal is to consolidate the majority coalition at the federal level, and increase the (currently symbolic) powers of the Yugoslav Federal President... a post which becomes vacant in 1998, and which he would like to fill himself. The questions to watch in Serbian politics in 1997 include the redefinition of the federation, attempts to deal with the Kosovo problem, and clarification of the socio-economic choices of the regime, including privatisation, and the management of the foreign debt. ★

Note

1) Zajedno has four components: the Civic Alliance led by Ms Vesna Pestic, a very small group of anti-nationalist liberals which has led the anti-war movement since the beginning, and three movements which, to varying degrees, are Serb nationalists: Vuk Draskovic's Serbian Renaissance Party, Zoran Djindjic's Democratic Party and the Serbian Democratic Party, which split from the Democratic Party, and presented its own lists in the municipal elections.

left advance in Scandinavia's largest unionised workplace Volvo workers ready for change

On March 12th 10,000 workers at the Volvo plant in Gothenburg, Sweden will elect trade union delegates. The left-wing Union Opposition is mounting an ambitious campaign to rebuild a fighting union in Scandinavia's largest local union body, and cut its financial link to Sweden's ruling Social Democratic Party.

Peter Lindgren

"If we win it will be like opening all windows in a closed and damp house, says Union Opposition candidate Göte Kildén. "Our candidacy is a necessary step in order to make our union the serious defence organisation we all need. We have to show all disappointed metal workers that it is both necessary and possible to fight for the leadership of our own union."

Union Opposition has been present at Volvo for 25 years and today runs three of the 30 trade union subgroups at Volvo Gothenburg. The opposition has nominated four candidates for the Executive Committee of the Volvo union and 98 candidates for the delegate council of Local (Branch) 41, which organises all metalworkers in the city of Gothenburg.

A decisive minority

Even if they win all these seats, the opposition would still be a minority in the Executive Committee and represent one third of the 290 delegates in Local #41. But this could still be a winning position. The social democratic current in Local #41 is traditionally badly represented, with only 50-80 delegates. So the Union Opposition delegates could easily become the single most important group in the delegate council.

Not surprisingly, the National Metalworkers Union has changed its statutes, to try to stop the activities of the Union Opposition. Because by-laws demand party names in elections, the opposition slate must now run as "Socialist party and independents"

Three of the Union Opposition candidates to the Executive Committee are members of the Socialist Party,¹ Göte Kildén, Tomas Johansson and Lars Henriksson. All are chairmen of their respective union subgroups. The fourth Union Opposition candidate is Dennis Ohlsson (independent).

Radical mood

The opposition's electoral prospects are good. Since coming to power in October 1994 the social democratic government has implemented a harsh cuts policy. The party



was a leading force in the 1995 referendum, in which a slim majority of voters agreed to membership of the European Union. All subsequent opinion polls show Sweden to be the most dissatisfied of all member states, with 70% of blue collar union members² still saying "No to the EU!"

Last year, the social democratic government was confronted with mass protests — for the first time since the 1930s — when unemployment benefit was cut from 80 to 75% of earnings. In January 1997, new cuts in housing, education and health programmes were introduced. A further reduction in unemployment benefits will come into effect two days after the union election at Volvo. About 60,000 unemployed trade unionists will lose their unemployment benefit completely, and become dependent on lower, social welfare payments.

Cut the link

In December 1996 the three subgroups run by the opposition voted to end union support to the Social Democratic Party.³ In a fourth work group, run by loyal social democrats, Lasse Henriksson debated against Executive Committee Olle Ludvigsson, and convinced 85% of his colleagues to vote against the link to the ruling party.⁴

Last month, the Socialist Party weekly *Internationalen* revealed that Ludvigsson, who sits on the Volvo board of directors, had voted in favour of a 300 million SEK (US\$41 m.) bonus and pension package for the company's top five executives!

Despite the sharp confrontation, the climate in the union is surprisingly good. *LO-Tidningen*, the weekly newspaper of the country's trade union federation LO, has even carried a running discussion.

"Excessive wage increases will harm the members," claimed LO Chairman Bertil Jonsson. "It is a betrayal of the members to claim such a thing, at a time when profits are soaring and low paid workers are losing money also because of the governments policy," replied Tomas Johansson on behalf of the Union Opposition. The relative

comradely reply from Bertil Jonsson shows that something new is happening in Swedish union circles. Not only is a representative of the opposition, a member of the "Trotskyist" Socialist Party allowed to debate with the national leadership in the main union publication, but there is not a word of anti-communism in the leadership's replies!

Socialist Party

At the Volvo plant in Umeå in the north of Sweden one delegate and two alternates to the April convention of the Metalworkers union are members of the Socialist Party. Another SP member was elected as a delegate from the Scania plant in Falun, central Sweden.

This is the first time that far-left militants have been elected as delegates to the metalworkers convention. What is more, there were no social democratic counter-candidates in the workplaces concerned. Union branches in both Umeå and Falun have been in the forefront of the opposition against the cutbacks of the government, sometimes reaching nation-wide attention.

The signs of the times are good. But can Union Opposition really win at Volvo? The opposition is strong in three work groups, but has few experienced militants in the other 27. They have real financial problems in reaching out to all members. The social democrats has 60 full timers and about 200 part-timers who will campaign during working hours; persons who fear that the opposition will send them back to the assembly line if they win! ★

1. Swedish Section of the Fourth International
2. Sweden is world number one in union affiliation: 84 percent of the workforce are members.
3. In a membership referendum, 90-92% of the membership of the three subgroups' members voted to cut financial support to the Social Democratic Party.
4. According to *LO-Tidningen* (the weekly of the Swedish union federation LO, Ludvigsson will resign if the Union Opposition wins the election in Local #41.

Police and judge co-operate to "fix up" left opponents of Arafat Palestinians get Irish treatment

Following one of the most highly politicised trials for many years in a British court, two Palestinians living in London have been unjustly convicted of conspiracy to cause explosions and sentenced to twenty years in prison, followed by deportation from Britain.

Roland Rance

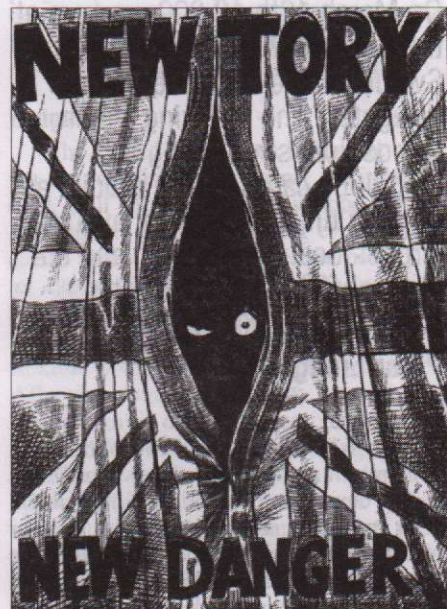
Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh are left-wing critics of Yassir Arafat's capitulation to US and Israeli pressure. Both continue to maintain their innocence.¹

The charges resulted from bomb attacks on the Israeli Embassy in London and on the London office of the Joint Israel Appeal (generally and erroneously referred to in the press as "Jewish" targets) in July 1994. The only defendant charged with personal involvement in these attacks, Nadia Zekra, was

discharged by the judge when it became clear that there was not a scrap of evidence against her. Despite this, and the fact that no evidence linked Samar and Jawad to the bombings, the judge, in a biased summation, informed the jury that "Jawad was the driver, and Samar the bomb-maker".

Samar and Jawad, described by the prosecution as "Marxist-Leninist terrorists", admitted in court the possession of explosive materials and firearms, but denied that this was illegal. They argued that they were studying ways to assist their unarmed compatriots under occupation to defend themselves against the unrelenting aggression of the Israeli army. This was justified under international law, as legitimate self defence. At the same time, they denied any connection with or information regarding explosions carried out or planned in Britain; they opposed any such attacks, which they said damaged the cause of Palestinian liberation.

Their defence was supported by several



Who are the real conspirators?

Samar Alami's letter to her friends and supporters following the sentencing

A grave injustice has taken place. We have never been part of any conspiracy. We have never taken part in any crime. We have never sought, acted or intended in any way to endanger life or property.

The only conspiracy we have known is a conspiracy against our innocence, against the truth... and justice. A silent conspiracy, where the engine for the case was to secure convictions and then to follow that up with a media circus... a meal out of our lives.

Justice has been aborted. The only things served in this case have been vested political and career interests. Prejudice has prevailed, truth and untruth were blurred. It did not seem to matter what you do or say; what you did not, would not or could not do.

There was a refusal to look at realities and evidence; instead, broad possibilities, vague enormous 'deductions' and baseless 'inferences' were accepted. Clear indications to the contrary were simply ignored. We spoke the truth, but it seems even truth is selectively accepted, and moreover, we are punished for it. The reality is that from the outset we have been presumed guilty and nobody wanted to let go of that regardless of the facts. Incredibly, most parts of the case are

unresolved. The bits and pieces found or provided by us were 'stretched' to resolve the case on our backs. It is us who were fitted to the police and Crown Prosecution Service framework, that is the reality.

We are no terrorists. We ask: Who are the terrorists? who are the criminals? We do not believe in violence or terror to resolve problems or conflicts, or that the end necessarily justifies the means. 'Doing something' is not 'doing anything'. In principle or in practice, what we believed in and what we did were clear to us.

To add insult to injury, we have been accused of being part of some kind of an 'anti-Jewish' campaign and 'plotting to attack Jewish targets'. We never did or thought of any such idea or attempt. We have never carried any 'anti-Jewish' feeling or action of any kind. Such accusations are hateful and unacceptable. I challenge anyone to come up with one example to indicate these rubbish suggestions.

We believe in democracy, universal inalienable rights, dignity and freedom. We have sought humble contributions to the legitimate struggle of our people for its basic rights and freedom, including the right of self determination. Yes, we have thought of

possibilities of armed resistance as a last and limited resort, and possibilities/ideas of self-defence and protection for a dispossessed and oppressed people facing daily aggression, violence, terror, brutality and varied threats to its existence and basic humanity (especially when other means are hardly available or enough).

We are thus not guilty of any crime. As such, we are fully committed to the just cause of our people (and are prepared for the consequences), in that respect our lives and freedom are no dearer (and no cheaper) than the thousands before us... and after us, no doubt.

We have lived here for years respectfully. Nothing and nobody can make us terrorists or criminals. We are innocent actually and morally. It is a tragedy to say the least that a guilty verdict was reached, we hope we are not the only ones who do not believe or accept it. For a grave injustice has occurred, but the truth will prevail over the evil power(s) of the real conspirators. ★

(Note to some of the newspapers: I never read one book of Marx... I am ashamed to say).

Samar Alami

British trade union "Broad lefts" increase co-ordination

Fred Leplat reports from a ground-breaking conference of left currents across the trade union movement

expert witnesses, who testified regarding the events of 1948, the nature of the Israeli occupation since 1967 and the characters of the defendants. These witnesses included former Conservative cabinet minister Lord Gilmour, Palestinian Jewish academic and activist Dr Uri Davis, and journalists and aid workers with lengthy experience in the Middle East.

Defence solicitor Gareth Pierce, a veteran of most political trials in Britain for the past 20 years,² has described the case as a miscarriage of justice. She points out a long list of material irregularities and flaws in the evidence presented against Samar and Jawad. Many key questions remain unanswered: who were the "Jaffa" team that claimed responsibility for the bombings? Who wrote the claim letters? Who planned and prepared the targets? Who bought and drove the two bomb cars and rigged the number plates? Who made the bombs and where? Where were the cars stored? Who bought the chemicals? What kind of explosives were used in the actual bombings? No evidence was presented to suggest that the defendants had any connection with these acts.

Some evidence was clearly farcical. For instance, the letter in which unknown people claimed responsibility for the explosions was mistranslated by the police; where the original had called on "Palestinians in Lebanon" to resist Israeli aggression, the translation presented to the court referred to "Palestinians in London." A map found in Samar's flat, allegedly of the area around the Joint Israel Appeal office in North London, turned out to be of Sidon in South Lebanon. The outright contradictory identification evidence of the alleged bomber led to the dismissal by the judge of the charges against Nadia Zekra.

An appeal has been lodged on the grounds of the judge's prejudicial summing-up, his refusal to take any action when an Israeli journalist attempted to interfere with a jury, and the broadcasting of a TV programme about a convicted Palestinian hijacker - which the judge advised the jury to watch! This contributed to a climate in which all Palestinians - even left-wing secularists - are portrayed as fanatical, bloodthirsty, Jew-hating Islamic fundamentalists. Like Irish prisoners, it is difficult for Palestinians to receive a fair hearing in a British court. ★

On Saturday 1st February, 200 delegates and visitors attended a conference called by a steering committee of various trade union "broad lefts". Most came from the teachers unions, the Communication Workers Union, Unison (the union for health and local government workers), the Civil and Public Services Association, the printers GMPU and the union for technicians, the MSF. Many had a long experience in the unions as shop stewards, branch secretaries, regional union leaders and some as national executive members. The aim of the conference was to set up a co-ordination between the broad lefts to push for specific demands such as the re-introduction of a minimum wage.

For far too long, the left in each union has been, through necessity, concerned with the affairs of their own union. The unrelenting attack from employers and the Tories combined with the union bureaucracy's total inaction has placed the unions in crisis and forced the left into retreat. Membership of unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress (TUC) has dropped from 9.8 million in 1985 to 6.9 million today. The number of strike days has decreased even more sharply from 6.4 million in 1985 to 415,000 in 1995 - the lowest level in over a century. Youth have little interest or possibility in joining unions. Membership for the under 20s is just 6%. Union membership is now concentrated amongst older workers in the privatised utilities such as telecommunications or rail and in the remaining public sector.

On the defensive

Over the last two decades, the unions have faced a triple challenge; from the economic crisis, from employer offensives and restrictive legislation. To raise productivity, employers have reduced the work force. There is now mass unemployment in Britain, with 3.1 million people out of work yet defining themselves as "ready to start a job."

Those new jobs created are without security and often part-time. There has been extensive privatisation of whole industries such as the railways and telecommunications, while other industries, such as mining, have virtually disappeared (it is expected that there will only be 12 coal-mines open by the year 2000). Where there is still no outright privatisation in the health service, an "internal market" has been created to allow "market forces" to determine "value for money".

The employers' offensive has brought about dramatic changes in working conditions through flexibility, team-working, performance related pay and temporary con-

tracts. To maintain recognition, some unions have agreed to single-union deals at the expense of any control over working conditions, even renouncing strike action in favour of compulsory arbitration.

One reason why the employers have been largely successful in these offensives has been the support business has received from government through successive anti-union laws passed since 1979, when Margaret Thatcher came to power. Picketing and solidarity action is now criminalised. Postal secret balloting for any form of industrial action is a legal requirement. The calling of official strike action is such a lengthy and complicated process that unions are easily victim to injunctions from employers over technical breaches of balloting procedures.

The removal of other legal rights such as wage councils that set pay levels in certain industries, and the lengthening qualifying period for unfair dismissal claims, have strengthened the employers' hand. But most extraordinary is that it is no longer possible, in Britain today, to have a legal strike for union recognition.

Responsibility for the defeats of the last two decades lies firmly with the leaders of the unions and the TUC. This is not to minimise the problems that the unions face but to assert that there is another way forward. The current trade union leadership has failed to organise any effective resistance.

It has allowed individual groups of workers to remain isolated when they have taken action and refused to generalise struggles or organise effective solidarity. The long running strikes by the Hillingdon Hospital workers and the Liverpool dockers, both out for over 18 months, unfortunately confirm this.

National attacks by the employers have not been countered by campaigns of national industrial action. With the threat of the anti-union laws, union leaders and un-elected officials are more likely to consult a lawyer than union members.

Unity in action... of course

The broad lefts have different traditions, experience and political outlook. Some, like in the TGWU, are by invitation only and organise only to secure elections. Others like the Socialist Teachers Alliance are open and have given as much priority to campaigning as to gaining elected positions. The STA takes up both issues of immediate concerns to members as to the broader political issues raised by government attacks. As a result it may soon be in a position to win a majority on the teachers union national executive.

Notes

1. A campaign is underway to secure their release and vindication. BM FOSA, London WC1N 3XX. They are held in high security prisons, far from their families and friends, and even further from their homeland. They need confirmation that their situation is known. Two other defendants were acquitted.

2. Representing the Bradford 12, Judith Ward, several of the Birmingham 6 and Guildford 4, and countless others.

Despite these differences, the union lefts generally agree that it is through action that the union is built. Experience shows that workers join the union when industrial action is organised to oppose a management attack. Yet the majority of union leaders and the TUC are turning the unions into welfare organisations providing cheap travel or credit cards, and rely on the law or the European Union Social Chapter protection.

Another common thread through the broad lefts is the fight for democracy in the unions. This means supporting the right for branches and members to take industrial action when necessary, for officials to be elected and accountable, and for the decisions of national union conferences to be respected and implemented.

Here we go

These broad lefts believe that it is necessary to prepare the ground now for a fight with a New Labour government on some key issues such as against wage controls and for a minimum wage set at a decent level, or for taking back into public ownership the privatised utilities and providing the funds necessary for a welfare state that actually meets the needs of the working class.

Recent New Labour statements have made it clear that it will keep to the Tories' economic framework for the next two years, that there will be no repeal of the anti-union laws, and that the spirit of privatisation will remain. A recent five-year agreement at Blue Circle Cement has been hailed by New Labour as the way forward.

In exchange for a no-compulsory-redundancy agreement, the union agreed to total flexibility and pay rises determined by arbitration. A few weeks later, Peter Hain, Labour's employment spokesperson, stated that a Labour government would bring back employment security where it could, such as in the civil service, in exchange for flexibility.

With the forthcoming general election and the possibility of a Labour government after 18 years of Tory rule, a new political situation will arise. A Labour government may well enjoy a honeymoon period while workers breathe a sigh of relief after 18 years of the Tories.

But there are already expectations that a Labour government should mean a change, however small in particular over pay and a minimum wage, and proper funding of health and other welfare services.

After years of seeing pay eroded, an ever increasing gap between the rich and poor, and obscene pay rises to the directors of the privatised utilities, a two-year pay freeze managed by a Labour government coinciding with continued cuts to meet the convergence criteria of the Maastricht Agreement could lead to a collision between union members and a Labour government. It is in such a context that this co-ordination of the union lefts, although small now, could develop into a real alternative leadership at the head of a wave of industrial action pressing for some minor concessions from a Labour government. ★

Prosperity? No thanks!

The Islamic fundamentalist Refah (Prosperity) party came to power in Turkey at the end of 1995, on an anti-Western and populist programme, following the collapse of a conservative coalition government. Once in power Refah made massive concessions to their neo-liberal backers within the Turkish bourgeoisie and the military bureaucracy that still controls Turkish politics behind the scenes. Disillusionment, and a series of scandals linking Refah and the other bourgeois parties to the military, the Mafia and the neo-fascist right have rocked the country.

We asked **Ufak Uras** of the Freedom and Solidarity Party (Ozgurluk ve Dayanisma Partisi — ÖDP) how the left is responding to this unstable situation

• What is the result of the first year of Prosperity Party rule?

The Prosperity Party (Refah Partisi) came to power with the tacit support of the army and the business community. Its behaviour in power has embarrassed its own militants: the Refah government has implemented pro-business economic restructuring projects. As a result, Refah has lost its fresh, new image. Nevertheless, Refah is different in some respects from the other parties, with its strong rank-and-file base, its network of economic relationships, and the community identity it has developed.

Refah presents itself as the ideological umbrella protecting all those rejected and marginalised by neo-liberalism and privatisations. At the same time, they reach for the whip to strike discipline into the working class.

The only real ideological challenge to Refah at the moment is from rather marginalised Islamic radicals and intellectuals within the party. The poorer sections of Turkish society have not yet reacted against Refah's anti-social policies. They have not yet realised Refah can neither transform relations of power at the local level, nor significantly transform daily life; the party has neither the intellectual capacity nor the force to do so.

The Freedom and Solidarity Party (ÖDP) links a libertarian, non-confessional perspective with an orientation towards social struggles, particularly the labour movement, in opposition to political Islam and neo-liberal orthodoxy.

• Refah may be a fundamentalist party, but they follow the same foreign policy as their pro-Western predecessors

As part of the opposition, Refah said relations with the Muslim Middle East were more important than those with the European Union. But once in power, Refah declared their allegiance to the traditional foreign policy objectives. Refah didn't even hesitate to implement a military co-operation agreement with Israel, a decision that alarmed many ordinary party members.

The lowest-common-denominator politics of "we are all Muslims, we can solve all our problems by talking to each other" no

longer hides the truth about Refah: they came to power without having done their homework. Their opposition to the West is a cultural opposition, which doesn't question the capitalist system that links us with Europe.

Turkey's relations with the European Union are limited to a customs union. Ankara cannot enter the European Union, but its economic ties, and position in the Middle East oblige Europe to take Turkey into account. But the West European countries have distanced themselves from Turkey over the state of emergency, the human rights issue, democratic problems, and the chronic economic crisis that has caused massive unemployment and very high inflation.

• Is there a possibility of democratic openings?

We try to express the libertarian, democratic alternative. The ÖDP slogan is "either they become accountable, or the people will sweep them away!" We seek to accelerate the massive protests that have been developing. To oppose the establishment parties, we need the broadest possible union of left forces. The ÖDP is building its own solidarity networks at a district and provincial level.

• Why are Greek-Turkish relations so bad?

The initiative in Greek-Turkish relations has always come from the hawks on both sides. The previous Ciller government was yet another example of the strategy of political masturbation on the international arena whenever the domestic crisis deepened.

• What does the ÖDP suggest to reduce the tension?

At our own level, we are preparing for a joint conference [of anti-militarist forces] to strengthen internationalist solidarity. We hope to work together with AKEL (Greek Cypriot Communists), the Turkish Republican Party of Cyprus, the Greek Communist Party and the Greek left party Sinasmismos.

• What about the Kurdish question?

The state of emergency continues. We call for a mutual cease-fire and a general am-



Ufuk Uras (right) with French Trotskyist leader Alain Krivine. Both men attended the recent Congress of the French Communist Party [see report in January issue]

nesty. We recognise the HADEP party as our ally [in the Kurdish regions]. We celebrated World Peace Day together on September 1st, 1996, launching a campaign to gather one million signatures on a peace petition. We realise that the struggle with the pro-war parties will be difficult. But there is no alternative to the construction of a multilingual, libertarian, egalitarian society, that respects a plurality of identities. Despite the challenges, we are gaining ground with these ideas.

• How is the ÖDP developing?

For 16 years in Turkey, fascism, political Islam and neo-liberalism all found a hearing for their ideas. But not those of labour, socialism and revolutionary thought. Hence the interest that greeted the founding of the ÖDP one year ago. A range of groups recognised the importance of uniting the revolutionary left, socialists, rank-and-file social democrats, feminists, greens, anti-militarists, anarchists and others in a pluralist party, with multiple voices, and a rainbow perspective.

The second important step was to unite the masses. Today, 85% of our 30,000 members were not previously members of left political groups. One million people have responded to our dialogue. In one way or another, our activities can reach about 450,000 people.

We have three main campaigns — for peace; for democratisation; and for the defence of workers' rights against the New World Order, globalisation and privatisation.

A few months after the ÖDP was founded, we faced the challenge of local elections in many regions. Despite the risks, we decided to participate in five districts where the right was particularly strong. Unlike all the other parties, the ÖDP selected its candidates locally, rather being designated by the national leadership. We received about 2% of the vote. Given the conditions, this was a success. Recent polls put our support at about 5%. We will be much better organised during the Autumn 1997 parliamentary elections. We are building up our district and provincial organisation, with a layer of experienced cadres. We are now present in 62 districts, 300 sub-districts and 1,000 municipalities.

We have to restructure the left too. No more arbitrary behaviour by the leaders. No more hierarchical models, with obedience to

orders from above. No to the excessive professionalisation of politics, with decisions are made far from where they are to be implemented. Enough of people not participating in politics, but viewing it passively!

As ÖDP President, I support the principle of rotation of party posts. I have kept my job at the University. We have also implemented a 30% minimum quota for women in the party's leading bodies. And indeed, the number of women and young people in the leadership is increasing.

Many outside the ÖDP were sceptical when the former Stalinists, Maoists and Trotskyists came together in a new party. People expected to see internal disputes. Instead, there has been active co-operation, as we have prioritised common work against the system rather than sterile arguments.

Our foreign relations are still below a level corresponding to our position in the country, though we shared our experiences with others at last year's Zapatista Conference for Humanity and against Neo-Liberalism and will do the same later this

year at the Sao Paulo Forum.

Inside Turkey, we reject any temptation to manipulate the trade unions, associations and professional groups where we have a real influence. Similarly, wherever we have an influence in the Turkish immigrant communities of Western Europe, we refuse to portray ourselves as speaking in their name and on their behalf. Those who try to use emigrants in this way, in the hope of building a political lobby in Europe, are doomed to failure. Hundreds of thousands of Turks live in Europe. We encourage them to turn not only towards the ÖDP, but towards the left groups and mass movements of the countries they live in. This is how we can build solidarity networks against multinationals like Shell, Mobil and Carrefour (supermarkets), who are sacking their Turkish workers, and preventing us from forming trade unions. ★

ÖDP, Necatibey Cad 23/11, Sıhhiye, Ankara, Turkey. © 0312/2317230

Portugal: abortion still restricted

Proposals to liberalise access to abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy were defeated in the Portuguese Parliament on February 20th. The reform failed because 13 Socialist MPs voted against the liberalisation. Once again, Portuguese progressive movements have been defeated by their pseudo-left "representatives." And Portuguese women have lost a real possibility to change the most repressive abortion law in continental Europe. At least 16,000 women are forced into illegal abortions every year, in poor conditions and with serious consequences.

The parliamentary discussions started at the end of last year, when a member of parliament elected on the (ruling) Socialist Party list admitted that, as a doctor, he had performed abortions beyond the strict limits permitted by Portuguese law. He proposed an amendment to existing legislation, saying that the legal limits on abortion of malformed fetuses were too strict. This purely medical argument did win parliamentary support.

The proposal to permit abortion until the 12th week of pregnancy was originally presented to parliament by the youth organisations of the Socialist and Communist Parties. Despite their extreme moderation, these proposals were a step forward; recognising women's right to choose. They provoked a new wave of public discussion about the abortion question.

The Catholic church immediately launched a counter-campaign, including television advertisements, opposing abortion. The main opposition to



the pro-life counter-attack came from the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) Portuguese section of the Fourth International. While the Communist and Socialist Party youth organisations confined themselves to parliamentary lobbying, the PSR ran the only visible campaign on the street; reaching thousands of people.

Many unorganised women did join the campaign to support the liberalisation of the abortion law. But attempts to use this campaign to rebuild the women's movement have failed.

Still, the response to the PSR campaign suggests that there has been a change in Portuguese society since abortion was last discussed, in the 1970s, when the country had a flourishing women's movement. This time, younger people understood the issues, and condemned the Church's reactionary campaign. Attendance at the main PSR rally outside the Parliament was very high — even without the "pro-life" counter-demonstration!

[Sérgio, PSR]

The President of Belarus has accumulated dictatorial powers

The 18th Brumaire of A. Lukashenko

The main opposition to Belarus' increasingly dictatorial regime comes from the country's fragile trade unions.

Fifty thousand people took part in a trade union-organised demonstration in Minsk on 17 October. The next day, representatives of opposition organisations and a number of well-known intellectuals, adopted an appeal to support legality and the movement to remove President Lukashenko from office.

The next day, in a manipulated "Popular Assembly" only eleven of the 5,000 "deputies" opposed Lukashenko. A referendum was called, to confirm an increase in presidential powers.

On November 4th, the Constitutional Court ruled that this referendum would have only an "advisory character". Two days later, Lukashenko issued a decree declaring the referendum legally binding, stating that the court's ruling went against the "public will". On November 9, he fired the president of the Central Electoral Commission who said he would not validate its results. This was followed by the resignations of the prime minister and the minister of labour.

On November 13, Lukashenko flew to Moscow, to seek support in the (essentially powerless) Russian Parliament. He stressed his desire for speedy unification of the "two Slav neighbours", evoked Soviet honour, Orthodox spirituality and the strategic threat posed by the West. He was warmly greeted by many Communist deputies and supporters of Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.² It was a speech calculated to appeal to Russian nationalists, who like Lukashenko for his pro-Russia, anti-NATO stance.

According to Lukashenko, 84% of eligible voters participated in the referendum, with 70.5% approving his amendments. The opposition alleged major electoral fraud and illegality. Among other things, the government encouraged early voting, before the draft constitution had even been published; the government itself printed the ballots, and their number is not known; funding for the referendum came from unknown sources, not the Central Electoral Commission; and, finally, the government controls the media.

Lukashenko then set up a new parliament with 110 of the deputies who acknowledged the official results. Several admitted that they had succumbed to the threat of dismissal of family members from their jobs. The new body voted to dissolve the Supreme Soviet. Five of the eleven members of the Constitutional Court resigned "for health reasons". So did the prosecutor-general.

Elections to a new upper house of the legislature took place on December 28. These deputies are elected by local soviets, but all candidates needed prior

approval by Lukashenko. In any case, the new constitution reduced the Belarus parliament to an essentially advisory body, as in Russia.

The basic criteria of Lukashenko's new appointments has been loyalty to himself. The speaker of the new parliament is A. Malofeev, a former member of the Soviet Politburo and secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU. According to the head of the Autoworkers' Union, there has been "a convergence of a presidential coup with the come-back of the die-hard Stalinists."

The active opposition remains a rather strange coalition of trade unionists, democratic Communists, social democrats, and liberal (pro-Western) nationalists. So far, it has kept a low profile. Fifty to sixty deputies of the old Supreme Soviet who refuse to recognise the new regime continue to meet periodically. A small rally took place in Minsk on December 8, after which the head of the Social Democratic Union was arrested along with several other people and sentenced to fifteen days for "participating in the organisation of an unauthorised rally."

The opposition is supported by the Western governments. This contrasts with the same governments' approval of Russian President Boris Yeltsin's coup in October 1993, which shed much blood. Lukashenko's presidential coup, at least, has been relatively bloodless.

The difference, of course, is that Yeltsin supports shock therapy and a policy of de facto subordination of Russia to the G-7 on major questions, whereas Lukashenko, so far at least, rejects neo-liberal "restructuring", supports integration of Belarus with Russia, and lends international support to Russia's half-hearted attempts to resist NATO expansion into eastern Europe.

The absence of any major challenge to Lukashenko so far is partly explained by his timely payment of wages. In addition, Lukashenko has taken a relatively soft line. He has concluded a general collective agreement with the Belarussian Federation of Trade Unions that promises some concessions, though it is unlikely he will actually carry them out. This "social peace" will not last: the economic situation will inevitably continue to deteriorate, feeding protest. In particular, the coming sectorial negotiations with the Autoworkers' Union are likely to lead to renewed open confrontation. ★

David Mandel

1. United Nations Day for the Struggle Against Poverty.
2. Yavlinsky's liberals (relatively more independent vis-a-vis the Russian government than the liberals of the "party of power") walked out.

Vladimir Igor'evich Shimanovich*

On March 15 1994, after two and a half years of discussion, the Belarus Supreme Soviet adopted a new constitution, creating a presidential republic. Previously, political power was divided between the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Soviet and the judiciary. Though, to be honest, an independent judiciary did not exist (and still does not).

Elections to the presidency were held in 1994. The Federation of Trade Unions supported V. Kebych, then Chairman of the Council of Ministers. But our union's position was, and still is, that Belarus does not need a presidency. In our opinion, history shows a tendency for presidencies to lead to usurpation of power. We support a parliamentary republic.

Besides Kebych, there were three other candidates: Shushkevich, speaker of the Supreme Soviet, Novikov, head of the Communist Party, and Aleksandr Lukashenko, director of a state farm and deputy to the Supreme Soviet, where he presided over the Commission for the Struggle against Corruption. Lukashenko was really an unknown quantity. People voted not so much for him as against the outgoing government. Lukashenko had made himself a certain political reputation on the basis of an anti-corruption report, which, however, did not deal with government corruption.

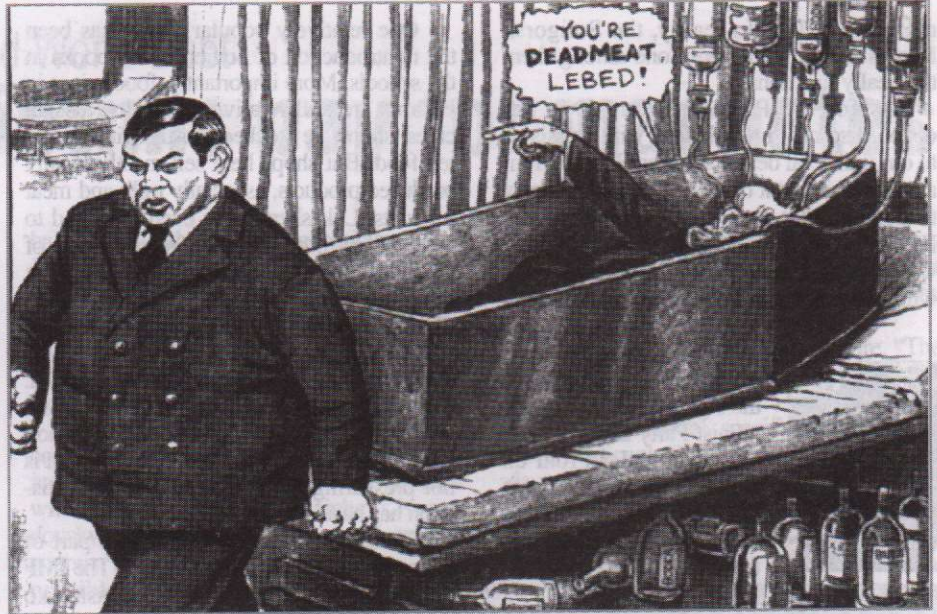
He pledged allegiance to the constitution but soon began to claim that the constitution gave him the powers of a tsar, that he could run the state without any opposition.

His basic electoral promise was to "get

A different Europe?

- Preparations for the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) are leading to the dismantling of public services and social security and rising unemployment in every EU member state.
- Negotiations to revise the Maastricht Treaty are supposed to end with the signing of a new treaty by the heads of government during the June 1997 Amsterdam summit.
- There will be an alternative conference, demonstrations and other activities. We invite you to take part.

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the factories going." And they have been "going" ever since. When he was elected, 12% of the enterprises were not functioning; today about forty per cent are not working. Meanwhile, the workers are getting paid. When we analysed the situation, we found that the hard currency accounts that were amassed in the Soviet period are slowly being unfrozen, that is, we are consuming the basis for future reconstruction.

Lukashenko also ran on the basis of the quality of his future cabinet, which included well-known legal experts, economists, etc. He advertised it as a team of young, energetic pragmatists. But they all resigned in the first half year, leaving Lukashenko with the officials who had served under Kebych. He has also appointed a series of people with whom he had worked in his native Shklovsk district.¹ The director of a local savings bank became director of the Republic's largest state-owned bank! The head of the President's economic administration, which controls all state property, is the former economist of Lukashenko's old state farm.

Good and bad laws?

Another electoral promise was to guarantee equal rights before the law, freedom of the press, and so forth. It took Lukashenko exactly six months to forget that promise. He began to ignore the law, to distinguish "good" laws, that should be applied, from "bad" ones, that should be ignored.

The Constitutional Court has ruled eighteen of his decrees unconstitutional. For example, he forbade a strike in the Minsk metro in the summer of 1996, fired the strike leaders and dissolved the union. He issued a directive forbidding state enterprises from hiring any of the strikers. Most are still out of work.

Another decree automatically terminated the employment of people reaching pension age. Again the Constitutional Court ruled it illegal, so the President slightly modified it to allow for a further two-year contract, but without automatic right of renewal. That, too, is unconstitutional. Another illegal decree ended elections to local governments. President Lukashenko appoints the entire local executive.

He also appoints all judges, but this is legal, an error in the constitution, which, however, guarantees judicial independence. The constitution provides for the division of powers, but in practice all power is concentrated in the President's hands.

Of the eleven people Lukashenko recommended to sit on the Constitutional Court, ten were confirmed. But as soon as the court knocked down one of his decrees, he declared it a bastion of the opposition and issued an order to all levels of the executive to be guided exclusively by his own decrees.

The threat of dictatorship and the loss of civil rights is real. Belarus has political prisoners and political trials; people have even fled to Russia and Bulgaria asking for political asylum. People are beaten and arrested during demonstrations. Some are held for several months. There have been closed trials.

The President controls the printing presses. As a result, all non-state, free newspapers and journals are either printed illegally or outside the country. He controls the state radio and television.

The single television channel carries only the government's point of view. Neither the Speaker of Parliament, nor party nor trade-union leaders have access to the electronic media.

More Russian than the Russians

Lukashenko has organised a show around relations with Russia. Last March, after he signed an agreement on closer relations with Russia, nationalist forces organised a demonstration, which was violently dispersed. Then the president launched a violent campaign of against the participants.

Teachers are afraid to criticise the government. Lukashenko appoints the deans of the institutions of higher education. He appointed a man who had already been dismissed under the Communists for plagiarism to head the State University, a man that students had hooted out of the classroom for incompetence. But that man is loyal to Lukashenko. Teachers who promote the Belarussian language and culture have been persecuted. Belarussian-language schools are being closed. Lukashenko is more Russophile than Yeltsin and he even stated publicly that he would consider running for President of Russia, were it not for the fact that he was born in Belarus.

Now Lukashenko has initiated a referen-

dum on amendments to the constitution. In practice, he is proposing a new constitution. The President could adopt laws on his own. His term in office would be extended at least two years to 2001. He could forbid strikes.

He could appoint a third of the deputies to a new upper house of Parliament, as well as all judges of the Supreme Court, the Supreme Economic Court, all lower judges and a majority of judges of the Constitutional Court. He is creating a fourth branch of government, the presidency that dominates all others. Another amendment would outlaw organisations that "fan social animosity". It is not hard to imagine this being used to shut down trade unions.



Labour in the democratic opposition

All more-or-less important parties, unions, social organisations and movements from all sides of the political spectrum have united against the President. Seven parties issued an appeal to the population opposing Lukashenko's dictatorial practices and intentions. They created a Round Table of representatives of twenty parties and social movements, including human rights organisations and "alternative" trade unions. It includes liberals, social democrats, the trade-union based Party of Labour,² the Communist Party, the Agrarians, the Women's Party (linked to the Federation of Trade Unions), the unions, as well as the Belarussian Popular Front and the "new" trade unions.

These "new" unions are members of the Confederation of Labour, which is close to the liberal-nationalist Belarussian Popular Front, though of late they have been leaning

The author is a member of the Praesidium of the Belarussian Auto and Agricultural Machine-Construction Workers' Union and Vice President of the Party of Labour

★ Belarus

more to the left. In reality, the Soligorsk Miners' Union is the only one among them that really functions.

As for the Popular Front, it is not opposed so much to relations with Russia as to our unilateral dependence on Russia. From an economic point of view, it would be crazy to demand that we isolate ourselves from Russia, since we lack natural resources and we were essentially one big assembly plant within the former Soviet Union. Besides, we are linked by blood and family ties.



No one expected to see the signatures of the Communist Party and the Belarussian Popular Front on the same document. But if the CP leadership is in opposition to Lukashenko, the same cannot be said for the rank and file.

The Round Table invited Lukashenko to work out a compromise. The political polarisation is even splitting families. The Round Table is offering a conciliation commission with the participation of all interested parties.

Our union held a big conference of its activists, not just full-timers but also ordinary workers from the shops. The conference expressed its indignation at the actions of the President. Our hostility to the President developed gradually, but the last straw was his refusal to sign an amendment to the Labour Code that would have made payment of wages top priority for enterprises. His decree makes payment of taxes a priority, with wages at the bottom of the list. Last May our union initiated a petition campaign to have the Supreme Soviet review the question. We collected the required 50,000 signatures, and the Supreme Soviet adopted the law we wanted. According to the constitution, the President has ten days to sign the law or to send it back, but he did neither, and so the law is in supposedly force. But the executive authorities are guided exclusively by Lukashenko's decrees.

Polls put popular support for the President at around 60%. In other words, he could win a "vote-of-confidence" referendum, or potentially go to the people and ask for even greater powers. His support is among the unpoliticised and politically illiterate part of the population. He is a very talented populist speaker. He tells every auditorium exactly what it wants to hear at that particular moment. Despite his demagoguery concerning the *rapprochement* with Russia, whenever Yeltsin or Chernomyrdyn openly express disapproval of his actions, he emphasises Belarus's sovereignty, its capacity to conduct independent external and economic policies, etc.

He plays on the population's disenchantment with market reform and nostalgia for the economic security of the Soviet system. These feelings are especially strong in rural areas, small towns, where there are no big plants, among pensioners and war veterans, and among a certain part of the urban working class that longs for a strong leader.

One relatively popular policy has been the reintroduction of Soviet-era textbooks in the schools. More importantly, food prices in Belarus are still relatively low. In Russian cities, shops are stocked mostly with imported food. But shops here sell mostly locally produced products, especially milk and meat products. Lukashenko has even promised to force shops to carry a certain percentage of domestic products. Urban workers do not have the Russian problem of wage debt, through it is quite serious in the villages.

Factories are working at 60% of capacity, significantly higher than in Russia. There have been relatively few layoffs so far in the auto sector — mainly because of union resistance but also because the government is not pressuring the administration. Privatisation has basically been suspended.

These policies appeal to a large part of the population with leftist leanings. The IMF and World Bank do not like Lukashenko because he is not applying "shock therapy." But all this "socialism" is demagogic. Sooner or later, the balloon will burst. The social rights of the old system are fast being eroded. In August and September 1995, Lukashenko issued seven decrees that abolished the legal norms governing student stipends, old-age pensions, pensions for invalids and victims of Chernobyl, and a series of other groups. Most factories, like our Tractor Factory, are just piling up goods in their warehouse, since they cannot find buyers. The state is merely printing a lot of money, fuelling inflation.

Most Belarussians live in small towns and villages, where it is easier to control publicly expressed views. In certain cases, the head of the local administration clearly told the collective or state farm chairperson: "If the referendum loses on your farm, you can kiss your job good-bye." On the other hand, the majority of trade union members are solidly behind their leadership; an important factor for the opposition.

The students also oppose Lukashenko and have been quite active in demonstrations. In part, they are reacting on a nationalist basis, though not the naked nationalism one can find in the Ukraine.

They have some valid points. Russia ships huge quantities of materials and goods through our territory virtually free. Russian military units stationed here cause tremendous ecological damage. Russia has never returned our share of the foreign currency that was frozen under the Soviet regime, nor have we received the funds that were committed to us by the Soviet government for the Chernobyl disaster. We have had to make do by our-selves, with some help from the West. True, we owe Russia money for oil

and gas, and it is not yet demanding payment. That is about a billion dollars, which is a huge sum for us. That is the major gain that Lukashenko has won for us. But we are getting no special favours on the price, which is the same as the Baltic states pay.

Lukashenko's manoeuvres are all too reminiscent of Yeltsin's "constitutional assembly", his abolishing of the local soviets and appointment of local administrations, his use of referendums preceded by "social" decrees designed to win popular support. Lukashenko has two budgets: the state budget and his personal budget, larger than the first. He simply orders the printing of more money, though by law only the National Bank controls currency emission. In the second half of 1996, Lukashenko issued a series of "social" decrees: pensions and student stipends were to be raised at the beginning of 1997; public service employees were to receive a quarterly raise of 500,000 rubles, and so forth. His populism has gone into high gear: he personally participated in the harvest; he personally decided and read out on television the list of topics for high school graduation essays; he even sent out his own commission to prevent corruption in university entrance decisions.

In reality, he has achieved very little positive and much that is negative in his two and a half years in office. He himself says that his main achievement is having avoided civil war, just like Yeltsin. They both constantly scare the people with civil war if the opposition prevails.

Lukashenko has brought in tactical police forces from the provinces. He does not trust Minsk police. It is worth noting that there are three and a half times more internal security forces in Belarus than army soldiers and that the wages of police and internal forces are two and half times higher than those of soldiers. A university teacher today earns 800,000 rubles a month; an industrial worker can earn about a million; but a rank-and-file policemen makes four million. ★

Notes

1. This is an edited version of presentations, supplemented by an interview, made at a union education seminar in St. Petersburg on October 16-18 organised by the School of Work Democracy in co-operation with the trade union of the Kirov Factory and the Leningrad Federation of Trade Unions. Edited and translated by David Mandel.

2. closely linked to the Association of Industrial Unions, which includes the auto and radio-electronics workers, the two most progressive unions in the country. This association is not an alternative to the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus but an independent structure whose members remains in the federation.

KEY INDICATORS

	1993	1994	1995*	1996**
GDP change (%)	-9.5	-20.2	-13.0	-10.0
Inflation (%)	1,994	2,220	703	32
Unemployment (%)	1.5	2.1	2.5	2.5
Exports (\$ m)	2,836	3,138	3,135	3,167
Imports (\$ m)	3,190	3,680	3,520	3,564
Current account balance (\$ m)	na	-545	-379	-412
Budget balance (as a % of GDP)	-8.3	-1.5	-3.2	na

Source: IMF, EIU, EBRD *EIU projections

** EIU forecasts

Campaign to abolish Third World Debt

Genocide victims pay for machetes

Colette Braeckman

From the closure of the Clabecq steelworks in Belgium to the Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, most of the struggles of the end of the century found a tribune and an attentive audience at the one-day event entitled "Eleven hours against neo-liberalism and for humanity" organised in Brussels on 25 January by the Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt (COCAD).

Discussions included child labour, the sex industry, and the dead-end which glo-

balisation leads to. Swiss geneticist Albert Jacquard denounced the way universities are increasingly obliged to adapt their work to the orders of industry; producing productive workers rather than independent intellectuals. The phrase "profit-fodder" will certainly catch on, as "cannon-fodder" did in its time.

Pierre Galand, president of Belgium's council of development NGOs (CNCD) has just returned from Rwanda, where, together with Canadian economist Michel Chossudovsky, he investigated the foreign debts of a country facing impossible challenges: rebuilding national consensus after the genocide, absorbing a million refugees, judging the criminals... and reimbursing foreign debts of about one billion US dollars, or 90% of the total value of goods and services produced in the country last year. Interest on these debts represents 46% of Rwanda's export earnings.

This foreign debt increased dramatically in the 1990s, during the preparation and execution of the genocide. Pierre Galand's research in the archives of the deposed genocidal regime revealed evidence that loans from the World Bank, and balance of payments loans from a range of financiers, including Belgium and the European Union, were diverted from their official purposes, and used, in 1993, to buy cut-throat razors, axes, saws and machetes. Half a million blades...

Matching funds provided through "aid" programmes were used not to support small scale projects or peasants, but to buy weapons and uniforms from Belgium and other first-world countries. One Belgium

company delivered 20,000 pairs of army boots. The invoice, for \$500,000, has just been re-presented for payment to the new Rwandan government.

Galand denounces a double failure. "The Rwandan partner did not use the funds for the agreed purpose. But the financiers did not carry out the normal, specified checks. They were negligent. Why should today's Rwandans, those who escaped the genocide, pay for the machetes which were the instruments of that great crime?"



After the defeat of the "genocidal" regime and the victory of the Rwanda Patriotic Front, which installed a government of national unity in Kigali, supporters of the previous regime fled into Zaire, where they created, in Goma, a "branch" of the National Bank of Rwanda, which continued to place orders for arms and other supplies, and guarantee payments. A number of foreign banks accepted these orders made by the "government in exile," which they considered more legitimate than the new authorities in Rwanda itself. Galand cites Citibank, Dresdner Bank (Germany) and BNP (France). Some other institutions, like the Belgian bank BBL, suspended all dealings with the exiled regime.

Galand's presentation was one of the best-attended parts of the COCAD event, which denounced the fact that Rwanda now faces \$155 m./year interest payments as "illegitimate" and "hateful". "Cancelling this debt is not a question of generosity, but is a duty to this nation of victims." ★

Source: *Le Soir*, 27 January 1997, p6. "Le Rwanda doit-il payer une "dette odieuse"?"

Interview with Eric Toussaint, event organiser

• Surely cancelling third world debt is not enough to thwart the neo-liberalism you denounce?

Our catalogue of alternatives is much larger! The northern assets of the corrupt regimes of the south, like Mobutu's fortune, should be expropriated, and the funds distributed to the population. We support the "Tobin tax" – one Nobel prize winner's suggestion on how to "put a grain of sand in the infernal machine of financial speculation" by imposing a progressive tax on financial transfers. We support all tax measures which would enable states to have enough room for manoeuvre to reduce the weight of their foreign debt. Professor Max Frank of the Université Libre de Bruxelles has suggested an exception tax on wealth. The social aspect should set the priorities!

• Sounds utopian

The implementation of these alternatives requires a balance of forces which doesn't exist at this time, neither electorally, nor in social terms. So, our modest, but important contribution is part of the wider project to modify the balance of social forces. Through initiatives like our "eleven hours against neo-liberalism" actors from North and South come together to establish what kind of resistance can be built to oppose neo-liberalism. This is our third initiative of this kind here in Belgium.

Source: *Le Soir*, 25 January 1997, p2.

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rebels under attack from European mercenary force

Zaire unravels, west panics

White mercenaries hired by the Zairian regime continue their counter-offensive against the rebels in the Kivu area. President Mobutu is dying of cancer, with no clear successor. There have been attempts to restore discipline in the army by trials of deserters, including officers. **Alain Mathieu** wonders whether the dictator's imperialist patrons can halt the disintegration of Zaire, a pillar of neo-colonialism in the heart of Africa.

Coming at the same time as the rebellion in Kivu, the illness of the dictator, Mobutu Sese Seko,¹ opened up a crisis for the regime. No successor is in sight. The Zairian army has been in a process of disintegration. But Mobutu remains the key to safeguarding French interests. Paris prepared the way for his return, hoping, with the help of mercenaries and the French military, to restore the prestige of his army by a reconquest of Kivu.

Last summer, when the former Rwandan government forces, backed by the Zairian army, attacked the Banyamulenge people² in Kivu, guerrilla forces came to their aid. The capitalist press portrays the guerrilla leader Laurent Kabila as a self-proclaimed chief set up by the Rwandans. Nothing could be further from the truth.³

Who are the rebels?

The Alliance of Democratic Forces of the Congo, which was formed in Kivu, includes four parties. Its stated goal is to overthrow Mobutu and replace his regime with a democratic state organisation. This is supposed to open the way for social justice and development by breaking from the system of corruption and neo-colonialism.

The Alliance is distinguished from the official opposition (led by Tschisékédi) by its

rejection of any compromise with Mobutu. The Rwandan army gave it logistical aid and training so that it could break the grip of the genocidal militias on the refugee camps. After it accomplished this, it went on to pursue its own objective of overthrowing the Zairian regime. Hundreds of Zairian army men, including officers, began deserting to the rebels, and the guerrillas started recruiting civilians as they advanced. They have been helping the populations of the liberated territories to organise themselves thereby leading the people themselves to assume more and more control of the struggle to overthrow Mobutu. The Alliance seeks to combine liberation of the eastern territories with a resumption of mass mobilisations in the cities.

France backs the dictatorship

France's international role as a middle-sized capitalist power rests on two pillars: possession of the atom bomb and close links with its former empire in Africa, and the former Belgian colonies of Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi. President De Gaulle established the French presence and influence on the basis of a patronage system involving inextricable ties between French and African leaders.

Successive French presidents have kept their Africa policy teams outside the control of the government and the parliament. This system degenerated into extortion and Mafia-type criminality, which infected both African and French political life. African bosses like Mobutu accumulated enormous fortunes which they used to bribe French businessmen and politicians.

But then the world economic crisis and the fall in raw materials prices reduced the size of the cake, with manifold consequences. In order to maintain their resources, the African strongmen resorted to all sorts of traffic (drugs, arms, precious minerals). The transfer of the resulting wealth abroad created a class of thieves, totally tied to French interests and completely unconcerned about industrialisation and development of their own countries.

In Zaire, Mobutu lost any illusions about building a modern country or restoring an already deeply undermined economic stability. His ambitions became limited to amassing a personal fortune – thought to be at least as large as Zaire's total foreign debt.

In order to maintain themselves in power, the African neo-colonialists manipulated clan and ethnic differences. The ruling factions appropriated the state apparatus and created ethnically-based forces. In Rwanda, this led to genocide and the subsequent defeat and flight of the murderous government. The genocide in Rwanda in 1992 exposed the degeneration of the French system of domination. President François Mitterrand then tried to camouflage French complicity by a so-called humanitarian mission, *Opération Turquoise*. In fact, this was nothing less than a military intervention to allow the orderly retreat of the genocidal regime, which set up a state-within-a-state in the refugee camps which sprang up across the Zairian border from Rwanda. The genocidal regime controlled the refugee camps, with the goal of one day returning to Rwanda and regaining control.

At the end of last year, the foundations of this system of domination were deeply shaken. In November, Zairian rebels with support from the new Rwandan government defeated the butchers who controlled the refugee camps in Eastern Zaire. One and a half million Rwandan refugees returned home. The eruption of this rebellion confirmed the death-crisis of the Mobutu regime. Finally, part of the army in the Republic of Central Africa, another pillar of the French military establishment in Africa, rebelled, obliging France to intervene "to protect its interests".

The military relationship of forces may be favourable to Mobutu at the moment, but his social base is weakening. The moderate opposition has stayed out of the government and is calling for negotiations with Kabila.

We have to redouble our solidarity with the Zairian resistance and mobilise against the French imperialist intervention that is being tacitly supported by the United States. It is essential to prevent a repetition of what happened in the 1960s, when imperialist intervention managed to kill the hopes of all the peoples of the region for a better future. ★

Notes

1. He was operated on for cancer in Switzerland, near his bank accounts, and went to recover in France, near his protectors and friends).

2. The Banyamulenge have lived in their present home in Zaire for centuries. They are called Tutsis by the Zairian regime, and the capitalist press, because of their common roots with that traditional group in Rwanda and Burundi.

3. Kabila began his struggle in 1960, fighting in the name of the central government headed by Lumumba against the Katanga secession organised by Tshombe, and supported by France, among others. In 1963, Kabila took the leadership of the Lumumbist forces. They were defeated by the imperialist counteroffensive following Mobutu's seizure of power in 1965, which was aided by mercenaries. They have kept on fighting for 30 years. They have managed to arm themselves without outside help by selling gold from Kivu.



resolution of the Fourth International* **“No mercenaries for Mobutu!”**

1. The genocide to which a million Tutsis fell victim in Rwanda in 1994 must be punished on an international level as a crime against humanity. This genocide was prepared and carried out by the dictatorial regime of general Habyarimana, who also eliminated thousands of his Hutu opponents.

2. Those responsible for this genocide must be tried in Rwanda.

3. The Interhamwe militias and the remainder of the Rwandan army responsible for the genocide who are on Zairian soil must be disarmed and brought to stand trial before Rwandan courts.

4. The neo-colonial system of imperialist domination, based on inextricable links between dictatorial African regimes and the economic and political interests of European governments, has led European governments to cover up for the criminal course of the Habyarimana regime that prepared the carrying out of this genocide. European governments have thereby made themselves accomplices to this genocide. The French government in particular armed, advised, financed those who carried out the genocide. The French government protected them after their crimes were committed. The French government in particular armed, advised, financed and protected those who carried out the genocide after their crimes were committed.

The Belgian government supported the Habyarimana regime up until the genocide began. Multinational corporations (weapons factories, the Banque de Paris, the Dresdner Bank and others) armed and financed the killers in full awareness of what they were doing. They continued to do this after the UN declared an arms embargo on 11 May 1994. They supported the killers when they retreated to Zaire beginning in July 1994. Operation Arquoise, carried out in late June-early July 1994 by the French army under the cover of humanitarian aid, aimed in reality at protecting the genocidal army against the Rwandan Patriotic Front's final offensive. It was the French army that established the remainder of the Rwandan army and the Interhamwe militias in Zaire, transforming hundreds of thousands of Rwandan refugees who had fled to Zaire into their hostages. Their goal was to prepare with Mobutu's aid an invasion of Rwanda by those responsible for the genocide.

5. Rwanda's foreign debt (US\$ 1 billion) is odious, since it was contracted by a genocidal regime which used the loans to buy weapons and multiply the size of armed forces by

eight between 1990 and 1994. **This debt must be cancelled.** The victims should not be forced to pay for the weapons that were used to carry out the genocide.

6. In addition, a vast programme of reparations and reconstruction of Rwanda must be paid for by the World Bank, IMF and imperialist governments complicit in the genocide. The reparations programme must be entirely paid for by these institutions and governments: they should pay back the damage inflicted with interest.

7. The role of women, who, since the genocide, constitute more than two-thirds of the population and often support their families on their own, is decisive in Rwanda's reconstruction. We support all the Rwandan women's organisations that are struggling for equal economic and political rights for women, necessary in order to contribute in full independence to rebuilding their country.

8. Stop the structural adjustment programme imposed by the World Bank and IMF on Rwanda. These SAPs constitute an obstacle to rebuilding Rwanda and exacerbate its dependence on imperialist countries.

9. The assets held abroad by the family of the dictator Habyarimana and his cronies (AKAZU) must be confiscated and returned to the Rwandan authorities.

10. Those allegedly responsible for the genocide residing abroad must be extradited to Rwanda.

Zaire

11. We oppose any imperialist military intervention in the region. No arms, no troops, no mercenaries for Mobutu.

12. Down with Mobutu's dictatorship. Expropriate the assets held abroad by Mobutu and the dignitaries of his regime. Return these assets to the Zairian people, plundered by the Mobutu regime for more than thirty years.

13. We declare our solidarity with the anti-Mobutu, anti-imperialist opposition in its struggle to put an end to the dictatorship. Hands off the armed rebellion in the east of Zaire!

14. We call for the defeat of Mobutu's troops, aided by the mercenaries in their attempt to reconquer Kivu. Hands off the armed resistance in eastern Zaire.

15. Refuse visas to Mobutu, his clan, the dignitaries of his regime and the chiefs of his killer army.

* This resolution was read out by Eric Toussaint at a meeting of the Zairian opposition held in Brussels on February 1st. More than 150 Zairians participated, including supporters of 12 opposition groups.

the badly disguised imperialist intervention in Zaire **CRAP intervention force**

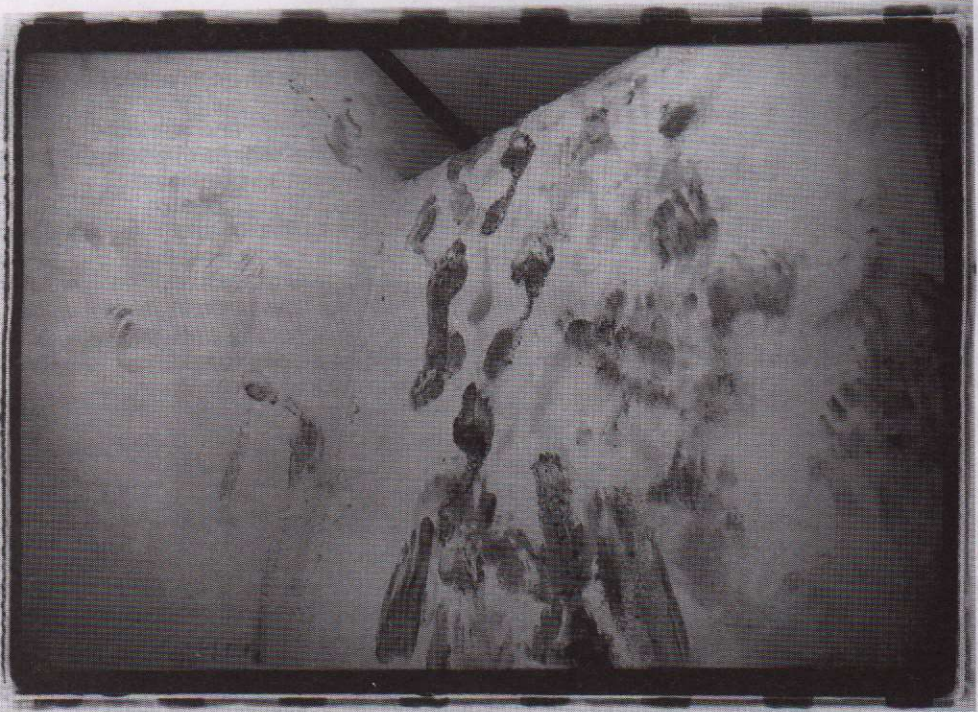
The westward advance of the rebel forces has encouraged many opponents of Zaire's Mobutu regime. But France, the USA and Belgium, the main imperialist powers controlling this region, so rich in strategic raw materials, are increasingly worried. They are trying, in vain, to impose some kind of Mobutuism without Mobutu.

Eric Toussaint

The capitalist powers can't agree on how to keep Zaire within the fold. France wants an aggressive, active policy, reinforcing its role as prime power in the region. Belgium is desperate not to lose its remaining influence in its former colonies. The United States wants to consolidate its influence in Uganda and Rwanda, and make new friends in Zaire.

But the size of the disaster seem to be forcing the three neo-colonial powers into a temporary alliance to protect their interests. The pretext, of course, is humanitarianism: coming quickly to the aid of those Rwandan refugees who have not yet begun the trek home. The second pretext is avoiding a destabilisation of all of central Africa.

What form will the intervention take? For the moment, under-the-table support for the Mobutu regime, enabling it to gain military control over the eastern regions of Zaire. The Belgian and US governments are hesitant, but they are allowing France to



forge ahead.

An international military expedition under the auspices of the UN Security Council is unlikely, but not impossible. The goal of any such intervention would be to prevent the rebellion from spreading to the rest of Zaire.

Another option would be to pressure rebel leader Laurent Kabila to negotiate with the Zairian regime, with some kind of guarantees for the parliamentary elections which should take place later this year. This would be hard to put into practice. What kind of compromise could be stitched together

between the rotten regime in Kinshasa, the zig-zag opposition of Tschisékédi, and the armed rebellion of Laurent Kabila? In any case, progressives should oppose any pact of this type, which would only prolong the life of the dictatorship, and the suffering of the Zairian people.

Blood on Parisian hands

France fully supports the Mobutu regime. The dictator's second home is on the Côte d'Azur, and France enables him to shuttle between Zaire, Morocco and Europe to mobilise support for his regime. Despite an official embargo, France continues to arm the regime in Kinshasa, training the officers and torturers of the Zairian armed forces.

There are even French troops among the mercenary force led, on paper, by the Belgian adventurer Christian Tavernier. According to Colonel Yamba, who defected from the Zairian army after active service in the Eastern provinces during the 1980s, "what you call mercenaries are actually 500 French soldiers from Bangui [France's main permanent bases in the region]. According to journalist Colette Braeckman, "the elite CRAP (Deep Search and Action) unit," was trained at Kota Koli, a Zaire army training camp set up by Belgian officers, and now operates from a base in Kisangani".

The mercenary Tavernier is just a cover. According to *Billets d'afrique* newsletter "the General Staff of the mercenary force is 80% staffed by French instructors." And "In June 1996, Christian Tavernier visited the Elysée palace [home to French President



Jacques Chirac] According to one French diplomat, 'given the links between Foccart [an Elysée advisor] and Bob Denard [France's most famous mercenary boss] it is inconceivable that Foccart would not have been at the least aware of Tavernier's contract... Since Denard is no longer operational since his disastrous [failed coup attempt] in Comoros, a Belgian took the lead, a position which Denard would otherwise have occupied."²

On January 8th the British daily *The Times* reported that the mercenaries included British subjects, and that the mercenaries were being led on the ground by Alain Le Carro, former head of the personal guard of French president Mitterrand. *The Times* estimated that 1,000 French troops and military advisors were involved. According to the January 27 issue of the Brussels daily *Le Soir*, many mercenaries have been recruited from former Yugoslavia.

The French president's office has had a hand in all the dirty work done in central Africa these last few years; complicity in the genocide carried out by Rwanda's Habyarimana dictatorship, intervention to protect the butchers,³ military intervention to support the Central African Republic dictator Ange Patassé, just as French President Giscard D'Estang supported that country's infamous Emperor Bokassa, support for the Eyadema regime in Togo... a long list.

Belgium, which put Mobutu in power thirty years ago after helping assassinate Patrice Lumumba, leader of the independence movement, has continued to pillage the mineral resources of Zaire. But political relations with the dictator in Kinshasa cooled in 1990, when the presidential guard massacred 200 students on the Lubumbashi campus. In November 1996, Belgium tried to re-build its privileged links with the dictatorship, realising that France and the USA were overtaking the former colonial power! Belgium's Secretary of State, Réginald Moreels shook hands with Zaire's Prime Minister Kengo Wa Dondo in Kinshasa, on the same day as the local population demonstrated in support of opposition leader Tschisékédi, and while the revolt in Kivu was quickly spreading across the eastern part of Zaire.

"People's" China, a long-time supporter of the Mobutu regime, sent a military delegation to Kinshasa on January 8th.⁴ Chinese military advisors are participating in the regime's offensive to re-conquer the eastern part of Zaire. As for Israel, Mobutu's other old friend, "Fourty just-retired Israeli soldiers have begun training the dictator's presidential guard"⁵ ★

1. Commando de Recherche et Action en Profondeur. See Colette Braeckman, *Le Dinosaur*, Fayard 1991
2. *Billets d'Afrique*, February 1997.
3. *La Gauche*, 22/96, 6 December 96,
4. *Billets d'Afrique*, February 1997.
5. *Le Soir*, 5 December 1996

In Algeria, "it seems surrealistic to talk about human rights"

Interview with Houssin Zahouan, general secretary of the Algerian League for Defence of Human Rights (LADDH)

• Describe your working conditions

Houssin Zahouan: The situation of human rights in Algeria is grave, and it could not be otherwise. It seems surrealistic to talk about human rights today in a country where the number of dead can be counted in the tens of thousands, where a state of emergency has been in existence for years, where violence is an everyday occurrence.

Nevertheless, the League for the Defence of Human Rights has not given up. The situation we face is quite difficult for the simple reason that from the beginning the government has targeted our organisation as its enemy, and prevented us from opening an office. Our telephones are cut off and our post office box is monitored. In addition, we are boycotted by the media and are vilified as a pro-Islamic organisation.

• Algerians continue to die in silence and with the almost total indifference of international public opinion. Why?

For almost 12 years, Amnesty International has been the only organisation internationally that took a systematic interest in Algeria. That said, their latest report¹ severely underestimates the problem. Other foreign NGOs and governments are rather indifferent. In Europe, reaction is severe if a dog or animal is injured. But human rights are subject to a different set of rules when it comes to developing countries, such as Algeria, where economic and strategic interests are at stake.

• In June 1994 the president of the Algerian League for Human Rights (LADH), was assassinated. Why?

In 1984, Youssuf Fathallah joined me in defending political prisoners before the State Security Court. We became estranged when the state, having decided to create a pro-government group to oppose the LADDH in 1987, publicised his name as being part of the leadership of the new league. The goal was to lure him in, to integrate him into this league precisely because he was known for defending political prisoners.

He began to change the nature of the "official" league. But, given his deep dishonesty, he did not understand that this was beginning to derail it

from the goals his sponsors wanted it to pursue. Toward the end of his life, he decided to simply close down this LADH through a unification of the two leagues. He did not appreciate the seriousness of this undertaking...

• What are the repercussions of the recent referendum that approved greater powers for the president?

It signified the end of the period that opened up in 1988-89. After the coup aimed at heading off the elections, an emergency situation prevailed. People simply waited for an end to the emergency - that is the re-establishment of secure conditions and a normal life. Needless to say, such expectations have not been met. President Zeroual wanted to secure his position through the referendum. This shows things are coming to a conclusion. We have entered into the final phase; the closing off of Algerian political and institutional life.

The results of the referendum are indicative. Estimates are that 15-20% of voters participated, compared to the government's claim of 75%. This shows how far a closed system can go in its falsifications.

• Was the university strike launched on October 15 the start of the rebirth of the social movements?

Neither a beginning nor an awakening. There is considerable social unrest in Algeria, which is ignored because it takes place in the context of a media black-out on both sides of the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, the situation is stymied because the leadership of the labour confederation (General Union of Algerian Workers, UGTA) is completely under government control. It does not allow this social unrest to advance as a co-ordinated national movement.

The teachers and university strikes lasted for weeks despite the repression and pressures. But there are other equally if not more important strikes in entire sectors, such as oil. These movements are still underway and will continue. The situation and the tension is such that we do not know what will make everything explode. ★

1. *Les Algériens souffrent et meurent en silence*, Amnesty International, 1996

Trade union recomposition

President Menem's "technocrat" neo-liberalism is loosing its hegemony in society, while the left opposition is challenging the authoritarian leadership of the country's labour movement

Eduardo Lucita

A number of events last year seemed to indicate a new moment in Argentinean politics. The first key movement was the election at the beginning of 1996, in which the mayor of Buenos Aires was elected directly for the first time. Voters also selected the members of a constituent assembly responsible for defining the statutes of the autonomous capital region. The result of the elections was a triumph for the opposition, and a shocking defeat for the establishment, which scored lower than ever before. Many people interpreted the results as a vote of no confidence in the government.

After months of sectoral mobilisations across the country, there was a centrally-organised general strike on 8 August 1996. The stoppage was called by the pro-governmental CGT, with the acceptance of the government, and supported by the more radical fractions of the workers movement.¹

This was the first national strike with a clearly anti-Menem line. Support exceeded the expectations of the official leaders of the CGT, and even the opposition currents in the labour movement.

There were as many forms of struggle as there are trade union groupings. The CGT organised passive support, while some regional bodies outside Buenos Aires organised walk-outs and mass assemblies. The MTA organised large public meetings in the main squares of Buenos Aires; the CTA organised a week-long caravan round the capital region, and the left in general organised road blockades, pickets and public demonstrations.

In this climate of mobilisation, the parliamentary opposition parties (former president Alfonsín's Union Civica Radical, and FREPASO - Frente Popular por una Alternativa Social), the CTA and MTA trade union groupings, and some smaller left political groups came together in the "Multisectoral" — a loose coalition which mobilised for the *apagón* ("blackout") of 12 September 1996. The *apagón* was a literal

"lighting-strike". From 8.00 pm to 8.05 pm, lights were turned off all over Argentina. The reaction of the government was to illuminate the Congress building, and warn that the popular protest could damage the electricity system, causing a collapse of service to hospitals, schools, etc.

Two weeks later, there was a 36 hour general strike, with a demonstration of 80,000 people in the famous Plaza de Mayo, and smaller demonstrations in many other municipalities.

The paradox is that while these strikes have been surprisingly successful, they have seriously weakened the bureaucracy of the officialist trade unions, and strengthened the opposition fractions of the labour movement. The officialist trade union structures are increasingly characterised by a dynamic of fracture, crisis and recomposition.

As a result, the CGT leadership held a series of extraordinary meetings, and, after a series of disputes degenerating at times into armed confrontation, a new leadership emerged. The section most directly linked to the government lost some of its influence, and the more combative MTA sector won a number of strategic positions. This re-shuffle will certainly not be the last; coexistence in the union is very weak and fragile.

Meanwhile, the first congress of the CTA (which split from the CGT four years ago) voted unanimously to rename itself as the Central de Trabajadores Argentinos (CTA), a new federation. This was a fundamental event for the Argentinean workers movement, the culture of which is tied to the monolithic, single Central.

The rest of the trade union left organised a national plenary of delegates and activists, most of whom approved motions calling for a regroupment of combative and class-conscious trade unionists across the various organisational divisions.

This is a new period for the trade union movement, characterised by the emergence of pluralist politics which, as they develop, threaten the historic hegemony of the officialist CGT leadership. The impact is being felt from the top to the bottom of the movement.

This new dynamic is partly the result of changes in the wider society: the labour market has been deregulated, the occupational structure has changed, and work processes and workplace organisation have been transformed. All this challenges the

structures of traditional trade unionism.

But while these changes are a challenge to the existing union leadership, they also represent a new possibility to resuscitate the class struggle tradition in Argentinean trade unionism.

This is one of the contradictions of the neo-liberal period: the generalisation of deregulation is destroying the old protectionist barriers, but also the social integration mechanisms which characterised the previous period of Argentinean social history. It would be overly dramatic to say that the strikes and demonstrations of 1996 inaugurated a new social dynamic. But they do express the potential for such a change.

New political situation

At a moment like this, it is important to take stock of the changing relationships between the state and civil society, and between the government and the masses.

The symptoms of social and economic tension which were exposed when the Convertibility Plan slashed inflation, and linked the currency to the US dollar were dramatically reinforced by the "Tequila shock" of 1995, when the economic crisis in Mexico in 1994 led global financial strategists to panic about their "overexposure" in Argentina.

But the causes had been present for some time. Successive governments were unable to keep the budget deficit within the limits agreed with the World Bank. This increased the direct and indirect tax burden. Concentration of wealth and social polarisation were increasingly obvious. Unemployment and marginalisation rates were high. The acceptance of "jobless growth" as a goal was increasingly widespread among "experts". There was growing evidence of a generalised corruption problem, affecting all parts of the state apparatus. All this had encouraged innumerable sectoral or single-issue demonstrations, some of them leading to or based on civil disobedience. Large sectors of the population were loosing faith and interest in the political choices presented to them. The *apagón* revealed the full implications of this state of mind, with the urban middle classes playing a major role in the mobilisations.

Economic crisis means, sooner or later, political crisis. Conflicts within the ruling party and even within its parliamentary fraction have increased. Former "Superminister" Domingo Cavallo now campaigns against the corruption of the government he

"The August strike, and the internal crisis of menemismo have opened, for the first time in 20 years, the historical and material conditions which may make it possible for the workers to regain our organic and political unity as a class... For the same reasons, there is a growing ideological-political dispute about who will lead this re-unification, and about what response our class should adopt in response to the crisis of *menemismo*" CTA Regional Congress, Buenos Aires

used to be part of, with one eye on the 1999 presidential election campaign.

He is not the only politician who would like to succeed president Menem. And all the other contenders are still members of Menem's Justicialist party!

Because of these internal tensions, and the difficulties mentioned above, the Menem government is finding it much more difficult to "make politics from an economic base" as they did in recent years with their measures to control inflation, reform the state, privatise, and restructure the economy. During those 'golden years', the role of individual parties, with distinct programmes, seemed less and less relevant. Instead, Menem manipulated a social alliance between rich and poor, dressed in old, conservative and populist clothes.

The new social dynamic is shifting that social alliance dangerously towards the poor. This is causing a political differentiation among the rich, and a recomposition of their alliances and class/faction alignments.

The respectable alternative

Menemismo is drawing to an end. But the ruling block of interests may find a novel way to assure a democratic transfer, possibly incorporating the opposition parties. Although FREPASO and UCR were carried along with the social movement in 1996, and supported the call for the 36 hour general strike, their behaviour has not reflected the rupture between the masses and the government. Their behaviour in parliament has strong elements of institutionalism, and a desire to do a deal at any price.

Not surprisingly, the general public is increasingly sceptical about the political institutions, including the opposition parties, the church and the trade unions. This crisis of representivity is corroding parliamentary democracy. It is also affecting the left, most sections of which have no real roots in the social movements, nor any clear electoral proposals which would be even moderately acceptable to the population in the short term.

The workers, the other subordinate classes, progressive democrats, and socialists are finding it terribly difficult to establish an alternative project to the dominant neo-liberal thinking.

This may mean that the result of popular unrest is a shuffle of power between the parties in parliament, with the current opposition forming the government.

The Multisectoral movement which found expression in the *apagón* is looking for a form of electoral expression. Despite intense negotiations between UCR and FREPASO, it has proved impossible to concretise an agreement. Electoral ambitions colour each discussion, with each party in the potential left alliance chasing after the same part of the electorate. To add to this, each of the parties is divided into many factions and groupings.

But what is at stake is more than just a change in government. New social and political alliances are being formed, with a

recomposition of the labour movement, and a redefinition of the relationship between organised labour and the state.

The social fabric of Argentina is open to change. The mobilisation has brought together very different ideologies, in an unprecedented atmosphere of pluralism.

Another important feature was the presence of delegations of workers from many other parts of the Americas, and even Europe, during the mobilisation for the 36 hour strike, and in the CTA congress. It seems that globalisation of the economy is, finally, leading to an increasingly international response.

The trade union bureaucracy has finally been obliged to address women, young people, students, retired workers, scientists, and other groups. As a result, the labour movement can be seen as the centralising element of social resistance to the government, and to neo-liberalism.

Of course, the union bureaucrats immediately opened negotiations with the government, ensuring that the mobilisation calmed down as quickly as possible. Nevertheless, they could not stifle the new mood in the country. The working population is back at the centre of society, and increasingly aware that fighting neo-liberalism requires a broad social front. More and more Argentines are realising that only the workers have the force and dynamism to crystallise and lead that necessary coalition into united action. ★

Notes

1. The CGT is the traditional labour federation, grouping the majority of industrial and service unions. The *Movimiento de los Trabajadores Argentinos* (MTA) is a more combative fraction, which is in open conflict with the leadership of the CGT, and struggles to "win the CGT back for the workers". The MTA is supported by the main transport unions, which gives it the power to paralyse the country. The *Central de Trabajadores Argentinos* (CTA) is a combative fraction which split from the CGT in 1993. It mainly represents those unions most affected by the State Reform project: Civil servants, teachers, and some industrial unions from the inland regions. The *Corriente Clasista y Combativa* is a trade union grouping led by the Maoist PCR. Smaller currents in the labour movement include the *Corriente Sindical Primero de Mayo*, a combative, nationalist current, and currents linked to the various Trotskyist groupings: MAS, MST, PTS, PO, etc. Militants of the former Argentinean Communist Party (PCA) have recently dissolved into the CTA.

Zapata lives on in opposition to new golf course

Tepoztlan: rebel town

In July 1995 the people of Tepoztlan, in the Mexican state of Morelos, began a movement to prevent the construction of a golf club on 240 hectares of common land within a local ecological reserve. In the following 18 months, the large mobilisations, international petitions, illegal arrest of local leaders and seemingly endless negotiations with civil servants, illustrate, at the level of one town, the deep rebellion of the Mexican people against the PRI party-state. *Jose Martínez Cruz** reports

The struggle in Tepoztlan is a struggle for land and freedom. In 19 months of struggle, the 10,000 inhabitants have, by peaceful means, transformed their lives. More than half the population took part in the election of local representatives, despite government refusal to recognise the process.

The Mexican police are not welcome in Tepoztlan. If they enter, they are detained by the popular patrols, made up of local youth. Three police agents were almost lynched last year, when they entered the town to arrest a member of the Tepoztlan Unity Committee (Comite de la Unidad de Tepoztlan), the group which leads the movement.

Tepoztlan is protected by a ring of mountains, and dominates a valley famous for magical and religious traditions linked to Quetzalcoatl and the god Tepoztecatl. Stone barricades have been built on the access roads, and on several occasions literally hundreds of police agents have been turned back.

This is the third time that local people have blocked neo-liberal plans to privatise the environment. The first project which provoked popular resistance was the construction of a cable car, which threatened to damage the pre-Columbian pyramid Tepozteco. The second protest blocked the construction of a scenic train route which would have damaged the delicate equilibrium of the high-mountain micro-region.

The government has used repression and endless negotiations to try and defeat the popular movement. Local teacher Gerardo ("Galo") Demeza, has spent over 12 months in prison, falsely accused of the murder of Pedro Barragan, who died in a confrontation between Los Ratones (The Rats) an armed gang of government thugs and the local population.

Other leaders and members of the Tepoztlan Unity Committee have been arrested, but then released following popular protests. Nevertheless, more than 170 detention orders against Tepoztlan residents are still valid.

This small town has acted in the spirit of the Zapatista Commune of 1914, when peasants in Morelos joined the rebels of the Southern Liberation Army of Emiliano Zapata in a struggle for land, which involved organising self-government in the townships.



That high point in the resistance and self-organisation of the indigenous communities has remained in their memories. The struggle for land and freedom continues! ★

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Rifondazione • Denmark's Red-Greens

Old world pressures on Mexico's rulers

Members of parliament from Mexico's ruling PRI have asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs to protest to the Danish government, after a group of Danish MPs [from the Red Green Alliance] wrote to Mexican President Ernesto Zedillo, asking him whether the Mexican government wished to solve the armed conflict in Chiapas or not.

The MPs urged Zedillo to approve the proposals for constitutional reform in the field of indigenous culture and rights developed by the Concorde and Pacification Commission (COCOPA). PRI members of parliament called this an "inadmissible act". Senator Adamor Rodriguez Lozano said that the Danish MPs' letter could not be tolerated, since it attacked the sovereignty of Mexico, and insulted the country's executive and legislative powers. "Under no circumstances, as a senator and as a Mexican," he said, can I accept that a group of legislators from other countries come and challenge popular sovereignty, and give us lessons in democracy."

One week later, 120 Italian MPs, representing all political groups, wrote to President Zedillo asking him "to lift his veto on the constitutional reform on the rights and dignity of the indigenous communities, as proposed by COCOPA."

According to a statement issued by the Communist Refoundation Party (PRC - Rifondazione) on 6 February, COCOPA "is an expression of the Federal Parliament, and includes representatives of all Mexico's political parties" COCOPA's proposals were formulated "after the peace accords signed between the Mexican government and the EZLN (Zapatistas) in February 1996.

The initiative was presented in the Italian Chamber of Deputies by representatives of Rifondazione.

Source: *La Jornada*, 30 January and 7 February

Multi-class, multi-ethnic movement Getting rid of "El Loco"

The massive rainbow coalition which forced the Ecuadorian parliament to remove President Abdalá Bucaram only six months after his election is the largest social mobilisation the country has seen in the last half century.

Fernando López

A week is a long time in politics, especially at times like these. The snowball protests of early November were much more than a continuation of the struggles against neo-liberalism which public sector unions, peasants and Indians have been undertaking for years. It would be triumphalist, and dangerous, to assume that the majority rejection of Bucaram implies a thorough rejection of his neo-liberal policies. Because this was also a civic movement, led by a sector of the grand bourgeoisie, which recognised its own lack of a strategic project.

Nevertheless, a new generation of militants was inducted in the massive protests of February 5, 6 and 7.

Bucaram and his neo-liberal crusaders alienated a majority of the population in record time – six months, since he was elected on a populist and eclectic programme, as the "lesser evil". Despite his electoral promises, Bucaram followed a much more serious neo-liberal programme than his Social Christian predecessors. And rather than build a minimum consensus for his programme, he preferred, from the morning after his election, to provoke conflicts with the opposition, to weaken and intimidate them.

While Indian activists, public sector trade unionists and the women's movement felt the direct impact of his attacks, he also managed to alienate soccer supporters (by proclaiming himself chairman of Barcelona, the country's leading team), and inhabitants of regions which he felt did not support him. The extravagant consumption and waste that accompanied his travel, and the corruption that blossomed as never before alienated poor and middle class alike. His 19 year old son Jacob even held a massive party to celebrate his first \$1 million "earned" through control of the customs authorities in Guayaquil. Meanwhile, the price of butane (domestic gas), milk and other basic products soared, creating buying panics and shortages which infuriated the poorest sections of society.

This diverse anger began to overflow on December 1st, when Bucaram announced a new economic plan, which would include the full convertibility of the national currency. This would ruin weaker sectors of the

economy, particularly in the mountain regions, terrorise the middle classes, concerned about their savings and shops, and provide fantastic opportunities for the governing clique to enrich themselves even further.

The division between the bourgeois fraction supporting Bucaram, and the section supporting the Social Christian party overlapped with the growing division between the government and those popular

sectors which openly opposed the neo-liberal economic policies being implemented.

What really divides the two bourgeois fractions is a struggle for booty – at the moment, the struggle for the proceeds of privatisation of the state sector and the social security system. As the gulf between them widened, with the parliamentary opposition increasingly relying on popular discontent, Bucaram was increasingly forced to rely on the support of international financial



★ Ecuador

institutions, which loved his economic plans, the Armed Forces, and those sectors of the population which he had managed to immobilise or win over with his populist offers.

The massive protests of February 5-7 were supported by the bourgeois right, led by the Social Christian Party, and the majority of business leaders, and by the country's left-wing forces and social movements.

What the left initially called a General Strike movement became a kind of national civic protest, with a constantly widening opposition front, coming to include most of the universities, local government bodies and "civil society". When even the Chambers of Commerce added their support, it became clear that the class nature of the protest had shifted considerably.



Until a few days before these massive demonstrations, the bourgeois sectors certainly did not seek to bring down the government. Opposition politicians saw the protests as the first step towards their victory at the next regular elections, and an opportunity to force the government to reconsider the most unpopular and unjust elements in its programme. Only when they realised the size of the movement behind them did the deputies of the National Congress begin to discuss using Article 100 of the constitution to declare the President of the Republic unfit to hold office by reason of mental incapacity.

Spontaneity

This was a cross-class civic movement, and a basically spontaneous one. It is hardly surprising that the bourgeois political forces dominated it. But each sector, each social force in Ecuador expressed themselves in their own way. Most of the sectors which became active had never before taken to the streets.

The movement also reflected and expressed local characteristics. The citizens of Quito and Cuenca articulated their feeling that they had been neglected by the rulers. While the peripheral, coastal provinces of El Oro and Esmeraldas, Bucaramista power-bases, launched a call for a new federal arrangement on February 8th, in the middle of their hero's final struggle. Economic dis-

content was the glue which held these disparate social sectors together. Bucaram had broken all his beautiful electoral promises, and all people could see was arrogance, corruption and circus antics.

The radicality of these days of mobilisation can only be explained by the fact that some of the social forces in play were essentially defining themselves politically. Businessmen from the mountain inlands realised that the proposed convertibility of the national currency would wipe them out. The Indian movement CONAIE realised that the recent creation of a Ministry for Ethnic Affairs would be a mortal blow to their independence and existence. The Social Movement Co-ordination realised that, if the movement failed, Bucaram, who had already weakened the petrol workers, would be able to flatten the labour movement.

Lessons

The role of the Armed Forces as guarantors of the established order was revealed during this crisis. The Army has certainly increased its credibility. The active role which the American Embassy plays in our national political life was also demonstrated.

Probably the most important consequence of this movement for social liberation movements is the powerful democratic consciousness which the Andean, Indian and lower-class population demonstrated, when they demanded the right to revoke political mandates, and a level of direct democracy, in which those below would be able to make the important decisions.

The "vanguard," the militants in the social movements, recognised that, without this popular upsurge, Bucaram would have been able to smash the opposition. We learned that the popular movement has the capacity to transform its demands into national demands, which can find an echo and sympathy in the wider masses. It was the Social Movement Co-ordination which first suggested the slogan "Bucaram must go" ("Que se vaya Bucaram"). By February 5th, the majority of the population agreed and, the next day, the slogan, under a full-page photograph of the demonstration, formed the front page of the Quito daily *Hoy*.

In the past, progressive forces like Pachakutik Nuevo País had, from time to

time, absorbed and adopted the political demands of the Indian movement. In the movement of February 1997, the Indian demand for a national constituent assembly became an important democratic demand for the nation as a whole. While the precise content of the demand is hardly clear, the idea of a constituent assembly is certainly a slogan which will continue to mobilise people. The priority now is to give this slogan a popular and democratic form and content.

Limits

Given the weight of the bourgeoisie within the movement, there was no real possibility of a popular leadership emerging. Some people on the left still claim that we could have shaped a different scenario. We couldn't. We didn't have enough weight. Not only were the Armed Forces active in seeking and imposing a solution, but at the moment this mobilisation started, the social movements were so weak that they simply could not have sustained an independent initiative within such a wide, large cross-class movement. And, unexpectedly and most unusually for this kind of movement, the bourgeoisie and their political representatives were actively involved from the beginning.

Nevertheless, the man or woman in the street knows that s/he was what brought down the Bucaram government, and that the new government was imposed as a result of this mobilisation. The population still does not trust the political system and politicians in general. On February 7th, the new Presidential candidate Fabián Alarcón was almost deafened by the chants of "Watch out Alarcón, or you'll go the same way as the thief [Bucaram]" and "Watch out Alarcón, the people are watching you". In other words, although Alarcón enjoys a high level of legitimacy, he doesn't have a blank cheque from the population. ★

In the next issue of *International Viewpoint* we will publish a longer analysis of recent events in Ecuador, a survey of the left, and an interview with Nuevo País MP Rosendo Rojas.

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Feminism: a new look

Events of the last two decades of this century have had great impact on women's lives internationally. The collapse of the political and economic systems of the post-capitalist societies as well as the application of neo-liberal economic policies in the industrialised countries and the Third World have directly effected basic aspects of women's lives. Cut-backs in state sponsored health care have jeopardised women's health. Elimination of state welfare systems and the social security net has accelerated the process of the feminisation of poverty. Economic accords such as NAFTA (North American Free Trade Zone) also attack workers, which in most cases are women, by making jobs more insecure and by lowering living and working conditions dramatically. The increase in the foreign debt of the underdeveloped nations and the neo-liberal policies imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, etc. to recover the debt, directly contribute to deepening the already existing feminisation of poverty in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

This becomes even more serious for indigenous women and women of other oppressed ethnic groups who are either forced to emigrate to find jobs or who remain in their countries, but whose job options there are severely limited. In both cases, racial and ethnic oppression is yet one more aspect of their overall oppression as women and as workers. In the "new world order", indigenous women and other women of colour continue to be locked into the lowest-paying, most unsafe and insecure jobs – domestic service, maquiladoras (free trade zones), sweatshops, and various informal sector jobs, just to name a few.

Privatisation of basic social services has shifted the responsibility for personal well-being from the public sphere of the state to the private sphere of the individual or the family. Due to the growing number of women-headed households, the effects of privatisation have made and are making a particularly devastating impact on women, children and older women in all societies. Cut-backs in child-care, educational facilities, medical care programs and pensions increase the pressure on women to extend their work-day beyond the sphere of the workplace to include the concerns of the household and other family members.

To accompany the economic attacks against women, there has also been an ideological front. The rise of right-wing conservatism – the "New Right" in the US, neo-fascism in Europe, religious fundamentalism, etc. – has resulted in the limitation of women's reproductive rights, affirmative action programs, etc. Women have had to struggle against a growing conservatism which seeks to strengthen the traditional

patriarchal family which defines women's primary role in society as wife and mother. In the US and Europe, recent attacks against gay and lesbian rights, bombings of abortion clinics, legislation restricting women's reproductive choices are just some of the ways conservative forces have sought to re-impose their perspectives and to dismantle the gains made by the women's movement over the last 30 years.

This issue of *International Viewpoint* will examine ways in which women are fighting back. The articles focus on women's efforts to build and strengthen the feminist response to neo-liberalism, privatisation, imperialism and right-wing conservatism.

This fight takes place in the context of a wide-spread decline of the organised feminist movement that developed, essentially in Western Europe and North America, in the 1970s and the conditions have changed since that period. Feminist ideas which have been taken up and disseminated, albeit often in an institutionalised way by governmental and non-governmental institutions, have had a broad impact in the developing countries. This has made these countries important testing grounds for the challenge of building women's movements that combine the fight for women-specific demands with a recognition of the importance of the fight against ethnic, racial and class oppression. At the same time these movements have to avoid the dangers of institutionalisation posed by the increasing network of women-oriented non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

This fight to build independent women's movements that relate more directly to the problems of all the excluded sectors of women (the poor, unemployed, homeless, immigrants) is also acutely posed in the advanced capitalist country, as the 1970s generation has increasingly lost its radical perspective.

The articles featured here give examples of these different but interlocked challenges – re-mobilising and rebuilding the women's movement in Canada; understanding the difficulties of building a new women's movement in South Africa and the tensions created within the women's movement by the conflict between "institutionalist" and "autonomous" feminism particularly in regions such as Latin America where bourgeois governments have seized on the "women's issue" as a way of declaring their modernity.

This is only a brief overview of some of the many and difficult questions facing women activists today. We welcome contributions from other countries and other experiences, for publication in future issues.

Penny Duggan and Nancy Herzog

time for working-class women's leadership Women in South Africa

Roseline Nyman reviews questions about the future of the "women's movement" in South Africa. Why do we need a movement? What form should it take? Who should lead it?

This is an important time to reflect on these questions, because trade unionists are considering the character of their own movement, and women feature prominently in discussions about the way forward.

From a class perspective, the Confederation of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) has played the central role in building a working women's movement. Within the union movement, workers have consistently prioritised issues such as maternity and paternity benefits, child care, sexual harassment and wage discrimination.

COSATU's work outside the union movement has been more sporadic. Examples of the federation's external contributions include participation in the Beijing process, a submission endorsing the right to an abortion, and work within the Women's National Coalition (WNC).

Trade unionists have not had a central role in the women's movement. Hence this article must raise difficult problems regarding the political and class character of contemporary gender struggles.

What needs must be met by a women's movement?

Women's socio-economic and political status under South Africa's first democratic government will continue to be the primary basis upon which a women's movement can build. The ANC leadership's role in government is the key determinant in improving

women's socio-economic status. It is not too early to ask, to what extent has the ANC implemented policies that have supported women in their daily struggles?

The ANC's campaign platform - the Restructuring and Development Programme (RDP) - provided policy directives regarding jobs, land, housing, water, electricity, telecommunications, transport, a clean and healthy environment, nutrition, health care and social welfare as the programme's highest priorities. These basic needs are also the most pressing issues facing the working-class, regardless of gender.

Since black working-class women experience the biggest share of poverty, socio-economic issues assume a greater importance than for middle-class women, especially white women. For black working-class women, both socio-economic issues and political issues such as violence, abortion and representivity, are critical.

Poverty rates in South Africa differ dramatically along racial and gender lines. While 65% of Africans are poor, only 0.7% of whites are poor (SALDRU, 1995). And 57% of ultra-poor households are female-headed, while 70% of female-headed households are impoverished. Women's share of the formal adult labour force is only 37%, and women's proportion of shared household income is a low 30%. Half of African women are unemployed compared with only 9% of white women and 34% of African men (Nyman and Naudascher, 1996).

To understand why these disappointing statistics are so durable, we can consider 487 short-term public works projects analysed by Valoodia (1996), which were meant to assure women at least 40% of all jobs. The RDP (Section 2.3) insisted that the "public works programme must maximise the involvement of women and youth in the poorest rural households... This must have significant socio-economic benefits, particularly with respect to production which meets women's basic needs (such as child-care facilities)." Such projects are important for generating incomes rapidly and providing needed facilities, but are no solution to the need for much more sustainable job creation.

In practice, however, women gained access to just 23% of the total 908,091 person-days in public works projects (according to a study by CASE), in part because the Public Works Department sub-contracted large amounts of the funds to in-

stitutions such as the Independent Development Trust, which apparently did not prioritise women. Moreover, facilities of particular importance to women are still not being built. Government has failed to implement a national comprehensive child care programme although only 9% of children of the age group 0-6 are in child care facilities. One third of these children are white while only 6% are African. Whites have also benefited more than Africans from subsidies from the Department of Education for child care.

Worse still, the Lund Commission recommended that child-maintenance grants should be drastically reduced since the government does not have the money to pay the grant to all racial groupings. This will exacerbate women's position. The increasing trend towards female-headed households means that many women have to bear the sole costs and responsibility of child care. Government's lack of support for women in the form of child care facilities and child maintenance grants has the impact of eroding the existing living standards of black working-class women.

Insofar as women remain economically deprived and insofar as there has not been a translation from formal Constitutional equality into socio-economic and political equity, the need for a women's movement remains. And insofar as we live in a capitalist society dominated by the stranglehold of patriarchy at all levels, it is only a socialist society that can generate social relations that will eradicate women's oppression.

Because working-class women want more than equality with their class brothers and middle class sisters. They want a society where all vestiges of patriarchy and male chauvinism are eradicated. They want a society where housekeeping functions are absorbed by institutions of a socialist society. The wholesale transformation of domestic work can only come about when the state provides resources for communal institutions such as maternity homes, nurseries, kindergartens, communal dining halls, communal laundries and mending societies. Only a socialist society can guarantee the liberation of the human spirit and ensure the fullest development of the potential of everyone, males and females.

What kind of women's movement is needed?

As women's liberation is tied to socialism, women's future is tied up with the

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Do the workers have a country?

by José Iriarte "Bikila"

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struggles of the working class. Only the leadership of working-class men and women can pave the road to a socialist society. Although there may be resistance from many male comrades to eradicating patriarchy, working-class women should strive to bring their male counterparts on-side. Men and women workers face the same bosses and state. However, because of all-pervasive patriarchy and the position of women in the reproductive sphere, women's needs are greater than those of men. The women's movement must thus always ensure that issues like child care facilities, abortion, and wage equity are part of the struggle of the whole working class.

If we do not have a women's movement that prioritises the eradication of women's oppression then the women's question could be put on the "back burner" of the working-class agenda. [...]

At present in South Africa, the political climate remains conducive to women fighting for their rights. The Interim Constitution's equality and affirmative action clauses provide the legal framework. Government policy papers on workplace equality and the Elimination of Pregnancy Bill are all victories for women. Government structures that advance women include the Office for the Status of Women, the Commission for Gender Equality and the Human Rights Commission.

A women's movement must build on such advances. In particular, government's more recent argument that it does not have money for women's basic needs must be vigorously countered. The National Women's Budget Initiative represents a campaign that working-class women can take up to ensure that government re-prioritises the budget to meet women's needs.

In this context, what role are middle-class women playing? Middle-class women, especially white middle-class women, prioritise gender equality in the political sphere within a capitalist framework at the expense of socio-economic issues and socialism. A working-class-led women's movement should form alliances with middle-class organisations around specific issues.

For example, the Termination of Pregnancy Bill provided an opportunity for a COSATU-led campaign inside and outside the federation. Women's right to an abortion concerns black working-class women,

especially, as they have suffered the most from deaths and injuries resulting from back street abortions. However, the "pro-choice" movement was dominated by parliament's health committee and the Reproductive Rights Alliance (of which COSATU is a member), which overemphasised the role of white middle-class women. COSATU women's involvement was limited to attending meetings and making a submission to parliament. COSATU gender structures failed to mobilise members around women's right to an abortion. In fact, COSATU's Central Executive Committee failed to discuss the issue despite the fact that it had been publicised extensively in the media for some time. Even though the passage of the Bill was ensured because of the ANC parliamentary majority, COSATU missed an opportunity to mobilise and lead all women under the banner of the working class.

Given this vacuum, there are possibilities for working-class women to play a stronger role. COSATU's Third National Women's Conference earlier this year provided three discussion strategies for building the women's movement: the national women's movement should be led by the working class; the WNC should be transformed into a body that has a working-class bias; and the national women's movement should mobilise around core issues. As the discussion document concluded, "we cannot rely on the constitutional, executive and legislative processes alone. The struggle for women's emancipation... Women's oppression is resolved through consistent and ongoing struggle by women and men, within the family, and within all structures and institutions of society."

The three scenarios that emerged from the COSATU conference are 1) the sisterhood scenario, entailing a national organisation for all women, based on the perception that women's needs are relatively homogeneous; 2) restructuring the women's movement, entailing different organisations and groups amongst women to strengthen the diverse voices of women; and 3) the rise of an organic women's movement through struggle, in which campaign-oriented activities organise women. The Communist Party (SACP) Gender Department supports the perspective of building the women's movement organically through struggle. Its rejection of the "sisterhood scenario" on the basis that class, race and gender divisions are interwoven is tantamount to rejecting the

WNC as constituted at present. The position that women should be organised around issues that affect them directly, means that a women's movement should be built around the burning issues of the day.

As the trade union movement constitutes the most organised section of the working class, it is hence imperative for trade-union women to spearhead the women's movement. It is evident that organisationally, COSATU must become much stronger to take leadership and to ensure black working-class women's concerns are prioritised. To this end, COSATU gender structures must play a twofold role. Firstly, they must wage tireless struggles within the federation to put gender issues on negotiating and campaign timetables. Secondly, they must initiate and lead organisations outside of the union movement to fight for women's liberation. These roles are inter-linked. As women's structures are strengthened within COSATU, so will COSATU women be equipped to lead the struggle outside. Conversely, COSATU women's campaigning outside will inject vibrancy into the federation.

Nevertheless, COSATU women have repeatedly demonstrated their ability to engage in and to lead struggles in the federation. During the 1980's, the CWIU successfully engaged in a series of strikes against wage discrimination. During the same period, SACCWU workers led militant strikes demanding a living wage. In the early 1990's and in this year, SACTWU workers struck for higher wages. COSATU's National Women's Sub-Committee played a leading role in ensuring that the CEC adopted the Sexual Harassment Code. Gender resolutions adopted by COSATU called for the employment of a National Gender Co-ordinator and the employment of a gender researcher at NALEDI.

However, there are other gender resolutions that have not been implemented. An important resolution concerns the under-representation of women in the federation's leadership. To cite developments in three major unions since 1994, SACCWU remains at 33% women in national leadership; SACTWU has dropped from 33% to 13%; and SACTWU has risen from 20% to 27%. In 13 COSATU affiliates, there are no female leaders at national level. Partly as a result, COSATU women have consistently battled to put gender issues on the NEDLAC negotiations table. At present women are rep-

resented on the NEDLAC labour caucus but not the COSATU negotiations teams.

The critical point is that women have won many of their demands through their own struggles. As trade unions are profoundly male-dominated, women must also struggle against discrimination by their male comrades (and often by female comrades). Women must strive to win male comrades to their side, in part because most gender issues AE reproductive rights, child care, parental leave, a living wage and social security benefits AE have an impact on both men and women. These struggles will only be successful if male and female workers are united.

Conclusion

The oppression of women under capitalism and the particularly high poverty rates faced by black working-class women confirm the need for a class-conscious women's movement. The ANC government's failure to prioritise women's concerns regarding job creation, child care facilities and child-maintenance grants, has contributed to women's impoverishment. The women's movement must take the form of a struggle for socialism under the leadership of the working class. COSATU, representing the most organised section of the working class has the critical role of leading the tripartite alliance and the women's movement. ★

Source: Debate #2

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Towards a grassroots women's movement

In recent months the autonomous women's movement in the Western Cape has re-focused its work to reflect its working class socialist orientation. Rita Edwards reports

A renewed commitment to build a radical, autonomous, grassroots women's movement emerged in the Western Cape after the Women's Charter was adopted in 1994. This marked the point at which the Women's National Coalition (WNC) was forced to rethink its role since its primary task had been completed.

Over previous years, the WNC had managed to mobilise a very broad spectrum of organisations and women activists from diverse backgrounds whose demands formed the core of the Women's Charter. The WNC raised issues which women wanted to see resolved in the new constitution.

But the fact that it was so broad-based also constituted the WNC's major weakness. The WNC brings ruling class women from the National Party and the Democratic Party together with women from the liberation movement and the trade unions. This made it difficult for a radical grassroots agenda to emerge.

And yet many progressives in the WNC believed it was premature to consider the formation of a grassroots women's movement. They argued that the WNC needed to continue as a broad front to lobby government around the Women's Charter and to mobilise women around the Beijing Conference. But in spite of the decision to continue as a broad coalition, the WNC in the Western Cape weakened and fragmented as member organisations concentrated on their own activities.

To address this situation, the WNC executive in the Western Cape organised a series of consultations to review the socio-political context and to debate how women should reorganise. These gave rise to an interim steering committee for the formation of a grassroots women's movement. Participants included organisations affiliated to the WNC and also broad sections of the community.

The first public forum took place in June 1996 and was attended by women from political organisations, trade unions, community, civic, non-governmental and gay and lesbian organisations as well as women parliamentarians.

Overwhelming support was given to the idea of building an independent grassroots women's movement that would address violence against women, basic needs, reproductive rights and child care. Follow-up workshops and forums have laid the

basis for building this new movement.

The movement is seen as a predominantly working-class organisation which will campaign around issues affecting grassroots women. Activists attending the consultations were unanimous in the view that we are building a women's organisation with working-class women in leadership. Although men are not defined as the enemy, they are not eligible for membership, since it is believed important for women to organise themselves against their own oppression. However, we are clear that our struggle is directed against a system that oppresses and exploits men and women; therefore we see it as important to link our struggles with the broader struggle to fundamentally transform our society.

A second important principle behind this initiative is that of independence and autonomy. In order to unify women across political lines, organisations and communities, it is necessary to build a movement that is independent of political parties and government. This does not mean building a movement that is apolitical. On the contrary, it seeks to mobilise women against all aspects of oppression in alliance with other mass organisations and social forces.

The movement's non-racial character is critical. It aims to bring women from different communities together. Our strategy focuses on building area committees that cut across traditional group area divides. The organisation should not be seen as an "african", "coloured" or "indian" organisation, but an organisation of oppressed women.

The movement is organising around a "Cost-of-Living Campaign" which will focus on the rising prices of bread, milk and paraffin. The structures of the movement will be built around the campaign. The campaign has four focus areas.

First, the campaign involves tackling the government around subsidies of basic necessities. Secondly, it is directed at multinationals that control the energy market. Thirdly, it is necessary to highlight the problems resulting from trade liberalisation and how it impacts on wheat prices. Finally, there is the need to address monopolistic producers and retailers. The campaign is already conscientising women around the different factors that affect the prices of basic commodities. ★

"Jobs and Justice! Bread, but Roses too!"

Women's march against poverty

A cross-country caravan drew women from across Canada to a spirited demonstration on Ottawa's Parliament Hill on June 15th. Inspired by the highly successful June 1995 women's march on Quebec city, the march was organised on a shoestring budget, and with only a few months of organising time.

By Mark Johnson

The caravan was launched in Vancouver, on Canada's pacific coast, and St. John's, Newfoundland and St. John's New Brunswick in the Atlantic far east. According to Edmonton march organiser Giselle Renault, "the final march in Ottawa was ten blocks long (estimated at 5-8,000 marchers). But this represented a small fraction of the tens of thousands of women, children and men who came out in support of the march as it passed through cities and towns across the country."

Hundreds of thousands of Canadians were made aware of the demands of the 1996 woman's march against poverty. And important openings were made for future work around poverty, feminism, racism, and trade union activities. According to Laurie Siver of the New Socialist Group, "the women's call to action was a great show of solidarity that simultaneously made links between economic injustice and the multiple forms of women's oppression: race, class, sexuality, ability and so forth. Fighting for decent jobs and social programmes was clearly worth the struggle."

Mixed judgement

Feminists are divided in their evaluation of the main march sponsors, the Women's Committee of the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC and the National Action Committee on the Status of Women (NAC). Irshad Manji of *This Magazine*, English Canada's largest radical monthly, defends the NAC against growing criticism from a sector of university-based feminists who accuse it of extremism and intolerance. "More men than even have gotten involved with the NAC since Sunera Thobani [an immigrant woman], became president. I don't think they would join an extremist, anti-male movement. "the NAC has [recently] sponsored Canada's first national conference challenging the Liberal government's social programme cuts. The fact that it was the first, and that it was national, is a sign of credibility, not extremism. And now there is a cross-country march, co-sponsored by the NAC, against poverty. The number one issue facing

Canadian families is unemployment, which often leads to poverty. This is hardly an issue that affects only immigrant, refugee and lesbian women."

Feminists from the revolutionary left see a different problem. For them, NAC, like the trade union bureaucracy, doesn't go far enough in its economic campaigns. "The CLC and NAC did little to link the [federal] Liberal government with the loss of federal transfer payments to provinces for social programmes, or with the provinces' current right-wing social and economic agendas," argue Julia Barnett and Lorrie Silver, in the September issue of *Socialist Challenge* magazine. "Neither body has pointed to the necessity to identify and act upon future strategies."

This is not just leftist sour grapes. Ontario, Canada's economic and political heartland, has seen an unprecedented rise in labour mobilisation and popular protest since the 1995 election of an unpopular provincial government led by "Progressive Conservative" Mike Harris. Together the women's movement and labour could build a movement that would bring down the government.

It is worth recalling what has been happening in Ontario. The Ontario Federation of Labour has called several major days of action over the last nine months, winning support from a wide range of community organisations and local labour councils. Over 14,000 people braved sub-zero temperatures to march and picket in London, Ontario on December 11, 1995. By doing so they built a momentum which led to North America's largest ever pro-labour demonstration. Over 25,000 people struck and picketed in Hamilton, Ontario on Friday February 23, and the next day over 120,000 Canadians demonstrated against the Tory party convention, held at the Hamilton Convention Centre. Several days earlier, 67,000 public sector workers voted 2:1 to strike for against cuts in service and working conditions. Several thousand members of the public sector union OPSEU attended a Toronto rally to mark International Women's Day. Subsequent days of action have been smaller than Hamilton, but they remain the largest mobilisations seen in those regions Ontario (Kitchener-Waterloo 45,000 on April 19, Peterborough 8,000 on June 24)

Unfortunately, the organisation of the Women's march against Poverty in Ontario and Canada's largest city, Toronto, suffered



the same bad organisation and bad leadership as the Peterborough labour mobilisation. According to local government (CUPE) activist Julia Barnett, "local organisers in Toronto mirrored the provincial labour dispute, which split the focus of the day's events and showed its weakness in building a long term-fight-back on a provincial basis."

Quebec

The women's march was one of very few popular mobilisations to occur more or less simultaneously in English Canada and Quebec, the French-speaking region conquered by Britain in 1759 and still discriminated against by the country's Anglo-Scottish bourgeoisie. Building on last year's *Bread and Roses* march, the Quebec Federation of Women made connections with social movements to sponsor a vigil and rally in the provincial capital, Quebec City. Over 6,000 participants, of all ages, gathered at the *Assemblée nationale* (provincial parliament), and dumped bread crumbs at the doors of major banks and corporations. They demanded that the federal government and the local ruling Parti quebecois adopt policies to create jobs, and boost social spending.

Participation this year was 30-40% lower than at the first march, which co-incided with a more militant climate linked to the October referendum on re-negotiation of Quebec's relationship with Canada. Nationalist leader Jacques Parizeau addressed the marchers, in the hope of co-opting their support for the referendum. "This year, the Parti Quebécois government is introducing cutbacks in social spending," notes march organiser Jacqueline Loiselle. "Parizeau had nothing to bring to the march. And people were less optimistic about making demands on the government."

In this context, Loiselle argues, the 1996 march was a real success. From her own region, Outaouais (in western Quebec, on the border with English-speaking Ontario, just across the river from the Canadian capital Ottawa), she estimates that two thirds of the women who filled the four buses for Quebec hadn't participated in last year's march.

Jaqueline Loiselle's union, the Public Sector Alliance of Canada (PSAC) provided funds to free her for workplace organising, which enabled her to involve more than 20 union members in the march, compared to



only three last year. This is relatively common in the Quebec union movement, but it was probably the first time unionists in the capital region had been freed to work on an action that wasn't strictly union business.

Union officials are clearly keen to link up with community initiatives. But there were few trade union women at the march in Quebec City. The Confederation of National Trade Unions (CSN), Quebec's largest trade union federation outside the CLC, supported the march with money, but apparently they couldn't mobilise their members. Participants from Loiselle's hometown of Hull were "mainly from the women's movement; women who provide services to women in difficulty-battered women, for example. I think that was true for other regions."

The demands of the Quebec march were the same as in 1995, but with a greater emphasis on minimum wage, pay equity, and a halt to cuts in social assistance. Committees within the Quebec Federation of Women are currently discussing the form that this year's march will take. And an international women's march to New York in the year 2000. Unfortunately, Loiselle reports, while the trade unions are participating, delegates "don't take the demands back into the union membership. All they do is report back to the women's committees of the various unions."

Uneasy sisterhood

There is an uneasy relationship between the women's movements in English Canada and in Quebec. This reflects the general pattern of (relatively mild) chauvinism on the English-speaking left. As Toronto activists Julia Barnet and Lorrie Silver explain, "little or no effort was made to work with Quebec women and their demands for self-determination, nor was there a concrete understanding of the frustrations they face within Quebec under the governing Parti Quebecois. Furthermore, there was no push to organise women in English Canada to participate in the Quebec rally and march. The English Canadian women's movement has effectively adopted a successful theme from their

Quebec sisters, but, it seems, without making the necessary links."

The final rally in Ottawa was "more or less" bilingual, though the day-to-day reality in the capital region is that there are two women's committees, one in Ottawa (Ontario) and one in Hull (Quebec). The one in Hull is French-speaking and the one in Ottawa is officially bilingual. But, according to Loiselle, "you have to speak English to be understood." As Loiselle explains, "we don't have the same way of looking at things or the same way of doing things. So there is some sand in the gears, even though there is a lot of good will on both sides." Perhaps unsurprisingly, it was hard to mobilise Quebec women for the Ottawa event, even in Hull, which is part of the same urban zone. "Even though Ottawa is so close, we had to work hard to mobilise because we really feel sometimes that Ottawa is in another country. Of the 200 Hull women who went to Quebec City (four hours by bus) only about 25 crossed the river to Ottawa."

New connections

Despite these shortcomings, which are hardly specific to the women's movement in the Canadian state, many local experiences were positive. In Edmonton, Alberta, the Women's Committee of the Alberta Federation of Labour and the AFL executive initiated an organising committee that attracted over 45 women. According to union activist Giselle Renault, these participants "represented various trade unions, women's groups, women of colour and religious organisations. But, most importantly, the meetings attracted the essential input of women who were living in poverty, and it was these women who were encouraged to take the lead, to demand justice, not charity, from our elected and supposedly accountable politicians."

"This was the first time such a diverse group of women came together. We mobilised over 2,000 people, and highlighted the plight of women in poverty. After the

march had passed through, we agreed to continue to nurture the coalition whose seeds were planted this spring. The women's network will continue to confront the sterile deficit hysteria of the Liberal government and their provincial counterparts."

The march generated very concrete demands for job creation and increased social spending. But, like any social movement "from below" it facilitated and encouraged reflection on the causes of poverty, and the long term solutions. Giselle Renault: "Beyond the immediate relief of poverty, we have the task of understanding the systematic corruption that is the basis of a society that favours corporate and banking interests over the interests of the very people who create the wealth. Do we rely want a society that panics when unemployment goes up, because the stock market's start speculating about wage inflation?"

"Our governments are in a frantic 'race to the bottom,' with lower wages and cuts in health, education and social programmes. With this goes a blame-the-victim mentality promoted by the politicians and the bosses. But a poorly educated, unhealthy and poverty-stricken population can hardly 'compete in the global economy.' A society that sees people as a liability and not an asset is politically and morally bankrupt."

"We must expose the corruption and propose positive alternatives. Coalitions that are rooted in concrete actions and demands for concrete positive changes are never out of fashion, regardless of the Right's dismissal of us as 'special interest groups' As if all their 'independent' research institutes, manufacturers associations and chambers of commerce were not "special interests". We must rely, not on money or police power, but on the strength of our numbers and our convictions. Never give up! Never give in!" ★

This article is compiled from articles in the September issue of *Socialist Challenge* and the July/August issue of *This Magazine*.



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Latin American feminist conference

More confrontation than debate

The last Latin-American and Caribbean Feminist Meeting was a controversial event. "Autonomous" feminists claimed that "institutionalised" feminists were dominating the movement, and allowing the state and patriarchy to divide and rule the movement.

Ana Canales reports

The Latin American women's movement has a long history of continental meetings which bring together the diversity and richness of the movement. Those meetings generally combine a multitude of simultaneous workshops with some "general" themes which are discussed by all participants.

This latest meeting was held in Cartagena, Chile, from 23 - 28 November 1996. The 700 participants came from 24 countries. It had a rather different dynamic from previous meetings, which produced a strong debate during the five days of the meeting.

Workshops discussed Latin American immigrant women in Europe; indigenous women; lesbians; horizontal (radial) communications; socialist women networking; political women networking; globalisation; neo-liberalism, co-operation; abortion; reproductive health; and young women. There was also space for theatre, song, video, book presentations, and a health space, with sessions on back massage, Tai Chi, and yoga.

The general themes of the assembly were "the political and philosophical aspects of the various currents of Latin American feminism" and "the hidden and discriminated face of feminism, in being and doing feminism." But this debate was forced into a simplistic, false polarisation, as if there were in the movement two clear main streams: women and groups which are absolutely autonomous and those who are committed to one or several patriarchal institutions.

This view of a dual polarisation was not accepted by the large majority of the participants, a large number of them activists in women's organisations within the popular movement, in trade unions and left parties and in feminist groups with a view of building a women's movement linked to the social movements.

"Institutionalised?"

To deal with this disagreement, three broad discussion groups were established.

The group of discussion organised by the so called "institutionalised" current was attended by around 90 participants. The discussion concentrated on the financing of the movement, and its general agenda. There was a call for the development of a radical

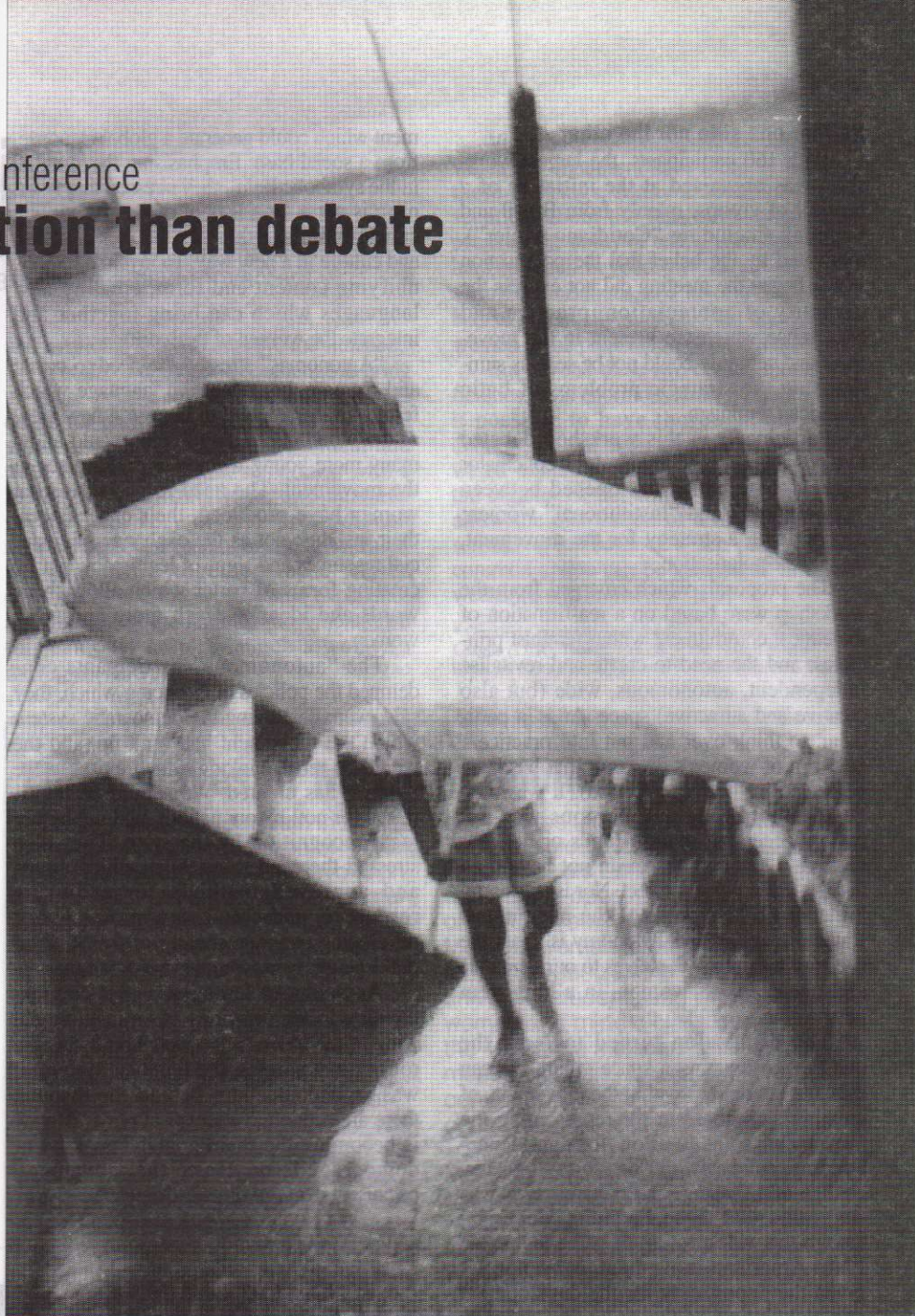
agenda. Speakers outlined a decline in institutional financing of feminist activities, and a marked unevenness in the distribution of these institutional resources between the various women's groups. Apparently, this is a subject of great debate inside the movement, particularly among those groups which have less experience in fund-raising and less information about the sources of finance.

There was also discussion about the relationship of the movement with the state. It was alleged that the state was becoming a "valid interlocutor" of the movement, given that people relate to the state in their daily lives. Dialogue and negotiation with the state, in this period of democratic construction is therefore valid, it was argued. This was considered a natural consequence of the changes in the general political situation from the period of confrontation which was called for in the time of the dictatorships in Latin America.

The Beijing UN conference on women has created a new challenge, some women

argued. The demands raised in Beijing should be implemented in each of our countries, and the UN forum considered as the highest framework for negotiation with the states. "States are only talking about the women question because women are organised!" it was said. The state decides on its interlocutors within the movement and it is they who participate in this arena through pacts, agreements and negotiations.

But how to intervene in this process? Gina Vargas, a well-known feminist from Peru, who was the Latin America coordinator for the alternative women's Summit in Beijing, argued that we should "re-accommodate our subversive" feminist practice. During the debates in the general assembly, the Bolivian group "Mujeres Creando" tried to denounce the risks of this reasoning by unveiling a huge banner proclaiming "Careful! Patriarchy is exploiting women who are hungry for power". Some delegates applauded. Others hissed.



★ Chile

Neither one side nor the other

With 160 participants, the largest workshop was organised at the initiative of a handful of groups, mainly from Brazil and Uruguay (including "Cotidiano Mujer"), motivated by the belief that the polarisation which began the meeting did not express the diversity of appreciation, practice and experience which are present in the movement and certainly could not be seen as summarising the strategic problems of Latin American feminism.

Participants in this workshop debated two possible approaches; a role of conciliator in the debate which has opened between "autonomous" and "institutional" women; and defining a strategy for the movement, despite the polarisation.

The proposals which emerged from the workshop were based on a reaffirmation of the ethical commitment within feminist principles, and the need to create and revitalise independent, autonomous, wide (but also creative and attractive) space. And, in particular, to think over and put into practice a platform of women's demands that has been neglected in the recent period). It was suggested that being autonomous was not mainly accepting outside funds or not, nor did being autonomous mean not having an ideological-political project. Nor is autonomy a matter of "demonising" the institutions. Rather, it was argued, autonomy is about the capacity to commit ourselves to our demands and our needs as women, in a long term perspective.

The discussion turned towards the question of creating a space where we can evaluate our actions within the movement, of creating a mechanism for representing the movement, so as to allow for confidence-building, solidarity, the possibility of interchange and sharing, and coherence. It was suggested that these Feminist Meetings, though the widest forum of gathering of the Latin American movement, have not yet given the opportunity for the development and elaboration of the necessary debates, despite the fact that they are still a privileged forum for doing so.

"Autonomous feminism"

Over 100 women participated in this workshop, which called for a feminist movement which would be a space in which each act "expresses the union between the intimate, the private and the public." By starting from this articulation, it was argued, we can introduce a discussion of the intimate sphere, which will take us forward. Otherwise we will remain incomplete as women and as a movement. "What to do as feminists" should be answered by starting from the personal, the "I", which is the only viewpoint from which we can understand the world, the speakers said. The body is both the synthesis and a component of existential and political "being."

These self-styled "autonomous" feminists called for a feminist analysis which would deny all forms of patriarchal power, public and private, challenge the patriarchal state and its institutions, and build a move-

ment which could generate a global response, from a social base. Emphasising the struggle in the symbolic field, they stressed that feminism is not a long lists of demands, but is a critical process, rethinking the world, reality and culture in a new way. To invent a society, unifying content and form, creating new languages which can bring together and integrate the women of the world.

"Autonomas" stressed the need to create and recreate the subversive language which feminism started, and to impose a new view of the world. This, it was said, would allow many more young women to find a place in the movement. The need to socialise what women have produced, their experiences, their insights: not as the exchange of financial resources and signs of legitimacy, but by creating forms of barter which allow those words and ideas to reach more and more women.

The "autonomous" participants condemned the policies of financing which, they said, were destroying the democratic system which the movement had built up, and the would-be-rebel thinking which exists in the space it has created. We should be legitimised (or not) by our actions, and not by our legal recognition by the state. They also stressed the need to establish ethical limits and approved methods for acquiring resources, and create new practices for developing our own sources of funds, without depending on foreign aid programmes.

Autonomous feminism is not complementary to the activities of an institutional wing of the movement which would play the role of maintaining the feminist system, it was argued. Because behind the dispute, there are economic interests at play. "Money is becoming the main goal." This kind of democracy is no use to the movement, because it denies women's existence.

They concluded their presentation by saying that autonomous feminism includes opposition to neo-liberalism, against the system, and against discrimination by race, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

They proclaimed that "autonomy defines our relationship with the world but it is not autonomy from history. We are present in the historical processes, where we nourish and deepen our critique of the system and where we introduce our daily subversion of the system... we cannot be tolerant with those who negotiate and deny our existence; our ethical commitment is not infinite tolerance but relations of respect and recognition".

In fact, the perspectives proposed would in practice mean the total isolation of the movement. This concept of autonomy implies the absolute denial of the efforts and experiences of the women's movement to build alliances with other social movements, political parties, and trade unions: which is the only possible way to link feminism with the building of a global progressive social project.

Looking forward

The next continental feminist meeting will take place in the Dominican Republic. Given the divergent positions expressed at this meeting, it was agreed that the Dominican meeting would continue to work on the basis of the partial agreement and partial disagreement expressed here, in the spirit of co-operation in what we do and in the face of challenges which affect all of us. ★

For more information about the conference see "Confrontation at Latin American feminist meeting" Jean Dupont, *International Viewpoint* #284, January 1997.

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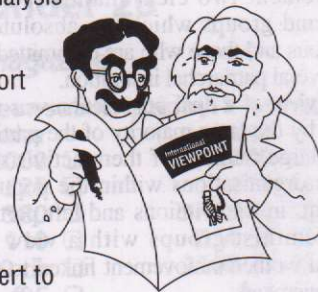
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Now hear this!

An ambitious conference this month will attempt to knit signs of restlessness among the women of France into a new movement...

Women were massively present during the November-December 1996 public sector strike. And in a whole series of smaller strikes, most of which have not hit the media, others, like the "kidnapping" of the director of Credit Foncier by his staff, supremely public events.

Women are also at the centre of the French movements against unemployment and marginalisation, like AC! (Act Together Against Unemployment). Women have participated in all the recent occupations of the ASSEDEC (offices which pay out unemployment and other social allowances) and the ANPE (job centres). Women have been active in the struggle of the "paper-less" immigrants and in the homeless movement. And women will play an active role in the European Marches against Unemployment, Job-precariousness and Exclusion, which will begin in April and cumulate in an Amsterdam rally during the Inter-Governmental Conference which will decide the future direction of EU integration.

Many of these women; feminists, trade unionists, researchers, community activists and political militants, will come to the Hearings on Women's Rights on 14-15 March.

The Hearings will embrace all areas of struggle, with the ambition of rebuilding broad, unitary initiatives to respond to the fascist threat and the Catholic fundamentalists, and to "put a spanner in the works" of all governmental and employer proposals which would reduce women's rights and recompense in the workplace.

The initiative for this event was born after the unprecedented success of the 25 November 1996 demonstration for women's rights (see "Women's movement re-surges", Maya Surduts, *International Viewpoint* #272, January 1996, p.5). According to Marie-Annick Vigan of *Cahiers du féminisme**, "in a context of social regression, growing fundamentalisms and the renaissance of a reactionary moral order, the demonstration last November created a new dynamic in favour of women's rights. More than 100 organisations and associations signed an appeal to "take stock, together, of the situation women find themselves in today, and define, together, the objectives of our struggle and action."

"This is a tremendous challenge. We already know that women, as a whole, are underprivileged compared to men; that women are underpaid, overexploited, and underrepresented in the institutions, the political parties, the trade unions and so on. But things become much more interesting when you try to see what all this means in practice in a region, a town, a particular party... and when you then put all this information together, and compare all the solutions which are being proposed, at a local

and a national level, to improve the situation.

It is also a tremendous challenge to bring all these people together; to maintain this desire for unity between militants, men and women, with very different political and trade union trajectories, sometimes with a history of confrontations, and between people with very diverse professional, regional and even generational origins. But if we can bring together these varied experiences and the accumulated experience and thinking of the feminist movement, then this can only help re-launch a women's movement here in France."

The memory of the movement

Three waves of Mexican feminism

The first wave of feminism in Mexico accompanied the revolution of 1910 to 1920. During the Mexican Revolution, the socialist governors of the Yucatan, Salvador Alvarado and Felipe Carrillo Puerto, organized feminist conventions and pushed women's rights. Working with feminists, Salvador Alvarado convened the first Feminist Congress in Mexico in 1916. Alvarado and Carrillo Puerto organized Feminist Leagues and reproduced Margaret Sanger's birth control pamphlets. They supported divorce, contraception, abortion, women's right to vote and hold public office. The first wave ended with the suppression of the revolution's left wing in the mid-1920s.

The second wave of feminism came in the 1930s. Radical women, nationalists and communists, organized peasants and workers. But the communists opposed the organization of an independent women's movement to fight for women's suffrage, so in 1934 Maria del Refugio Garcia established the Sole Front for Women's Rights to fight for women's suffrage. When Lazaro Cardenas was elected president, he encouraged the suffrage movement and even pushed a women's suffrage amendment to the Constitution which passed the Senate and was ratified by all 28 states.

However, when conservative general Juan Andreu Almazan announced he was running in 1940 for president against the ruling party, and created a "Feminine Idealist Party" to support his campaign, Cardenas and the leaders of the ruling party decided to kill the women's vote. Not until nearly 20 years later, in 1958, did women win the vote.

The third wave of Mexican feminism

Vigan does not exaggerate the difficulties which the organisers have faced in building these Hearings. Many associations were sceptical about the feasibility of such an event, or the utility of taking part. And it was hard to reach beyond the "cartel" of sponsoring organisations, and involve large numbers of potentially interested but unorganised women in the preparation of the event.

But beyond these two organisational difficulties, is an enormous strategic question. Is it possible to have thorough, on-going debates, on the basis of local experiences, which will not be "forced" to a conclusion by the organisers, but which will nevertheless allow the distillation of a minimum consensus, on the basis of which proposals for common action can be generated? In a few weeks we will know... ★ [JD]

* Quarterly publication of the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), French section of the Fourth International. ☉ 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108. Montreuil, France

came in the late 1960s and early '70s. The Tlatelolco massacre of 1968, President Luis Echeverria's call for a democratic opening, and the example of the U.S. feminist movement led Mexican women to organize. Mexican feminist organizations grew among university students and professional women and middle class women. In the 1970s the Mexican feminist movement took up the issues of the right to contraception and abortion, and the controversial question of lesbianism.

Separate from the three waves of Mexican feminism have been the Mexican women's organizations, which did not identify with and often rejected the feminist movement. Women in Mexico have often organized in the neighborhoods to get basic services such as running water, sewer systems, and electricity. Many of these women were the activists of the Urban Popular Movement of the 1970s and 1980s. The First National Meeting of Women of the Urban Popular Movement was held in 1983.

In 1982 Rosario Ibarra de Piedra became the first woman candidate for president in Mexico as the socialist and feminist candidate of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT, Mexican section of the Fourth International). Today, Rosario is a congresswoman for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and closely associated with Subcomandante Marcos and the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN).

Since January 1, 1994 and the EZLN-led uprising in Chiapas, many women throughout Mexico have organized in support of the EZLN or of women or communities in Chiapas. ★

Source: MLNA

book notes

What Women Want

By Patricia Ireland

Reviewed by Shirley Pashlok

What Women Want, an autobiography by Patricia Ireland, president of the National Organization for Women (NOW), is an easily readable introduction to feminist ideas. As Ireland relates her experiences growing up in the 1950s, the reader can't help but see how women are socialized to accept sexual discrimination as the norm. Without lecturing or going into debates on feminist theory, Ireland makes her points through a series of personal vignettes. She vividly describes the dead-end low-paying jobs she and other women of her generation were forced into. Lest anyone think this is simply an historic account, later chapters give evidence of women's continuing job segregation and wage discrimination.

It was as a stewardess (as flight attendants were then called) at Pan Am that Ireland first came into contact with NOW. Her husband, a student at the time, needed extensive dental surgery. Ireland was shocked when the insurance company denied him coverage as her spouse. At first, she thought that was some type of clerical error. However, her supervisor explained to her that it was no mistake: Pan Am's "family" insurance benefits only applied to male employees and their spouses. Ireland explained that although she hadn't been politically active, the civil rights and antiwar movements had influenced her, giving her the confidence to act. So, she called Dade County (Florida) NOW. A NOW volunteer explained that what Pan Am was doing wasn't just morally wrong; it was also illegal. She explained what steps Ireland needed to take to solve her problem.

Growing awareness

From this experience, Ireland learned that legal rights alone are insufficient, that a movement is necessary to guarantee that these rights are enforced. She also learned that in solving her individual problem, she could help large numbers of women. Her success in forcing Pan Am to pay for her husband's dental work inspired Ireland to enter law school. There, whether protesting a sexist law text, a sexist guest lecturer, or a discriminatory service club, she learned another important lesson—the importance of collective action: “We didn't abolish slavery, we didn't win the right to vote, first for African American men and then for all women, because we had a few good men in the Congress or in the White House or on the Court, but because we had strong individuals and strong movements that demanded change. “Now it is our turn to continue. We have the ability and the respon-

sibility not only to take control over our lives, but literally to change the course of history.”

Some serious omissions

This book does not purport to be a history of the women's movement. Although this is understandable in an autobiography by the NOW president, it leads to a one-sided picture of NOW's early history. Although Ireland mentions other groups and stresses the value of coalitions, there are some serious omissions. Ireland describes her experiences speaking out about her own illegal abortion without mentioning that, prior to the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* Supreme Court decision—at a time when NOW was still reluctant to publicly support abortion rights—the Women's National Abortion Action Coalition (WONAAC) organized demonstrations, speak-outs, and tribunals.

Similarly, consciousness-raising groups, independent campus women's liberation groups, city-wide women's liberation groups, feminist newspapers and journals, radical feminist collectives, and the self-help groups that later grew into battered women's shelters and rape crisis centers are largely ignored.

Ireland doesn't ignore NOW's original hesitation to embrace lesbian rights and lesbian-baiting within the organization. She points out that homophobia is used to keep women in line regardless of their sexual orientation. Similarly, Ireland discusses the problem of red-baiting. Although she doesn't detail the extent to which the NOW leadership has employed red-baiting, she acknowledges that it has been a problem and describes her own positive experiences working with members of the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) on clinic defense and protests against police brutality while she was in Dade County NOW.

Ireland also describes the way Miami right-wingers used red-baiting coupled with physical violence to intimidate all progressives. She explains her own initial fear and hesitation to speak out on behalf of free speech for supporters of the Cuban Revolution. She doesn't duck the role of U.S. foreign policy: graphically describing persecution faced by women under U.S.-supported dictatorships. Rather than rely on statistics, she personalizes this violence by describing the work of one woman she met and her subsequent torture and murder.

Emphasis on electoral politics

Ireland doesn't ignore the continuing betrayal by “friendly” Democrats or the power of an independent mass movement. But she continually subordinates this power to electoral politics. At times it almost seems as if Ireland is arguing with herself, trying to convince herself that this electoral approach is

correct despite the overwhelming evidence to the contrary. She describes her early desire to run for elected office: “I wanted to change the system that caused so much suffering, and one way of doing it—a way that might just be best for me—was to run for elected office.”

She changed her mind when she realized she would have more real power and influence as a leader of NOW than as a Florida state legislator. Ireland details NOW's support for the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), the campaign that transformed NOW into the largest, most significant national feminist organization. She correctly points to the many discriminatory laws that the ERA would abolish and its economic benefits for women. In her description, however, she omits the shift from mass demonstrations to electoral efforts. On the contrary, Ireland says, the demonstrations and educational efforts were also aimed at establishing a future electoral campaign network for what would overwhelmingly be to the benefit of the Democratic Party.

Ireland doesn't ignore the futility of this strategy. She names “friends” that NOW money and volunteers helped elect who then voted against the ERA. Yet, even as the ERA went down to defeat, doomed by this electoral strategy, she sees these efforts as positive. She asserts that later electoral “victories” resulted from the groundwork laid during the ERA campaign. Ireland claims that the betrayals by many male “friends” in the ERA campaign led to the creation of the “Feminization of Power” campaign; that is, instead of trying to influence those in power, to become those in power. Again, she proudly points to NOW's “success” in this area—only to have women candidates (mostly Democrats) elected with NOW money and volunteers also stab them in the back. This was demonstrated recently by the women members of Congress who voted to throw millions of children deeper into poverty by voting for the so-called welfare reform bill.

NOW didn't “endorse” Clinton in 1992. Instead, they actively campaigned for various female candidates under the slogan “Elect Women for a Change.” Ireland admits that the result was to increase Clinton's vote total. This strategy was modeled after similar efforts in state elections where a particularly reprehensible candidate wasn't endorsed while efforts were made to turn out a large vote for a “good” candidate for a lesser office, knowing that these voters would also vote for the head of the ticket as a “lesser evil.”

Defending women's clinics

Explaining that if we can control our reproductive rights, we can control our lives,

Ireland discusses the need for actively defending clinics from assaults by Operation Rescue goons. Yet, she portrays this as a short-term solution, subordinate to the long term solution of court actions. Ireland answered critics within the women's movement who question the value of the massive pro-choice demonstrations NOW has initiated: "There are solid reasons for doing mass actions. We use them to organize and to inspire. A mass action builds our strength and our momentum – and shows that strength to politicians and to ourselves." She added that these actions also provide a pool of volunteers to turn out the vote and lobby politicians.

This book tells its readers, "We've come a long way, but we still have a long way to go." It shows women that their problems aren't caused by some individual failing or bad luck, but result from systematic sexual discrimination. And, more important, it urges them not to accept the status quo, but to take control of their own lives and engage in activity that can make a positive change for all women. Ireland sums up: "I want us to move forward and to continue fighting for justice in those areas where triumph has so far eluded us. I want us to feel the urgency of taking action now to prevent the loss of everything we've gained over the past 30 years of progress and struggle." Given the current intensity of the bipartisan attacks against working people, women, minorities, immigrants, and children, Ireland will certainly have ample opportunity to back up her words.

What Women Want, Dutton, 1996, 323 pp. This review is reprinted from *Socialist Action* (US), October 1996

Lean Production: a Capitalist Utopia?

Tony Smith

reviewed by **Thomas Coutrot**

In the "notebook" series of the Amsterdam-based International Institute for Research and Education (IIRE), Tony Smith offers us a well-documented critique of the theses that "lean production" (translated into French as "*la production flexible*") makes it possible to overcome, in a lasting way, the contradictions between capital and labour.

This is high quality work, based on a deep familiarity with the international literature on this subject. Tony Smith uses the conceptual tools of Marxism in a very pedagogical way, in order to show how these innovations in no way abolish the structural contradiction between capital and labour. Instead, "lean production" re-creates these contradictions, in a new form.

This is a remarkably clear and well-documented text, which reviews contemporary developments. It is highly recommended, and stimulating reading, and an excellent synthesis for the non-specialised reader.

The problem is that lean production theory can be demolished using the critique which Marxists make against capital, what-

ever the historical period. Curiously, Smith seems to have missed the target. Nowadays there are very few writers who claim that lean production makes it possible to go beyond capitalism. The thesis we ought to be attacking is the suggestion that lean production could make it possible to launch a new period of long term capitalist growth.

Although Smith mentions Ernest Mandel in his bibliography, he doesn't refer to the Belgian Marxist's work on long waves of boom and slump. Indeed, Smith avoids the very concept of long waves. He explicitly rejects all "regulationist" approaches.

This is a common attitude among excessively "orthodox" Marxists. Frightened of suggesting that a reformist alternative might be possible, they don't want to even consider the possibility that capitalism could be capable of regenerating itself and rebuilding viable social structures which will permit continued accumulation.

Since he refuses to ask the question, Smith can hardly convince us that the answer is "no". This obviously weakens the impact of his critique.

Could lean production be the support for a new long wave of expansion? Capitalism has regained a historically high average rate of profit. A new model for the extraction of surplus value is being introduced. In that it reinforces control over labour while simultaneously partially liberating labour's capacity for initiative, this model is more efficient than Fordism. So, given all this, why is there no new dynamic of durable growth?

To answer questions like these, you need to stop concentrating on the sphere of production, and look at the global configuration of the new regimes of industrial and financial accumulation, and the relationship between private accumulation and the public sphere. As you do so, you begin to realise that neo-liberalism, even when re-enforced by the most innovative forms of lean production, does not offer the possibility of credible, long term growth. On the contrary, the persistence of neo-liberalism goes hand in hand with the aggravation of social contradictions and conflicts. But to prove this to people we need to go beyond generalities about the capitalist mode of production, however true they are, and bite into the question of specific modes of capitalist production, in their historical context. Let's hope that, in his future work, Tony Smith touches on this.

Tony Smith replies...

I am very grateful to Thomas Coutrot for his generous review. I would like to acknowledge that much of the credit for whatever is of worth in the monograph goes to comrades working on the front lines of the struggles against lean production, especially those associated with the newsletter *Labor Notes*.

Certain criticisms made in the review are well taken. The monograph does not examine the global dynamics of contemporary capitalism, the political strategy of neoliberalism, nor the role of the financial

sector. My only defense is that it was not possible to talk about everything in a relatively short work.

I am less sure about other objections. Coutrot asserts that I "missed the target" because no one today believes lean production goes beyond capitalism. But as he elsewhere notes, my target was not the claim that lean production transcends capitalism, but the quite different thesis that lean production is a form of capitalism with the potential to abolish many antagonisms between capital and labor, capital and consumers, and among units of capital. And this thesis is still being proclaimed in the popular and scholarly business press, the bourgeois academic community, and in factories and offices where lean production is being introduced.

Coutrot claims that my account is incompatible with long wave theory, and lumps me with "orthodox" Marxists who have difficulty appreciating capitalism's ability to regenerate. This is puzzling, given statements such as the following, in the book: "(T)he epoch of Fordism appears to be coming to a close. We now appear to be in the midst of a transitional period, in which a new variant of capitalism is gradually taking shape." (p. 9)

It is completely consistent to accept criticisms of the regulationist school and still hold that capitalism develops in long waves in which technologies and forms of social organization holding sway in one wave give way to new technologies and social forms.

The most important issue raised in the review is whether lean production could in principle be part of a solution to low growth rates. In a manner perhaps in tension with his criticism of "orthodox" Marxists, Coutrot denies that this could be the case. I am not so sure a definitive judgement is possible at this time. As Ernest Mandel argued, the start of an expansionary wave does not depend simply upon the availability of new technologies and forms of social organization: a myriad of contingent factors play a role as well, especially those connected to class struggle. Among these contingencies is the extent to which the ideology of lean production infects the working class and its allies. This is why I thought it worthwhile to establish that the promises proclaimed by advocates of lean production can only be fulfilled in socialism. But Coutrot is correct to insist that this is part of a much bigger story, and that much remains to be done in response to the restructuring of capital.

Tony Smith <tonys@iastate.edu>

[Review of the French edition, published as *La production flexible, une utopie capitaliste?*, IIRF, 1996] *Lean Production: A Capitalist Utopia*, Amsterdam, IIRE, 1994, ISSN 0298-7902. To order, send a British, French or US cheque for £5/\$6.20/\$5FF payable to P. Rousset at IIRE, PB 53290, 1007 RG Amsterdam

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Donor policy aims at terminating UNRWA's mandate in the framework of the current peace process, and donor governments regard UNRWA as a tool for channelling financial support to the Palestinian Authority, mainly through special UNRWA projects (Peace Implementation Program). The result is a severe crisis in UNRWA's regular budget which has led to refugee protests in Syria, Lebanon, and the 1967 Occupied Palestinian Territories. Includes suggestions for international action based on demands raised by the refugee community.

Project for Palestinian Residency & Refugee Rights. Memorandum 3/97. English, 40 pages, January 1997 (Arabic edition forthcoming); US \$7. Available from the AIC, PO Box 31417, Jerusalem.

Seeds of War in Jerusalem

This video illustrates Israeli settlement policy, particularly Israel's strategic plan of encircling Palestinian Jerusalem. It shows the devastating effects on Palestinian community development. A tool for awareness raising also among less informed target publics.

Produced by The Israeli Settlement Project Har Homa on Abu Ghneim Mountain; Producer: AIC, Director/Editor: Marty Rosenbluth-Insightment Video Productions; English, 20 min., US \$15 (or equivalent in your local currency). Cheques made out to the Alternative Information Centre, PO Box 31417, Jerusalem.

PAL-VHS copies can be ordered from the AIC; for NTSC-PAL copies contact Marty Rosenbluth (tel/fax. 001-919-732-5864).

IWA Bulletin n° 4

Serbia and Croatia - Protests and repression • reports from Belgrade, and Croatia • news from the IWA-supported trade union magazine in Tuzla

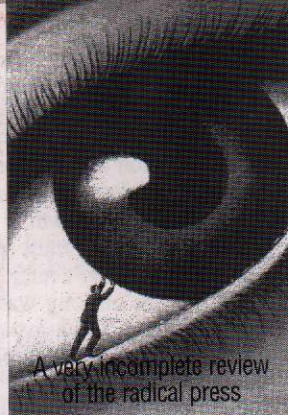
IWA Bulletin is edited by members of IWA-Denmark, and published every two months. The next three issues will be sent out for free. Order copies or send proposals for potential recipients to:

IWA Bulletin, Box 547, Noerre Alle 11a, 2200 Copenhagen N, Denmark, ☎/fax +45 35 37 32 17,

eMail: <socinf@inet.uni-c.dk> Financial contributions to: BG-Bank reg.no 1199 account no. 1 93 61 58

Suggestions for additions to this regular review should be sent to the book reviews editor at our Paris office.

well read



A very incomplete review of the radical press

Seminar on the October Revolution

Following the July 1996 seminar on Ernest Mandel's Contribution to Marxist Thought, the Ernest Mandel Study Centre will either organize or co-organize a seminar (in English and French) on the October 1917 revolution. It will be held either as a larger-scale colloquium with a broad range of international sponsors and participants in Belgium or on a more modest scale in Amsterdam.

☎ Postbus 53290, 1007 RG Amsterdam, Netherlands
☎ 31 20 6717263, Fax: 6732106 eMail IIRE@Antenna.nl

NetWorking



EuroMarches

Organisers of the European Marches against Unemployment, Job Insecurity and Marginalisation are contributing to (at least) three sites. The German site www-pluto.informatik.uni-oldenburg.de/~also/eumard.htm (administered by also@also.ol.ni.schule.de) is the most active, carrying information in English, German and French. The other sites are in Britain, www.gn.apc.org/labournet and France www.neuronnexion.fr/emploi.chomeur@neuronnexion.fr administers the list.

Christophe Aguiton of the EuroMarch secretariat can be contacted at aguition@sud.unions.eu.org. Robert Cremieux cremieux@club-internet.fr co-ordinates media contacts. Michel Rousseau (co-ordination France) is at rousseau@sud.unions.eu.org and Diosdado Toledano (co-ordination NE Spain) is at dios@milenium.com. And chomeur@neuronnexion.fr administers a French listserv on unemployment.

Solidarity (USA)

The web site was visited 236 times from 219 different sites in the week from 29 January to 5 February
www.labornet.org/solidarity

International Viewpoint

An page has been created at the site of **Internationales** newspaper in Sweden.
www.internationalen.se/sp/ivp.htm

Listservs in English, Spanish, German and French. English listserv includes full contents of this magazine, and a selection of articles from our associated publications.

>> 100666.1443@compuserve.com

IWA

International Workers Aid Tuzla and Copenhagen offices

>> iwa.tz@zamir-tz.ztn.apc.org

>> socinf@inet.uni-c.dk

Debatte

A new magazine on Germany.
sun1.bham.ac.uk/minnerhg/debatte.htm

Iran

Radical perspectives
www.iran-e-azad.org/english/president.html

MRTA

European representative
www.cybercity.dk/users/ccc17427/

Bandiera Roja

Portorican left paper (in Spanish)
www.bandera.org

Fjarde internationalen

Theoretical quarterly of Socialistiska Partiet, the Swedish section of the Fourth International
www.goteborg.se/kultur/tidskrifter/tids/inter

Colombian guerillas

The UC-ELN is at
www.voces.org

The FARC-EP is having problems finding a permanent site. Try the following, or check the **Rebelión** page (below) for news.
sociology.adm.binghamton.edu/pages/farc/

www.members.tripod.com/~farc/
www.geocities.com/capitolhill/8006

>> elbarcino@laneta.apc.org

Threats

The electronic magazine **Rebelión**, run by a collective of Spanish journalists, including Communist Party and Fourth International supporters, has received threats from the Colombian military and paramilitaries, after being falsely accused by a Colombian newspaper of being the UC-ELN's web site.
www.eurosur.org/rebellion

Palestinian refugees

Coming soon: A list of selected independent organisations working to promote refugee rights, and addresses of web-pages which facilitate communication and networking for refugee rights.
www.aic.org

This section is edited by **International Viewpoint**, 100666.1443@compuserve.com