

VIEWPOINT

April 1997 • No. 287

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Albania
chaos or revolution?
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Rwanda
genocide's creditors
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Britain
should Labour win?
.....

AIDS

poverty & prejudice
feed the epidemic

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The wretched of the earth rise up



The 20th century ends as it began: with the humiliated and exploited masses taking to the streets. In Albania, this time.

The combination of economic crisis, fraud during the May 1996 elections, and the collapse of the financial organisations running the pyramid schemes stripped the Berisha regime of all legitimacy, and exposed it as the number one enemy of the overwhelming majority of Albanians.

The subsequent social explosion quickly brought forth a fairly well structured popular administration, which challenged the Berisha regime, in a situation of dual power. The balance of forces quickly shifted against the President, and a third force, the leadership of the Socialist Party and the rest of the old opposition, stepped into the vacuum of power, and assumed the dominant position. For how long? Nobody knows.

Georges Mitralias

How exotic Albania seems! The mass of analysis and comment produced by the Western media all leads us to one conclusion: Albania is totally unique, and the Albanians do not belong to the “civilised world”.

The revolt erupted because Albanians are so naive that pyramid schemes separated most of them from their savings. These schemes were run by financial institutions that could *never* exist elsewhere. The insurrection opposes the country’s two tribes, northern Tosks and southern Ghegs. This civil war can only lead to “chaos”, which, in any case, has never been far below the surface.

How comforting to know that the Albanian case is unique in Europe, that the popular revolt there has no similarity with the revolutions of the past, and order can only be re-established from outside. Because, at the end of the day, and whether you see them as noble savages, or poor bastards, the Albanians are unable to enter the modern world without the aid of the civilised nations.

Reality check

All this is rubbish. Albanians are no more naive than the five million Rumanians, three million Russians and half-million Bulgarians

who have “invested” their savings in pyramid schemes. Many Macedonians continue to risk their savings in this way.

Unstable pyramid “investment” schemes, like Vefa in Albania, and MMM in Russia are not some invention of the post-communist era. Pyramid schemes were invented in the US in the 1930s, and were -for a while- extremely popular in Western Europe.

The real difference between Luxembourg in the 1930s and Albania in 1996 is the IMF pressure that forced Tirana to abolish guarantees on bank deposits, and liberalise the banking and financial system to the point that pyramid schemes offering monthly interest rates of up to 100% became legally possible.

This was not a “mistake” by the authorities and the IMF, but a deliberate attempt to encourage the primitive accumulation of capital Albania’s fledgling bourgeoisie so badly needs. One new banking firm, Vefa quickly became a holding company controlling at least 240 enterprises, from a supermarket chain to petrol stations, seaside hotels and food processing plants.

The total fraud exceeds US\$2 billion, or 80% of Albania’s Gross Domestic Product — the total value of goods and services pro-

duced each year. The capitalists would have considered this to be a major success, if only the armed insurrection had not occurred.

The IMF, World Bank and other financial institutions are not just guilty of selective blindness towards the pyramid schemes. For several years, they boosted the myth of an Albanian economy growing at an unparalleled rate of over 10%/year. Albania was a model, they argued. And President Sali Berisha was a true soldier of neo-liberalism.

This is another falsehood. "They made fools out of us" admits an expert at Vienna's prestigious Institute of Comparative Studies. In fact, the five years of economic reform have been "catastrophic". Since the industrial base was almost totally destroyed in the early period, "it was not difficult to project high growth rates for the foreseeable future." The starting point was so low that *any* growth was impressive in statistical terms.

Industry has been almost totally dismantled, and most peasants, particularly in the south, have abandoned agriculture. Up to 80% of the population is unemployed. The only fast-growing sectors of the economy are those linked to the black market and organised crime (smuggling of all types, and marijuana cultivation). Berisha's capitalist Albania would have gone bankrupt years ago were it not for the pitiful remittances sent home by the 500,000 Albanians working illegally, in slave-like conditions, in Greece, Italy and other countries.

A nation-wide uprising

Southern Albania is traditionally more prosperous, more politicised and more restless, and the north poorer, quieter and more conservative. But the recent insurrection was nation-wide in scope. It started in the southern towns of Vlore, Saranda, Gjirokastrë, Tepelene, and Delvino. But 10 days later, residents in the north began to take to the streets. Western media reports of a northern "counter-revolt" in support of Berisha are completely false. Even in the president's home town, Bajram Curri, people burned all symbols of the detested regime, and chanted "down with Berisha!"

The Western press all speak of civil war. Where is the evidence? The army and police literally dissolved at the beginning of the insurrection, and the regime sought, in vain, to identify and fortify a social base. The civil war is an invention of western "Albania specialists". In fact, the immense majority of the Albanian population rose up. The small bourgeois layers, and the various servants of the regime preferred to keep their heads down, and wait for better days.

No "tribal" division, no pro-Berisha resistance, no civil war, and no massacres. Yes, there was an element of chaos, an element of "anarchy". But let's be clear. The bourgeois media presented such anarchy as the result of the collapse of the Albanian state, the institutions, and, above all, the repressive state forces — the army and police. After all, our rulers argue, since order and law require a (bourgeois) state, an army and a police force, the collapse of these pillars of peace can only lead to anarchy. Right?

Dual power

Wrong! In only four to five days, people began to create self-management and self-defence organs for each town or village. Then, completely new municipal and district councils were elected. And the self-defence groups were transformed into fairly well-disciplined partisan units, with clearly defined responsibilities, using former officers, and deserters from the Albanian Army.

For two weeks there was no regional co-ordination of these local self-management bodies. Then, eight southern towns formed a "National Committee of Public Salvation", composed of representatives of each "Autonomous Communal Council". A further five towns quickly joined them. This was the beginning of a dual power situation. The rebels had appropriated almost all the attributes of state power — police, army, and civil administration.

We know little about the way these new organs of popular power actually operate. But it is clear that important decisions are taken at daily public meetings, usually held in the town square. A large majority of the population participate. In Vlore and Gjirokastrë, public meetings overturned the conciliatory positions of their leaders, and reaffirmed that Berisha's resignation was an essential pre-condition to any settlement.

On a number of occasions since then, local leaders have bent under pressure from Western ambassadors, and agreed to all kinds of concessions, only to fail to win support for these policies in the general assemblies. The masses refuse to give up their arms until the regime is overturned, and Berisha kicked out.

When northern towns joined the revolt, they created similar self-management structures. By 12-13 March, there were two Albanias. Tirana, the capital, was under Berisha's control, with agents of the *Shik* secret police patrolling all areas. Outside Tirana, the entire county was in revolt!

People, parties, and presidents

It is no surprise that the insurrection declared itself independent from the country's opposition parties. There is a huge gulf between the radical demands of the armed populace (resignation and putting Berisha on trial, dismantling the regime and secret police, reorganisation of the state on a new basis, full reimbursement of the money stolen through the pyramid schemes, punishment of those responsible, as an example to the others) and the conciliatory attitude most opposition parties have adapted towards Berisha.

Apart from the Democratic Alliance, Albania's political parties have been extremely moderate — a moderation that fails to hide their own fear of a self-managed popular movement that, maybe, no longer has need of their services! Since the insurrection began in Vlore on 28 February, opposition leaders have been overtaken by the events, and have recognised that they run the risk of becoming irrelevant. Their own social base was melting away: the more the opposition parties' ranks radicalised, the deeper they became involved in the transformation of the revolt into an authentic revolution.

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★ the event

Before the uprising, no one would have imagined that the leaders of all opposition parties would accept Berisha's authority, and sit down with him to discuss, and express support for, his proposals. Yet this is how the "opposition" has reacted to the uprising.

While Berisha denounced the "red terrorists" who he said were behind the revolt, the Socialist Party (ex-Communist) agreed to join Berisha's "National Unity" government, as if they didn't realise who the president was labelling as "red terrorists." Acting Socialist Party leader Bashkim Fino even became Prime Minister, while the undisputed party leader, Fatos Nano, languished in the prison cell where Berisha sent him in 1994!

Total confusion

The rank and file having disappeared, the Socialist Party leadership found itself without a social base, and began to tear itself apart. Fino met with leaders of the insurrection in Gjirokastra (where he used to be mayor), and recognised the "essential role" of the "people in arms." Meanwhile, a Socialist Party spokesperson denounced the costs of "anarchy" and called for a return to "the previously existing normal situation."

To the insurgent population, the opposition parties were, if not allies of Berisha, then certainly objectively acting in the president's interest. Only one response was possible: the National Committee of Public Salvation immediately declared itself to be independent of all the political parties, and demanded that it participate directly in the negotiations, as a "third force."

Unfortunately, without a clear-thinking political leadership, the popular movement was torn between its spontaneous dynamic, which subverted the old order, and the remnants of the population's sympathy for the opposition parties. Leading insurgents continued to demand that Berisha resign, but did not attack, verbally, those who had now associated themselves with the president. The insurgents "tolerated" Fino's new Government of National Reconciliation, a government that protected Berisha's role as president, but

at the same time the people refused to surrender their weapons, and submit to the authority of this government.

Three weeks after the beginning of the insurrection, Albania had three centres of power. Firstly, the remnants of the old Berisha regime, disintegrating, but still operative, thanks to -secondly- the former opposition (now government's) refusal to cut its links with "the constitutional order", and thirdly, the armed population and their National Committee of Public Salvation. This "independent third pole" declared itself to be completely opposed to the old regime, but showed itself willing to make a deal with the new, Fino government.

Nature detests a vacuum

Things were evolving towards a hybrid, intermediary state, which would delay the final solution of the conflict one way or the other. The ball was in the hands of the new government. The old Berisha regime was seriously weakened, the Western embassies had stressed their support and understanding and, above all, the popular movement had no revolutionary leadership. And so, the Fino government took the initiative. A minimal state (police and army) was reconstituted, and the government proclaimed itself to be the saviour of the endangered motherland.

This government is too heterogeneous to represent a long term solution. The first public demonstration in support of the new government began with cries of "we want peace," and finished with the Internationale!

Those crazy Albanians again, right? Wrong again! Most of the several thousand demonstrators were members of the Socialist Party. Their feelings are contradictory, but comprehensible. These people, residents of Tirana for the most part, support the government that, in effect, has ended the Berisha dictatorship, but they remain frightened by the great unknown: the Albanian people in arms.

This was not the first time in the 20th century that Stalinist bureaucrats, or ex-Stalinist social-democrats, sang the Inter-

nationale to exorcise the ghost of a revolution they see as a competitor, or even a danger.

Which way forward?

As we go to press (20 March), the situation in Albania is more confused than ever. Casualties have been very limited: less than 100 deaths during three weeks of insurrection in a Balkan country where everyone is armed to the teeth. But now, for the first time, a real danger of anarchy, and total chaos is posed. Hundreds of thousands of people are now motivated by hunger and desperation. To paraphrase the Internationale, "the starvelings have awoken from their slumber." Italian television has convinced people that, in Western Europe, "even the cats eat from silver plates." People will be ready to do almost anything to satisfy their basic needs, and their (also modest) dreams.

After three weeks of general revolt, this precarious equilibrium could break down at any moment. On the one hand, the popular movement cruelly lacks clear perspectives. On the other hand, the remaining financial companies will almost certainly collapse. Meanwhile, Berisha refuses to resign. There is little prospect of stability under the National Reconciliation Government.

Those who wish to defeat the Albanian insurrection will need time, and all the machiavelian skill of the Western powers. In the meantime, the armed population may be able to exploit the hesitation of the West, and the Socialist Party bureaucrats, and become even more radical, and more explicitly plebeian. It may throw up new leaders, men and women able to meet the responsibilities and face the challenges the dynamic of permanent revolution imposes in Albania today.

The Albanian insurrection is not the result of exceptional circumstances. We may see similar social earthquakes elsewhere in the Balkans, particularly in Macedonia or Bulgaria. Russian nationalist leader Alexander Lebed recently warned that Russia itself could "easily become the Albania of 1998" ★

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A monthly analytical review published under the auspices of the Fourth International. Published by Presse-Editions-Communications Internationale, PECEI, BP 85, 75522 Paris cedex 11, France. e-mail <100666.1443@compuserve.com>, fax (+33) 1/43792961. 01/43792960. Directeur de publication: Jean Malewski. Commission paritaire n° 64324. Printed and distributed by Spartakos, Eressou 34, 10681, Athens, Greece. ☐ (+30) 01/3300675. Signed articles do not necessarily represent the views of the editors. ISSN: 1294 2925

End the Tory Nightmare!

Pete Firmin for *Socialist Outlook*

The Tories have spent the last 18 years launching massive attacks on the working class. They have wreaked havoc on the trade unions, taking on and defeating section after section of workers, taking advantage of the weakness of the union leaders. They have privatised and contracted out the public sector to the benefit of their fat cat friends and the detriment of services, working conditions and jobs. They have undermined the National Health Service, education and every other part of the welfare state. They have grossly increased poverty, homelessness and used unemployment as a deliberate weapon to discipline workers. They have weakened workers' ability to resist all these by introducing eight packages of anti-trade union legislation stripping away almost every right which previously existed and making a legal fightback almost impossible. And they plan more of the same - total privatisation of pensions and the London Underground system, and further curbs on the right to strike. It has to be time to end the Tory nightmare.

The vast majority of workers recognise that the Tories represent the open class interests of the bosses and want to see them out. They will do that by voting Labour and hope that Labour will be at least a little better. They are crying out for a government which tackles unemployment and the deterioration of the welfare state. Socialist Outlook knows that a Labour government led by Blair will not do any of these things of its own free



will, but it has never been more important that a Labour government is elected, despite the extent to which Blair has taken it to the right. A fifth Tory term would create widespread despair while a Labour victory would create higher expectations and new conditions for a fightback.

If elected, Labour leader Tony Blair would immediately face hard choices, such

as whether to go into the single currency. A Labour government is committed to building on the Tories' achievements for British capitalism. Gordon Brown, due to be Chancellor if Labour takes government, is committed to carrying out the limits on public spending set out by the Tories, including the limit on public sector pay increases. Labour will continue with much of the Tory programme, its anti-union laws, its attacks on the welfare state, no reversal of privatisations. Even where Labour is committed to better policies, like the statutory national minimum wage, it will take a fight to ensure that it is implemented, and at a level which significantly improves the living standards of the lowest paid.

Whether we like it or not, the vast majority of class conscious workers will vote Labour in the general election (unfortunately, a significant minority will vote Tory or Liberal Democrat). Those who doubt that this is a "class against class" election should consider what the effect of the election of the Tories for another term would be on the morale of militants. Labour not winning the election would be seen as an endorsement of the Tories, who would feel they could continue their attacks on the working class with impunity, and whole layers of the working class would feel they had no defence against these attacks. The modest increase in struggle in the last year in the expectation that the Tories are on their way out would be set back to a considerable extent.

While it is the case that Blair has moved Labour's programme considerably further to the right than ever before, the basic nature of the Labour Party has not changed. Despite Blair's worst intentions, the affiliation of the trade unions means the Labour Party is in essence a workers party, even though it has always had a pro-capitalist programme.

We would take issue with those socialists who believe that what is necessary in order to break the working class from its support for Blair is to simply denounce Labour and stand candidates critical of New Labour. While that might make us feel good and attract a small layer who totally reject New Labour, it will have little effect on the vast majority who will see such candidacies as marginal to the central question in the election. That is what happened when they stood in the Hems-worth, Barnsley East and Wirral South bye-elections. Far more productive and likely to gain a hearing in most areas is for socialists to link a call for a Labour vote with both a critique of Labour's policies and building struggles which place demands on Labour around key policies and fights to force a Labour government to carry them out. Workers who, despite all the evidence, expect Labour to deliver something, will relate to that much more than simple

A new mood on the left

A modest increase in worker militancy has occurred in the form of the long running Dockers Strike, the Magnet Strike and Hillingdon hospital dispute, along with action across the public sector such as in the Post Office, on the London Underground, in Higher Education and in the Civil Service. There is now a concerted effort to unite these developments in worker combativity on the issue of how to fight Labour's austerity programme. One such initiative is the national March for Social Justice on 12th April which has been called by the Dockers Support Committee in London and the accompanying Peoples Charter for Social Justice. This demonstration also heralds the start of the British leg of the European Marches Against Unemployment which is backed by many trades unions across Britain.

The Peoples Charter and the European Marches Against Unemploy-

ment are important ways of uniting workers and the oppressed in a struggle to fight Labour in government and for defence of the welfare state. It is crucial that they become a focus for working class activity in the weeks before the election. ★

The People's Charter for Social Justice was drawn up by 500 sacked Liverpool Dockers and their partners' group Women of the Waterfront. It will be launched in London on Saturday 12th April.

The Charter includes 10 demands for Social Justice, including • the immediate reinstatement with full trade union rights of the 500 Liverpool dockers, the Magnet strikers, the Hillingdon hospital strikers and all other unjustly sacked workers • full trade union rights and the repeal of all anti-union legislation • the right to work • democratic planning to secure full employment • equal pay for work of equal value • repeal of the Criminal Justice Act • defence of the welfare state • abolition of the Job Seekers Allowance • the right to a home (including emergency measures to house the homeless) • repeal of all discriminatory legislation on race, gender, and sexuality • abolition of the un-elected House of Lords • emergency action on the environment • abolition of both the nuclear power and nuclear weapon industry.

Radical left candidates

Socialist Campaign Group

This 28 member group of MPs includes Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner and even front bench spokesperson Dawn Primarolo. In practice this group does little outside of parliament. It has distanced itself from the Campaign Group Supporters Network which was originally set up in its image. The Campaign Group is sometimes a useful platform for struggle. But the Group fails to unite or lead the struggles in the wider workers movement. A monthly paper is produced but not very widely sold. The Campaign Group is currently focusing on the need to avoid a coalition with the (Centre) Liberal Democrats. A few parliamentary candidates are potential new Campaign Group members, but, like the current Campaign Group MPs, they are generally "keeping their heads down".

Socialist Alliances

Also to the left of Labour, Socialist Alliance groups are based on established networks of class struggle fighters in Scotland, Manchester and Kent. At least 14 candidates are likely to stand, mainly in Scotland and including Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow. The Scottish Socialist Alliance (SSA) is the strongest. It has broad support from the trade union and social movements, and produces a monthly journal, *Red*.

Socialist Party

As *Militant Labour*, it campaigned for an open, pluralist basis for the SLP, but was denied access to the new part. It then renamed itself as the Socialist Party,¹ to become the party it wanted the SLP to be.

The SP supports the European Marches Against Unemployment. Their weekly newspaper is now called *The Socialist*. Scottish SP supporters are in the Scottish Socialist Alliance. ★

Socialist Labour Party

Formed by miners union leader Arthur Scargill. The party also has the support of many members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union's national executive committee. The SLP has around 5,000 members, and won 5.4% in the vote in the former mining area of Hemsworth. It publishes *Socialist*. Criticised for being too 'anti-Labour' rather than positive in its propaganda, the SLP needs to be drawn into broader struggles during the election campaign and beyond. ★

Note

1. Not to be confused with the (minus) Socialist Party of Great Britain.

denunciation of Labour.

By and large, the job of creating an alternative to New Labour with serious support is ahead of us. There are very few places where candidates to the Left of Labour in the election represent serious forces. Whilst calling for an overall vote for Labour we would support some of the most credible and well-placed candidates of the left parties and organisations. We support Dave Nellist in Coventry (standing for the Socialist Party (ex-Militant Labour)), Tommy Sheridan in Glasgow (Socialist Party/Scottish Socialist Alliance) and Arthur Scargill standing in Newport East for the Socialist Labour Party. Although these organisations are different, and the SLP problematic in the way it was established and has functioned since, this is a recognition both of the base of support these individuals have in the workers' movement and of the importance of the forces developing to the Left of the Labour Party. The SSA comes out of the radical political situation in Scotland, and the SLP emerges from the rightward march of Blairism.

If Labour wins the election, we can expect conflict between the government and those who elected it expecting Labour to be

Portugal

Abortion: our rights postponed again

In February the Portuguese Parliament rejected, by one vote, a proposal to make abortion on demand legal until the 12th week of pregnancy.¹

Abortion is only legally possible in cases of rape (up to 12 weeks), where the mother's life is in danger, or there is a danger of severe handicap to the baby (up to 24 weeks).²

Once again, women's right to choose has been denied, in a country where at least 16,000 illegal abortions are performed every year, and where abortion complications are the second largest cause of death for women of child-bearing age.

All but three of the MPs from Portugal's right-wing parties voted against the liberalisation. They were joined by 14 MPs from the ruling Socialist Party, led by Prime Minister António Guterres, a member of the Catholic fundamentalist society *Opus Dei*.

The Catholic Church campaigned against liberalisation, but, unlike previous parliamentary debates on abortion,³ did not run massive mobilisations of its supporters in the streets. Their main weapon was their influence in the government, probably greater than at any time since the fascist dictatorship was overturned in 1974.

The Socialist Party has an identity crisis. On the one hand the Prime Minister, on the other, a "historic" wing, which defends the anti-clerical tradition (but is influenced by free-masonry!).

better than the Tories. Brown's commitment to keeping down public sector pay will not go down well with those workers who have already experienced several years of pay restraint from the Tories. Blair's desire to prevent the trade unions having any real say in Labour Party policy is already causing upset, and is likely to be one of the major issues of debate at this year's trade union conferences.

Not only will the election of a Labour government lift the air of gloom over the working class, it will also release the class from the arguments of their union leaders over the last decade that any struggle would damage the chances of a Labour victory. It will begin to show the limitations of Labour in government and allow socialists the scope to put forward alternative policies to a much wider audience than has been possible in the recent past. Although Blair can expect a certain "honeymoon" period while he is given the benefit of the doubt, struggles will develop against a Labour government from those expecting it to reverse the actions of the Tories. Those who rule out support for Labour in the election rule out, or refuse to relate, to such crucial developments. ★

Once again, the absence of a real women's movement in Portugal made itself sorely felt. Feminism has never had a strong presence here, but in 1979 the small women's movement launched the dynamic National Campaign for Abortion and Contraception. This provoked a real, broad debate in society. One taboo was broken when over 2,000 women signed a petition declaring that they had each had at least one illegal abortion.

The collective women's response this time was much weaker. Apart from women members of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR),⁴ few groups were involved in any extra-parliamentary mobilisation. The lesson is easy to learn: without women's mobilisations, abortion rights will always be postponed, and our rights will never be guaranteed. ★

Alda Sousa

Notes

1. By 112 votes to 111. See last month's "Portugal: abortion still restricted," (*International Viewpoint* #286, p.11). The proposal was presented by Sérgio Sousa Pinto of the Young Socialists. A similar proposal, presented by Odete Santos of the Communist Party, was also refused, by a larger majority.

2. This reflects the only change to the 1984 law which was approved on 20 February. Strecht Monteiro, an obstetrician and MP for the Socialist Party, successfully presented an amendment which extended to 24 weeks the deadline for abortions where the mother's life is in danger, or there is a danger of severe handicap to the baby.

3. In 1982 the Communist Party made the first ever parliamentary proposal to liberalise abortion law. It was defeated. The current legislation dates from 1984.

4. Portuguese section of the Fourth International.

Meet the new boss...

Britain's Labour Party will almost certainly win the General Election on May 1st, after eighteen years of Tory government.

The working class may soon face a Labour government firmly committed to deepening the austerity offensive of the Conservatives against working people.

Rod Marshall says the key question is how to fight back – both now *and* once Labour is elected.

Successive Tory governments have cut state investment in manufacturing and funded the privatisation of state run industry with revenue from north sea oil. This strategy has led to a curious series of mini boom-and-bust cycles, with the service sector as the motor force. Consumer-led booms that have centred on very narrow upper layers in society, misnamed the 'middle classes'.

Margaret Thatcher was originally swept into office in 1979 promising pure monetarist economics. But although the most progressive aspects of the welfare state have been viciously attacked, and higher unemployment used as a weapon against worker militancy, public debt has actually increased massively. This is due to the increasing costs of high unemployment, the threat of combativity from the working class and the vested interests of capital in certain of the state funded apparatuses (civil service, defence etc.).

Affluent middle managers, in common with their bosses in the City (London's financial district), are suddenly very welcoming of the notion of a Labour administration. This is a state of affairs that has not been seen since the 1960. Dominant layers of the Bourgeoisie see Labour as the party now best able to manage capitalism in Britain.

While important layers of the British bourgeoisie in the 1970s favoured economic isolation from Europe, this position has now been largely reversed. The European bourgeoisie's plan for a trade bloc to protect profits and to try to find new markets is now supported by many bosses in Britain, some of whom are connected to multi-national corporations that already trade across Europe.

Traditional British industry, which the Tory governments have deliberately destroyed, is no longer the isolationist bulwark it once was. So the Tory party, dominated by a combination of neo-liberal free market advocates and nationalist xenophobes, is now decidedly out of step with the dominant views of its own capitalist class. Labour, on the other hand, has no such

qualms about European Economic Union, and is much less hostile to the proposed single European currency, the Euro.

New Labour

Bourgeois willingness to try a Labour government is also motivated by a rightward shift in Labour policies, reflecting both the determination of successive party leaders to make Labour a credible alternative for the upper classes, and a historic decline in the combativity of the working class in the 18 years since Labour was last in government.

After Labour left office in 1979, the resulting internal struggles briefly allowed an upturn in the fortunes of the Labour Left, with Tony Benn as its virtual leader in parliament. Benn was narrowly defeated in the election of Labour's Deputy Leader in 1981. Unfortunately, "Bennism" focused too much on internal Labour Party struggles. When it came to fighting the Tory offensive against key sectors of the working class, such as in the Miners strike of 1984-85, the Bennite Left played only a limited role in mobilising solidarity action.

The early and mid-1980s saw a series of working class defeats. Meanwhile, after inspiring struggles in Lambeth and Liverpool, the resistance of Labour-dominated

local and municipal Councils to Government funding cuts gave way to a "dented shield" policy of token resistance. The forlorn hope of a future Labour government increasingly became the sole salvation, in the eyes of many party members.

This "dented shield" approach only became the dominant left Labour strategy for local government after a wave of defeats of workers in struggle, and the shift to the right in the working class that followed. This shift to the right was reflected in the Labour Party, and culminated in the massive defeat of the Benn-Heffer ticket for the Labour leadership in 1987.

This signalled the defeat of left-reformist socialism as a serious alternative to rightist social democracy within the Labour Party. In many respects the Labour Party reverted back to its normal, moderate, pre-1979 state. But the bosses still did not favour the Labour Party for government when it came to the 1987 election. On the surface, this 'back to normal' phase lasted until the party's third successive defeat at the Polls in 1992. Under the surface, Labour Party policy continued to shift gradually rightwards.

During the Poll Tax' struggle, the Bennite Labour Left once again showed themselves to be ineffective mobilisers, and the struggle

How to vote on May 1st

The prospect, however forlorn, of better policies from Labour, has often been used as a block on working class activity. Rod Marshall argues that, with the election of Labour almost a forgone conclusion, it is time to concentrate on how to deal with Labour in office.

The election candidates to the left of Labour in the election allow for these issues to be raised and it is to be hoped that the election campaigns by the SLP, Socialist Party and SSA candidates will involve a broad campaign against the bourgeoisie's austerity programme. That is why socialists should back these pro-working class candidates, particularly where they have a reasonable base in the workers movement, as a vehicle for uniting working class activity during the election campaign and beyond.

None of these candidates are likely to succeed electorally but this is not the reason why they are standing and it would be wrong to argue for a vote for or against these parties on this basis. Indeed, it is crucial that these election campaigns *do not* conform to the electoralist politics of the pro-capitalist parties. Pressure should be put on left Labour candidates not to do so either.

The election campaigns of socialist

candidates both inside and outside of the Labour Party should be the beginning, along with the March for Social Justice and European Marches, of a broad coalition of workers and the oppressed that is fighting the pro-capitalist consensus of Labour and the Tories.

Once Labour is in government there is a real prospect that this movement can grow and become much more significant and this is the main reason why workers in Britain should look forward to the Tories being booted out of government on May 1st. May Day 1997 in Britain will hopefully mark the start of what will become, in time, a new stage of worker militancy – what is crucial is that the left in the unions and the social movements unite now to make sure that this happens. ★

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EuroMarches against unemployment

Preliminary march routes and European timetable

There will be fourteen main European marches, writes *Mark Johnson*.

Iberian peninsula

- West Spain, leaving from Tangier April 14th, to Bayonne, May 1st, then going up to Paris for the 1st of May, Lille the 24th of May, Brussels May 28th
- East Spain, leaving April 14 from Almeria, via Barcelona, to Perpignan, May 1st, then Paris
- Portugal march: to be confirmed

Great Britain

- Scottish march, leaving Scotland May 10th, crossing London 6th June
- English march, leaving Preston May 17, crossing London 6th June
- Welsh march, date of departure to be decided, crossing London June 6th.

Irish march

- leaving Belfast 1st June, via Dublin.

Scandinavian march

- leaving Finland on April 14th. Via Sweden, Denmark, Germany

German march

- leaving Frankfurt on-Oder on May 1st, crossing Berlin May 4th, then Hanover, then the Ruhr

Balkan march

- leaving Sarajevo April 14th. Though Vienna, then Germany

Italian march

- leaving Crotona from the south of Italy on April 14th, crossing Switzerland (Basel May 10th) then across Germany following the Rhine valley.

French marches

- starting at Grenoble on April 14th crossing Switzerland, and joining the Italian march
- "Maastricht" march leaving from Strasbourg, crossing Maastricht
- Breton march: point of departure: Brest
- Local marches will be organised from Tarascon, in the Pyrenees, from Toulouse and from Marseilles

Greece

- to be confirmed

The fifteenth march

There should also be a "cybermarch", which will allow those with access to the Internet to follow the marches.

Actions:

April 14: The official start date. [some marches will in fact begin on April 12th.]

April 22nd: Demonstration on the problems of globalisation, in Geneva, site of the World Trade Organisation and the International Labour Office.

1st May 97: Marches will be pass through several important European cities, becoming a focus for solidarity for the countries of the East and the South, solidarity with immigrant workers, and for a Europe of free movement among people. Five of the fourteen major marches will be crossing frontiers on this day.

May 24: Demonstration at Lille on youth concerns. An opportunity for inter-communication on a European scale between the youth of different countries.

May 28: The European Confederation of Trade Unions is organising its own demonstration in Brussels. Euro-Marchers will stress the link between employed and unemployed workers.

Other initiatives will be organised around the themes of unemployment, precarity, exclusion, and homelessness.

Amsterdam

During the first half of June the marches will be within 100 to 150 km of Amsterdam. Camping sites will be set up along the way. These camps should have the capacity to welcome several hundred marchers from different European countries. Participants should expect to walk about 15 km every day.

June: The Inter-Governmental Conference will be held in Amsterdam on June 16-17. Our aim is to gather more than 30,000 participants from different European countries. The French Delegation has set itself the objective of bringing five thousand demonstrators.

All marches should be in the outskirts of Amsterdam by the evening of June 13th. They will enter Amsterdam from different directions on the morning of the 14th and gather at either Dam Square or Museum Square (to be confirmed) from 12.30 to 13.00. The marchers, and all those coming by bus, should be at Museum Square by 14.00. From here, we will march through Amsterdam, via the Dutch National Bank. We will return to Museum Square, where the demonstration will end at about 18.00. Afterwards, we plan to hold a festival at Museum Square.

A petition will be proposed for signature during the marches. These petitions will be laid out in Amsterdam in some significant public square (to be decided). The unified petition should cover about 100 square meters, reflecting the extent of the movement in the most vivid fashion possible.

You should plan your homeward journey for the early hours of Sunday.

Source: reports from preliminary meetings of 22/23 February 1997, in Brussels. The next meeting of delegates from all the European countries, will be held in Amsterdam on Saturday the 10th of May. For up-to-date information on local activities, contact your International Viewpoint distributor.

saw the start of an important shift in the location of radical young layers of workers away from Labour and into single issue campaigns and social movements, a trend that has quickened in the years since.

The election of John Smith as Labour leader in 1992 was a culmination of the rightward shift that had been going on since 1987. Labour Party membership had fallen dramatically and many socialists and trade unionists had been expelled or had left of their own accord. In the leadership elections, large parts of the remaining Left backed John Prescott for leader rather than Ken Livingstone, the more radical candidate. Under Smith, and, after his sudden death, current leader Tony Blair, Labour's shift to the right has become much more visible.

Collective (in)action

But it is not just about Blair. There was a rightward shift in the working class in the years leading up to 1992. This was represented in a continual reduction in trade union membership and in industrial action over that time – a decline caused by the many defeats suffered during the early and mid 1980s, and the Tory's prolonged offensive against the trade unions.

The reduced influence of the trade union bureaucracy within the Labour Party has occurred alongside the adoption of aggressively pro-capitalist policies which are now fully supportive of the free market. The New Labour leadership has completely abandoned Keynesian economics.

In economic policy, Labour is more committed than the Tories to trying to meet the criteria for European Monetary Union (EMU). Labour has already stated it will not exceed the Tories' public spending limits for at least the first two years of government, and there are clear indications that it could cut public spending further in areas such as pensions and unemployment benefit (workfare schemes are planned). Labour's aim is to create 'smaller government.' The five 'early pledges' from Labour, which appear to be its only definite pledges for government, involve no increases in public expenditure whatsoever.²

Labour is now committed to carrying out the austerity programme of the European bourgeoisie. The Blair leadership team is borrowing heavily from the ideology of Bill Clinton's Democrats in the U.S. Despite all this, for many workers in Britain, the Labour Party still represents a class vote against the bosses' party, the Tories. ★

Notes

1. The Poll Tax was a regressive, flat rate personal tax for local government services. Its introduction would have reduced civil liberties, by justifying much tighter monitoring of identity and residence. It was abolished after massive civil disobedience, and several riots.

2. Labour's Five Early Pledges: are
i. Cutting class sizes in schools to 30 for 5-7 year olds using money saved from assisted places scheme.
ii. Fast-track punishment for persistent young offenders.
iii. Cut National Health Service waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients using money saved from the NHS internal market.
iv. Putting 250,000 under-25s who are on unemployment benefit onto a workfare training scheme, using money from windfall tax on privatised utilities.
v. Tough rules on public spending, low inflation, low interest rates.

End Game in Liverpool?

Union leaders are pressing the Liverpool dockers to end their dispute, to avoid embarrassing an incoming Labour government. Neil Murray reports

In the run up to parliamentary elections in Britain, leaders of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) are trying to negotiate an end to the 18-month dispute. This doesn't just reflect the natural urge of most union leaders to close down disputes. Nor is it simply the latest in the series of attempts by TGWU leaders to pressure the dockers to accept a pay-off instead of winning their jobs back. Union leaders are worried that, unless the dispute can be ended before the May 1st general election, it will be an embarrassment to the incoming Labour government they expect. In similar moves, the public sector union, UNISON, has disowned the long strike of Hillingdon Hospital workers against a wage cut and the leaders of the four unions at Magnet, where the work force was sacked for striking.

The Liverpool dock workers were locked out in late 1995, when they refused to cross a picket line set up by ancillary workers who had been sacked for refusing to work overtime at short notice. The dockers demands are simple – reinstatement for all and scabs out. Several times the employers have made “final” offers to buy out the dock workers and these have been overwhelmingly rejected in both mass meetings and secret ballots.

In the face of Britain's anti-union laws, which put their dispute outside the law, and the refusal of the TGWU leadership to confront these laws by making the dispute official and seriously seeking support from other sections of workers, the dockers have turned to dock workers world-wide to make their dispute effective.

The dock workers have built up an incredible network of support among other dockers internationally. They have had two international days of action, supported by strikes, demonstrations and pickets of ports around the world. They have held several international conferences, and continually tour other countries gaining financial support and solidarity actions. They even managed to win International Transport Workers' Federation support for their last day of action. Akinobu Itoh, Assistant General Secretary of the National Council of Dock Workers' Unions of Japan, recently visited Liverpool to address a dockers' meeting.

All this contrasts with the situation in Britain, where the TGWU has only given token support, has been slow to inform its other members of the dockers struggle, and there has been virtually a media black out throughout the dispute.

The TGWU leadership has brokered several deals with the company over the heads of the dockers and their shop stewards. Each deal has been rejected. They have continually put pressure on the stewards to accept these deals or lose what little support they get from the union. The TGWU leadership has insisted on postal ballots on deals, rather than accept the dockers insistence on decisions being made by mass meetings, because they hope that a docker voting from home is more likely to accept a large pay-off.

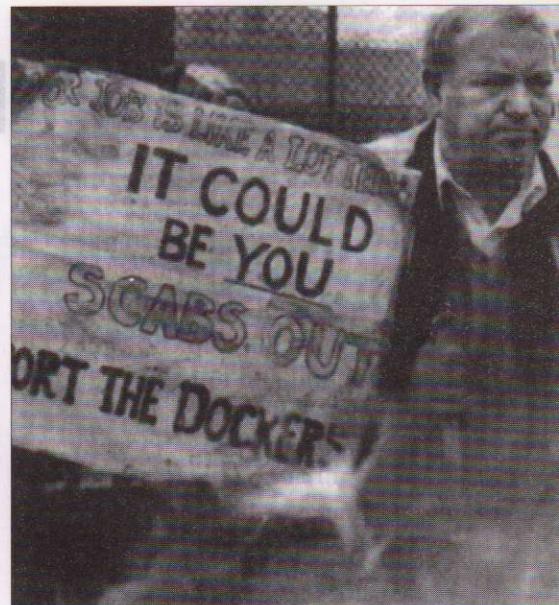
Trick or treat?

These negotiations have now taken a new turn. The TGWU leadership seems at last to have recognised that the dockers are unwilling to accept a pay off, rather than winning their jobs back. The union now suggests that the dockers should form a co-operative, a “Labour Supply Organisation” from which the company would employ its workforce. Dockers' shop stewards are adamant that this means a monopoly on work, allowing them to enforce a “scabs out” policy. But this is not certain. The TGWU leadership has excluded the shop stewards from its talks with the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board (MDHC). The strikers do not know the details of the deal they are being asked to accept!

Some suspect that the dockers shop stewards have fallen into a trap set by the TGWU bureaucracy. Once they agreed to putting forward the LSO proposal, the outcome seemed inevitable, which was certainly bad for morale among strikers and their supporters. The LSO proposal has caused particular consternation among the dockers' supporters in ports around the world. Meanwhile, the TGWU bureaucracy persuaded the Docks and Harbour Board that it was in their own interest to seek a deal, which the union leadership would “sell” to the dockers via a ballot.

Who will control the hiring hall?

In an open letter to striking dockers, US dockers' leader Jack Heyman (ILWU Local #10) warned that “At this most critical stage of the conflict it is essential that the dockers know precisely what is being formulated. There must be time to discuss the labour supply question fully before it is put to a vote.” Is it fish or fowl, worker-controlled or company-controlled? Will it be a form of workers' control as the ILWU exercises through its hiring halls with the docker's right to choose his job and elect union job dispatchers? Or will it be a cloned-off unit that disavows any connection to the company, yet screens out union militants? MDHC claims they no longer want to be direct employers, but they still want control over labour [...] Any supportable labour agreement must include all the docks.”



The Liverpool stewards are now trying to backtrack from the TGWU trap by emphasising that their demands are that Drake International and other agencies be removed from the port along with the strike-breakers, full reinstatement for the sacked dockers to ensure continuity of all pension rights whether or not individuals then choose to leave the industry, the right to be involved in supplying labour to every area of port operations, and dockers' control over working conditions.

It isn't over till it's over

Whatever political pressure the Labour Party and TGWU may feel to end the dispute by any means necessary, their problem remains: why should men and women who have fought 18 months to uphold their right to refuse to cross a picket line now settle for a compromise on the employers' terms?

According to US dockers' leader Jack Heyman, dockers outside Britain are ready to intensify their solidarity. During the International Day of Action nearly 100 ships were stopped just on the US West Coast. “The bottom line as stated by dockers is 1) Scabs out. 2) Dockers to get dockers' jobs, not ancillary jobs. 3) A dignified retirement for those who choose to hang the hook. These are winnable demands. What is needed is another push to hit scab cargo internationally and mobilising Merseyside workers along with us.” ★

Some material used in this article was first distributed via LabourNet.

Note

1. The company has apparently expressed its willingness to work with a new, union-recognised Labour Supply Unit, but so far only in the General Cargo and Timber areas. They are also said to have responded favourably to the concept of a “minimum standards agreement” covering all stevedoring operations, as outlined in the Labour Supply document. MDHC has also proposed that the company and union jointly fund a business analysis. The Labour Supply Unit would allow companies to contract only those workers they require for each job, but prevent savage competition between workers through a transparent seniority system and restricting the size of the labour pool.

Trouble in the ranks

The membership of the ruling Social Democratic Party is increasingly unhappy with the right-wing leadership. But does the anti-capitalist left represent a viable alternative?

By Jörgen Abro-Bähr

In the autumn of 1996 the Danish Social Democratic Party celebrated its 125th anniversary. Like other European social democratic parties in the past, it faces a stark choice. Re-state the reformist project, or join the neo-liberal dance of death

The party has been in government more or less continuously since 1945 (not so unusual in this part of Europe). Successive social democratic coalition governments with one or more of the small bourgeois parties, reflected the "success" of the party's reformist, class-collaboration line.

The current crisis has changed all that. Denmark's bourgeois parties have adopted policies inspired by Margaret Thatcher, Britain's former Prime Minister. Denmark's conservatives argue that direct confrontation with the organised (unionised) working class is necessary, in order to establish a new formula for the distribution of wealth in society, liberalise the labour market, cut back on social welfare, and increase legal restrictions on trade union organising.

The role of reversing the past conquests of the workers' movement fell to Poul Schlüter's conservative government, which took power in 1982. With the abolition of the automatic increase in cost of living allowances, cuts in unemployment benefit and cuts in social welfare, they won the first battles in this class-confrontation.

A 1984 conflict over the union membership agreement of Copenhagen bus drivers targeted another important bourgeois concern: the unity of the trade union movement.

The Schlüter government's role as "crisis-solver" for the bourgeoisie was hampered by increasing working-class resistance, climaxing in the massive national strikes during Easter 1985, with hundreds of thousands of workers on strike, or demonstrating against the government's intervention into the bargaining process on the labour market.

The social democrats were temporarily side-tracked by these developments. They wanted to re-convince the bourgeoisie of the advantages of class collaboration, on a new basis. But they could not do so until the tide of class struggle had declined, and until the Communist Party was no longer in a position to challenge the Social Democratic leadership of the labour movement. With the quiet decline in the class struggle after the Easter strikes and the collapse of the Communist

Party the threat of a radical alternative "disappeared" in about 1990.

Bourgeois reforms

Reformist policies of class co-operation in Denmark have only been possible because of the real advantages and reforms which have been imposed by the workers movement, and absorbed by the managers of the system. But a central characteristic of social democratic policy has been replacement of real reforms with "reforms" which in reality provide advantages for capital.

The Social Democrats' original project of economic democracy had, for all its limits, a certain sparkle of hostility to capital, of real reform. But the result was the introduction in 1991 of retirement pension reforms which meant adjustment to the less progressive measures common in the rest of the European union, and increased inequalities among the working-class population.

This pension legislation has been followed by more openly pro-bourgeois reforms of the labour market, and attacks on the unemployment benefit system.

The sorry state of the Danish workers movement has another cause: the project of European union. Ever since 1972, the northern European countries have been characterised by a distinct division within the labour movement concerning attitudes to European integration. The top of the movement has been strongly in favour, the rank and file strongly opposed.

As the current project of European Union took form, the leaders of the social democratic movement and the trade unions have increasingly committed themselves to an agenda which is effectively defined by the European bourgeoisie. Their last bastion of resistance was the introduction of the single market. When they failed to prevent Danish approval of that project, they surrendered to all the rest. In the new reformist logic, the Maastricht Treaty represented progress, compared to the non-regulated single (common) market.

On 2 June 1992 the Danish electorate rejected the Maastricht Treaty in a referendum. This reflected the continued division of the labour movement — leaders campaigning for a "Yes" vote, the rank and file campaigning for a "No" vote. This division was not healed when, after a massive, manipulative media campaign, a second referendum in 1993 narrowly approved the Maastricht Treaty.

Division among the social democrats

There are two competing lines within the social democratic part of the workers movement. This tension was demonstrated in 1992, when Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (now Prime Minister) replaced Svend Auken as

party leader, after mobilising the right of the party.

Auken defended the traditional reformist line. He wanted to defend the existing welfare state by traditional parliamentary means, not understanding that the bourgeoisie is no longer interested by this strategy.

Nyrup's campaign represented the "social-liberal" line. The obvious problem with this line is that the increasing acceptance of bourgeois policies leads to an erosion of the parliamentary and social basis of social democracy — the breaking down of the collective-bargaining system in the labour market and the decline in mass membership of the trade unions.

The elements in this modern social-liberal policy are:

- a minimum social welfare system, to protect the "weakest",
- increased profits by giving contracts to private firms for work that has former been done by the public sector,
- privatisation,
- an ideology which says that one has to contribute in order to receive
- the creation of new segments of the labour market, based on the principles of the law of the jungle.

"Renovation" of the labour leadership

European integration, in particular its "social dimension" and the increasing regulation of local conditions by Union-wide directives is unambiguously supported by the "renovation" current in the labour leadership. The flexibilisation and individualisation of the labour market is increasingly accepted by labour leaders, who now have a vision of individual rights, guaranteed by Europe, rather than underpinned by union organising and collective bargaining.

Union leaders now accept that working time must be more flexible, and employers must be able to impose new technologies easily.

The upper layers of the trade union bureaucracy dream of transforming the unions into "equal" partners of co-operation within each branch of the economy.

Their heads are filled with the supposed merits of "improving work", "salary based on results" and so on: concepts which, behind the ideological smoke screen, contribute to a weakening of trade union organising at the workplace level, and a weakening of the unions as such.

In other words, the labour leadership's strategy is losing its progressive content. It no longer identifies private ownership of the means of production as a problem, and no longer sets as a goal the right of the employees to govern production.

The traditional reformist resistance against this "renovation" project is led by the



Prime Minister Poul Nyrup Rasmussen isn't smiling

SiD — the country's best-organised union, which represents semi-skilled workers in every municipality in Denmark. Given the union's strength within the labour movement, and its organisational importance for the Social Democratic Party, SiD hostility to the "renovation" project is a major obstacle to the social-liberal leadership of the movement.

But the SiD is a colossus with feet of clay. The union's potential as a combat organisation is continually restricted by leaders who implicitly accept the pro-bourgeois policy of "managing the crisis" They refuse to recognise the full implications of the transformation of labour relations in Denmark over the years. Drawing the consequences would mean, for a start, breaking with the system of industrial relations courts.

Possible breaks

This is a period of great instability in the labour movement. SiD opposition to the Social Democrats' compromise with the conservatives over the 1995 state budget [see *IV*#284, Jan. 1997] may even result in the development of a new "social democratic labour party". Though the peculiarly Danish Socialist Peoples Party (SF), a relatively large left-reformist, non-Stalinist party to the left of social democracy may pick up most of the unsatisfied social democratic workers.

The Socialist Peoples Party has certainly been able to capture unsatisfied leftist votes in the past. What makes things less sure this time is that not only is the SF supported more by white collar and professional workers than the semi-skilled, but many leading figures in the SiD rebellion against social liberalism come from the Stalinist tradition. The organisational strength of this current is very weak, and it is unable to attract much support among newly-radicalising sectors. But in some trade unions, it has a certain influence.

One thing which is clear, is that there is no clear dividing line between reformist and revolutionary currents. The new disposition of forces is more likely to divide the existing organisations than oppose them on a clear left-right continuum.

This situation creates a possibility for the Red Green Alliance, which brings together most former and present members of the Communist Party, the Left Socialists and Trotskyists. With its parliamentary and movement presence, the Red Green Alliance can — at least partly — constitute a new

centre for an eventual regroupment.

The problem is that the Alliance lacks organising strength, and is too heterogeneous to present an attractive alternative to the larger parties. Also, it is quite possible that, since the new regroupment is starting within the social democratic party, there may not be significant groups of militants who are ready to break with traditional reformism. Don't rule out the possible formation of a new party based on reformist traditions.

The social-liberal "renovation" line dominates the leadership of the social democratic movement in part because of the short term economic upturn, which has led to falling unemployment. This in turn is used to counter any and all left criticism of the course taken in recent years.

The implication, of course, is that a downturn in the economic situation could have a big influence on the legitimacy of the social-liberal line. Although the growth of a

real alternative, even within the framework of reformist policies, can only really develop if there is progress in the class-struggle.

The immediate priority is to build strong and well organised left wing currents in the workers' movement. This means defending collective bargaining rights, fighting for the generalisation of job-sharing, a break with the system of industrial relations courts, and resistance to European Union attacks on collective bargaining and social welfare.

To win these goals, revolutionaries should support "united fronts" with the reformist leadership of the labour movement. But they should make sure that it is the left which wins the credit for resistance against cuts and privatisation, and for daring to struggle. ★

The author is a member of the Socialist Workers Party (SAP), one of the groups which founded the Red-Green Alliance, and Danish section of the Fourth International.

Ireland

Time off for domestic violence?

Women who suffer domestic violence should be allowed compassionate leave from work, according to the equality officer of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions. The ICTU is "trying to reach an agreement with employers to give the necessary time off to deal with a situation," says Rosaleen Glackin.

She was speaking at the launch of a joint campaign with Women's Aid to educate and train trade union officials to deal with victims of domestic violence.

Roisin McDermott of Women's Aid said women who apply for barring orders against violent partners have to wait up to two months, during which time they may be living in a refuge and have difficulty working. A woman could go on benefit, but there would be no guarantee that she would get her job back. "Economic dependence and nowhere to go" are the reasons many battered women don't leave, she said. ★

Source: *The Irish Times*, March 8, 1997

Britain

Solidarity with Roisin McAliskey

Following successful protests across the world on March 8, International Women's Day British authorities have been forced to concede that Roisin McAliskey will be able to keep her baby with her when it is born in a few weeks.

McAliskey has been imprisoned since November 1996 for supposed involvement with the IRA bombing of the Osnabruck bombing in Germany. Her solicitor Gareth Pierce told a packed London meeting organised by Fuascailt (the Irish republican prisoner support group) that "if she were charged here tomorrow there would be no requirement to prepare to defend the case; there isn't a case" Pierce also explained that she had never seen a prisoner treated so badly — some feat given Pierce's involvement with other Irish prisoners who have been abominably treated such as the Birmingham Six and Guildford Four.

McAliskey is the only Category A prisoner to have ever given birth in prison and the civil liberties implications of her treatment is beginning to raise objections from many who have taken little interest in Irish politics.

In London 300 mainly women protesters gathered outside Holloway prison to show solidarity. Hundreds of bunches of flowers were delivered from supporters across the world but only a token number were allowed into the prison. Roisin asked that the rest go to Women's Aid centres — the primary area of her own political activity.

The picket produced one of the most lively and committed International Women's Day mobilisations in London for some years. Other actions took place in Germany, Ireland, Norway, Australia and the USA. ★

Terry Conway

Sandinistas move to the right

In October, Arnaldo Alemán was elected as President of Nicaragua, defeating FSLN leader Daniel Ortega by 13%. Articles in this and other left publications argued that Alemán's Liberal Alliance won the elections through fraud.¹ As the debate continues, we publish an article by **Cesar Ayala**, arguing that the real problem is the rightward shift of the Sandinistas.

Were it not for the 1979 revolution led by the *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*, there would not be any elections in Nicaragua today. The Sandinistas came to power through armed struggle and left the government after their defeat at the ballot box in 1990. The possibility of elections and of a change of parties in government are themselves conquests achieved by the 1979 revolution. This simple fact, often overlooked by right-wing observers, must be the starting point of any analysis of the Nicaraguan situation.

The 1996 Sandinista defeat is the second major electoral upset for the party that led the 1979 revolution. In 1990, the Sandinistas lost to Violeta Chamorro's *Union Nacional Opositora*. The 1990 result has been the object of much debate about the relative

weight in the FSLN defeat of international factors such as the U.S. financed Contra war, as compared to internal factors such as unpopular Sandinista policies.

Through a long war of attrition that began in 1981, the United States was able to skew the playing field of Nicaraguan politics by forcing upon Nicaraguans the following two choices: either elect UNO and obtain peace and economic aid, or re-elect the Sandinistas and risk a continuation of the war and the U.S. economic embargo. U.S. "humanitarian" aid kept the Contras in operation, thus discrediting the FSLN claim that a Sandinista victory would mean an end to the war and eventual peace.

FSLN recognises "negative" policies

In June 1990, the Sandinistas met in El Crucero to identify aspects of their own policies that could have contributed to the 1990 electoral defeat. The Sandinistas pointed to a long list of mistakes, among them the forced relocation of Miskito natives on the Atlantic coast, abuses by some FSLN cadre in the mass organisations, failure to shield the poorest segments of society from the ensuing economic hardships, particularly after the 1988 measures that benefited the agro-export sector, incorrect procedures and untenable convictions in the trials of former Contras and collaborators, and last but not least, the late realisation that peasants wanted individual titles to land.³

Any fair study of the process of erosion of support for the Sandinista cause shows that the Contra war was the primary factor. Of those who voted for the FSLN in 1984 but for UNO in 1990, 28% stopped supporting the Sandinistas by 1985, another 13% by 1986, and an additional 15% by 1987. The erosion of support was greatest during the years of heaviest fighting against the Contras, i.e. before the 1988 austerity measures. Much of the attrition of support (particularly after 1988) was due to economic factors: the effects of the Contra war, foreign hostility, exhaustion, and to many Nicaraguans' desire for light at the end of the tunnel. Much of the electoral effect attributed to "unpopular" Sandinista policies, particularly conscription, was directly or indirectly a product of the Contra war.

The elections of 1990 took place in a complex international scenario that did not bode well for the FSLN. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European regimes, the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, and President George Bush's declaration that an UNO victory would mean an end to the U.S. embargo did not help the Sandinistas.

Yet even within this context of foreign aggression and violent interference in the country's internal affairs, it is possible to identify problems that may have corresponded exclusively to Sandinista errors.

The shrinking rural vote

The decline of FSLN support in the countryside varied widely according to class. Pre-Sandinista Nicaragua had no vast peasant movements. Nor did it have indigenous communities capable of demanding a return to a pre-Hispanic communal past. It did have a substantial small and middle peasantry.

The FSLN distributed *Somocista* properties and the idle lands of large landowners, and gave land titles to peasants. But investment under the Sandinistas went mainly to the state sector, large, modern farms, and, thirdly, to cooperatives.

The decline of rural support for the FSLN from 65% in 1984 to 36% in 1990⁴ was partly due to this "developmentalist" bias: the absorption of resources by the state sector, with "little impact on the population."⁵ In 1990 the FSLN won the votes of agricultural workers from state-run enterprises, but not the middle peasants.⁶

Workers from state enterprises were mobilised for the war on a voluntary basis, and the *Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo* cushioned the blow which enlistment in the armed forces caused by providing financial aid to these soldiers' families. But for many poor private peasant families, recruitment meant a serious economic loss to the household, which was not compensated. As a result, many poor peasants voted against

Electoral fraud?

Of course there were electoral irregularities, argues Cesar Ayala, But "not of sufficient magnitude" to alter the final results

While the Alemán forces no doubt attempted to influence the total vote count by all kinds of licit and illicit means, there were too many local and international checks on the electoral process to permit fraud on a scale capable of overturning the results nationally.

The independent Nicaraguan magazine *Envío* certainly documented irregularities in the electoral process, but they were not of sufficient magnitude to alter the final results of the national elections. In addition to winning 65% of mayoral races, the Liberal Alliance won the post of mayor of Managua, beating the favourite (independent) *Viva Managua* candidate into second place. The Sandinista candidate finished third. *Envío's* analysis speaks of "electoral chaos", rather than systematic fraud.

Most of the discrepancies in the Supreme Electoral Council's results correspond to the disappearance of the

ballots of entire polling stations—which affect all parties—, probably as a result of the long queues waiting to hand in the polling stations' ballots to the CSE. One *Envío* report argues that "if it were a matter of fraud, the logical thing would be losing the ballots for the party against which the fraud was aimed."²

The Sandinistas share of the vote declined by 3% relative to 1990. Their principal opponents' score also declined by 3% relative to 1990, while the independent parties increased their support from 4% to 11%. Broad sectors of the population identified the social ravages caused by the neo-liberal turn of the 1990s not only with the UNO government of Violeta Chamorro, but also with the Sandinista-UNO parliamentary majority which approved these attacks. Memories like this hardly encouraged a significant surge of the pro-Sandinista vote! [CA] ★

the FSLN, while the rural proletariat remained loyal to it in 1990.⁷

The Contra war gave the FSLN an extremely reduced margin of error, making every mistake extremely costly. Within this context, top-down decision-making and ineffective transmission of grassroots input prevented the Sandinistas from realising the extent of the economic hardships and the magnitude of the problems created by conscription, leaving Nicaraguans to communicate them in the elections.⁸

La Piñata

In reaction to the unexpected defeat in the 1990 elections, the FSLN embarked on a brisk process of transferring state properties to mass organisations and local Sandinista organisations. The previous lack of separation of state property from that of the Party left the FSLN facing the possibility of losing many of the assets the party needed to function, such as printing presses, buildings, vehicles. The hasty transfer process left many local organisations, and eventually the local leaders of those organisations, in charge of assets, and led to the enrichment of a sector of the FSLN at the expense of the state and the party. This process became

known as *La Piñata*.

The international context and the Sandinista defeat, in turn, pushed a sector of the FSLN into a "realistic" accommodation with the recently elected UNO forces. When Chamorro took office in April 1990, and promised to overhaul the government in the first 100 days, the Sandinistas called on the popular forces to "govern from below" and practically paralysed the country. Barricades were erected all over Managua. At that point, the Sandinistas came to an agreement with the Chamorro government: in exchange for an end to the far right's plans and accepting the agrarian reform, the Sandinistas pulled back from their mobilisations and acquiesced to the return of the financial



elite's control of the Nicaraguan economy via privatisation.

During the next three years, the FSLN was in virtual co-government with Chamorro's ruling UNO through an alliance in the National Assembly.⁹ In January 1993, the UNO parliamentary caucus formed a majority with the Sandinista legislators.

This parliamentary alliance formalised the process of rapprochement which began under the Chamorro government, between the enriched sector of *Sandinismo* and the "anti-oligarchic" wing of the UNO bourgeoisie. The Sandinista "new bourgeoisie," which got rich through *La Piñata*

and their UNO counterparts shared a common opposition to the oligarchic forces of the Old Order, but were perceived by increasing larger sectors of the population as responsible for the deepening economic hardships. In April 1994, the IMF and World Bank signed an agreement with Nicaragua that imposed typical structural adjustment constraints on the country. The Sandinistas had earlier unilaterally repudiated the foreign debt.

The acquisition of properties and money by some Sandinistas during *La Piñata* has caused, in the words of FSLN vice-presidential candidate Sergio Ramirez, "irreparable moral harm."¹¹ There are some, according to Sandinista sociologist Oscar Antonio Vargas, who seized a home as a means of ensuring survival in the future, but then grabbed a second home on the seashore, then a third house, then 600 *manzanas* of land and 800 head of cattle. A "new class" thus emerged, with the standard of living of the dominant top 5% layer, for which the logic of profit is increasingly important to the preservation of their acquired social status. This new bourgeoisie seeks acceptance by the traditional dominant class, and increasingly joins it or enters into pacts with it. The *rapprochement* of the enriched sector of the Sandinistas with the Chamorro government had the immense advantage of rendering the country "governable" through a "pact between the elites" and allowing it to over-

★ Nicaragua/Québec

come conditions inherited from the civil war after the 1990 elections.¹²

The properties seized in *La Piñata* include assets the FSLN and many popular mass organisations utilise legitimately. In addition to these collectively-held assets, the mansions and multiple homes seized by Sandinista leaders on an individual basis have been the object of much controversy. In 1991, a bill was introduced into the National Assembly to guarantee the rights of small property owners, while requiring those with mansions, multiple homes or huge land tracts to return them or pay a fair price.¹³ In January 1997, after the FSLN's second electoral defeat, Daniel Ortega returned the home he had occupied since the revolution.¹⁴ More than the assets held by mass organisations and the FSLN, it was the individual properties held by prominent Sandinistas that sparked an uproar and were exploited by the right wing as symbols of Sandinista hypocrisy and of the individual enrichment of its leaders.

As the commotion provoked by *La Piñata* and by calls for the return of the properties held individually by prominent Sandinistas subsided in 1991, the Chamorro government broke with the extreme right-wing elements in the UNO coalition and reached a compromise with the FSLN, with the goal of "rebuilding the center". Meanwhile, Chamorro's orthodox privatisation program, perceived by broad layers of the population as the product of the Chamorro-Sandinista "co-government", together with deregulation and economic "liberalisation", produced a social disaster in Nicaragua. The "pact between the elites" carried out under

the Chamorro government is part of a long tradition in Latin American politics. Another "pact of elites" will surely emerge after the 1996 elections to cushion the impact of Alemán's victory, preventing the country from moving outright into a new "Somocismo without Somoza", but nonetheless continually moving to the right.

Privatisation

Under Chamorro, a rapid process of privatisation has been undertaken. In 1987, the state held more than 13% of cultivated lands, 50% of industrial production, and many service sector businesses, including hotels, restaurants, supermarkets, and the national airline. Prime Minister Lacayo directed a large scale sell-off of state-owned businesses at very low prices.

"The government appears to have gained little, or no income from these sales, even though these businesses (however run down or damaged by the war) used to amount to 30% of GDP. This process has generated suspicions of a second *piñata*, "this time via the gross under-valuation of assets sold and/or the return of properties for which former owners had already been compensated by the Sandinista government." Not surprisingly, the Lacayo government did "little to reverse the Sandinista *piñata*, much less examine allegations of corruption within its own ranks." To be privatized were 351 urban and rural enterprises and 280,000 hectares of land. The new private banks give credit to commercial firms and large-scale producers, but not to small or medium rural producers. The state banks do the same, under strictures

from international financial institutions.¹⁵

Workers opposed many of these measures. The Sandinistas were pulled in two directions: on the one hand, they supported the workers' struggles, and the independent workers' and farmers' organisations while on the other they backed the Chamorro/Lacayo government, fearing that the more "revanchist" UNO right wing, backed by sectors in Washington would overcome the more moderate currents with which the Sandinistas were in alliance. The FSLN leadership, "was publicly backing the workers while also negotiating (more moderate) deals with the Chamorro administration."¹⁶

In 1989, Nicaragua spent \$35 per capita for health; by 1996 that figure had fallen to \$14. Infant mortality increased from 58 per-thousand in 1990 to 72 per-thousand in 1995. In 1995, 70% of the workforce was in the informal economy. In that same year, 71% of export income went to pay the foreign debt.¹⁷ Nicaragua is one of the poorest Latin American countries. Its *per capita* GDP of \$597 is half that of El Salvador (\$1,192), a third of that of Peru (\$1,885), a fifth of that of Mexico (3,041), and about one eighteenth that of Puerto Rico (\$10,820).¹⁸

Even though under the Sandinista government 78,000 families received land between 1979 and 1989, lack of credit has pushed them into subsistence farming and has prevented the development of diversified agriculture. The FSLN did not pay attention to providing clear, individual registered titles to most beneficiaries and in many cases the land register continued to contain the name of the old owners. Chamorro's structural adjustment policies have led to a sharp reduction in agricultural credit. The main beneficiaries of the land reform have been parcelling their lands and selling them. Lack of credit and uncertainty of tenure have led to "distress sales", which could lead to the re-concentration of land ownership.¹⁹

Agriculture is returning to monocultural patterns, with its classic evils. Coffee accounts for more than 50% of Nicaragua's exports. The *quintal* (hundredweight) of cacaó, which sold at \$143 in the 1980s, was selling at \$54 in 1993. World Bank recommendations require Managua to implement policies that promote exports. Boosting the principal export, coffee, means strengthening the traditional coffee oligarchy. Yet even these efforts are frustrated by falling world market coffee prices. Alemán's victory in the 1996 elections will undoubtedly move coffee exporters back to their traditional role as the country's oligarchy. Foreign capital is unwilling to invest in an economy lacking infrastructure and plagued by "social risks." Disarmed Contras and Sandinistas have such a hard time finding employment that they have held joint demonstrations demanding resources to make the transition to the peacetime economy, promises the Chamorro government made, but did not respect.

FSLN Split

In 1994 the FSLN suffered a split. A tendency led by Sergio Ramirez (Ortega's vice-presidential running mate in 1990) left

McUnion recognition in North America?

Workers in St-Hubert, Quebec, may soon become the first McDonald's employees in North America to unionise

Union drives in 1993 and 1994 failed to win support from a majority of employees at test-case McDonald's outlets in Quebec and Ontario. McDonald's Restaurants of Canada and its franchise-holders vigorously resisted unionisation. Militant workers say that their hours were cut to make way for more docile employees.

But local 973 of the Teamsters Union is confident of victory this time and expects to organise employees at least a dozen more McDonald's outlets in the Montreal region before the summer.

"The difference this time around is that we made sure we had a solid majority from the start," said Louis Fournier, a spokesman for the Quebec Federation of Labour (FTQ) to which the Quebec Teamsters belong. Most McDonald's restaurants have high turnover. Many of those behind previous union drive left or were fired before the matter came put to a formal vote, he said. This problem is unlikely to arise at the St-Hubert outlet. The average age of the 62 employees is over 30 and the majority work full-time.

The Teamsters began a new union drive on Montreal's South Shore last autumn (fall). Common grievances among McDonald's workers include low wages and a failure by employers to compensate for overtime. Many workers said they are required to arrive up to 30 minutes before the beginning of their shift, without pay, to prepare machines and other equipment. After six years at the St-Hubert McDonalds, 30-year-old Martin Tremblay still only makes 20 cents more than Quebec's minimum wage, \$C 6.70.

The application for union certification is now in the hands of the *Commissaire general du travail*, in Quebec's Labour Ministry. How long it takes to rule on the application "will depend on the objections McDonald's tries to raise," says Fournier. "Corporate lawyers always have many resources at their disposal to stall the process."

The Quebec Federation of Labour already represents workers at several Harvey's and Kentucky Fried Chicken fast-food restaurants in the province. ★

Source: *The Globe and Mail*, March 6, 1997

the party, accusing the Ortega leadership of "Stalinist" methods and calling for a renewal of *Sandinismo*. Ramirez and other historical FSLN leaders (notably Dora Maria Tellez, of legendary stature) established the *Movimiento de Renovacion Sandinista* (MRS). The MRS complained of lack of internal democracy in the FSLN, and of government by pact between the elites, particularly of collusion between Ortega and Antonio Lacayo, Chamorro's Presidential Minister.²⁰

The FSLN majority on the other hand accused the MRS of moving too far to the right in seeking further accommodation to Chamorro's neo-liberal policies, and of not supporting the 1993 transportation workers' strike.²¹ The split began to surface in the May 1994 special FSLN Congress, which ratified the Ortega leadership and gave his Democratic Left current a majority, and placed Sergio Ramirez and his tendency in a minority. On October 25, the conflict spread to the party newspaper *Barricada*, whose MRS-affiliated editor was sacked. The FSLN majority described this policy as reimposing party discipline, while the MRS charged it smacked of "authoritarianism" and the "orthodox left." Ernesto Cardenal resigned from the party at this point, claiming that Ortega had kidnapped the party to further his own political ends.

Pressures in a uni-polar world

Under Chamorro, the Sandinista army was reduced from 96,000 troops in 1990 to 21,000 in 1992 and 15,250 by 1993. Its budget dropped from \$177 m. in 1990 to \$36.5 m. in 1993. In a 1991 interview, "The Army will not be the armed wing of *Sandinismo*," General Humberto Ortega asserted that peace and foreign funding would not have been achieved had his brother been elected, and said he was 100% committed to Chamorro's economic plan.

In July 1993, the Sandinista Army attacked an incursion of dissident Sandinista combatants in Esteli, in a context in which General Ortega wanted to show the U.S. and UNO critics that the military was independent of the FSLN and supportive of the Chamorro government. The FSLN National Directorate severely criticised General Ortega. Pressure from Senator Helms and the U.S. government pushed Chamorro to remove General Ortega and replace him with Joaquin Cuadra in February 1995. The *Ejercito Popular Sandinista* was renamed; it is now called the Nicaraguan National Army.

The 1994 split led to ironic twists and turns: while the FSLN majority (*Izquierda Democratica*) charged that the MRS was making a classical social-democratic orientation, Daniel Ortega chose Juan Manuel Caldera as his running mate for the 1996 elections. Caldera is *not* a member of the FSLN, but is rather a member of the Supreme Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP), the main organisation of Nicaraguan capitalists and was a virulent opponent of the Sandinistas in the 1980s. Ortega's choice of running mate was interpreted by many Nicaraguans as signalling a turn to the right, further accommodation to bourgeois in-

Brazil

Rural workers march for land, work & justice

On March 17th the Movement of Landless Rural Workers (MST) began a march for Agrarian Reform, Jobs and Justice. Marches from Sao Paulo, Governador Valadares (Minas Gerais state) and Rondonopolis (Mato Grosso state) will converge in the federal capital, Brasilia on April 17th, one year to the day since 19 peasants were massacred in Eldorado de Carajas (Para state), a crime for which the landowners responsible have still not been tried.

About 600 landless workers joined the Sao Paulo march, which is marching at 20km/day on its 1,000 km route to Brasilia. The march is supported by the Workers Party (PT), the CUT trade union, the Catholic Church and a range of popular organisations. Wherever it stops, the march is greeted warmly, confirming that the demand for agrarian reform is supported by the vast majority of Brazil's poor. Tens of thousands of

demonstrators are expected to welcome the marchers at a rally in front of the National Congress building in Brasilia on April 17th.

The MST march is a protest against the impunity of those who terrorise and even murder rural workers who demand their basic rights, a protest against the government's irresponsible treatment of the land reform question, and a protest against the neo-liberal economic policies of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

This is the first major protest against the present federal government.

According to the MST, Brazil has four million landless families, waiting in tents for the government to fulfil its various obligations and promises towards them. The movement is intensifying its occupations of unused farming land and plantations, which it sees as the only way to create real land reform. [JD] ★

terests, a desire on the part of the Sandinistas to place themselves further in the "mainstream" in an increasingly neo-liberal, uni-polar, imperialist-dominated new world order. In other words, Ortega and the FSLN were actually carrying out in 1996 what they had derisively accused the MRS of proposing during the 1994 Sandinista Congress.

In this context, the 1996 election results are not very surprising. The severe social crisis plaguing Nicaragua was associated by broad layers of the population with the Chamorro government AND with the parliamentary majority made up of 39 Sandinista legislators and 15 UNO "moderates". There is considerable concern about the corruption and enrichment of a layer of the FSLN. Widespread cynicism prevails on the viability of struggling against the neo-liberal agenda and IMF-World Bank dictates. There is, in addition, the omnipresent fear of a return to war. Alemán's supporters "hammered home the warning that a Sandinista victory would mean a return to the years of war and economic collapse."²² Meanwhile, Daniel Ortega chose a capitalist as his running mate. Faced with this choice, the Nicaraguan electorate voted for the wholesome capitalist ticket of Alemán/Bolanos, who are perceived as having greater access to international funding and better prospects of obtaining foreign aid. Cynicism concerning graft among politicians and even about the corruption of the Sandinistas is reflected in the phrase, reported in the press, that "Alemán also steals, but at least he's efficient!"²³ Sandinista candidate Victor Hugo Tinoco said the Sandinista programme had only 'differences of shading' from the Liberal Alliance free-market strategy of economic re-activation by encouraging foreign investments.²⁴ In a race in which the Liberals' message was "restoring production"

and the Sandinistas the "search for a productive consensus," the Liberals were perceived as less linked to Chamorro's policies than the Sandinistas, and with better possibilities of obtaining credit to restore production.

Who is Alemán?

Alemán receives financial support from Jorge Mas Canosa, leader of the Miami anti-Castroists. His father was an official in one of Somoza's governments. In 1980 Alemán spent nine months in jail for counterrevolutionary activity. In the 1980s he was head of Managua's coffee growers' association and later of the national coffee growers association. In 1990 he ran for mayor of Managua through the Liberal Constitutionalist Party, a splinter from the National Liberal Party, Somoza's party.

As mayor of Managua, Alemán built a classic patronage machine and utilised public works projects to distribute jobs and economic favours. The Cuban-American Foundation supports Alemán through the Nicaraguan Foundation for Development and Democracy, a conduit for Miami funding. NFDD dealings in Miami are handled by Alemán's agent Byron Jimenez, who allegedly participated in Somoza's death squad, Mano Blanca. The NFDD serves as an intermediary for many Miami companies with contracts in Managua.

Alemán's backers have called for restoring properties acquired by Sandinistas in *La Piñata* to the pre-revolutionary owners. This threatened a return to unmitigated *Somocismo*. The principal stumbling blocks in the path of such outright oligarchic restoration are the Nicaraguan army and the IMF/World Bank, which prefer stability over a flare-up of struggles over property.²⁵ Before the elections, Ortega called upon Alemán to agree on a "pact of governability" with

guarantees against revanchism. Alemán's rising star was foreseen by many observers.²⁶

A double dynamic FSLN

The struggle continues over the agrarian reform, particularly concerning land titles, which the Sandinistas sorely neglected during their administration. Massive land invasions took place in 1990, and they have continued every year, although on a steady downward trend. Workers' struggles will continue, and the Sandinistas are not about to disappear from the political scene.

There is no easy answer to the dilemmas facing the FSLN in the present international context. Instead of simplistic arguments about supposed electoral fraud, an assessment of the complex causes that led to the second Sandinista electoral defeat may help shed light on Nicaragua's current situation, and the possible course of the FSLN's struggle for national liberation in the future.

Under the Chamorro government, the FSLN was pulled towards workers' struggles, and towards a "realistic" accommodation with imperialism and the Nicaraguan right. Under the Alemán government the weakened FSLN will experience the same tensions, but within a political framework situated further to the right ★.

Notes

- 1 See, for example, Dianne Feeley, "The 1996 Nicaraguan Elections: How Arnoldo Alemán 'Won'," *Against the Current*, no. 66. (January-February, 1997), pp. 26-30.
- 2 "Como votaron los nicaraguenses?" *Envío* (Managua), Nov.-Dec., 1996. (gopher://ns.uca.edu.ni/00/4/1/1).
- 3 *The Principles and Program of the FSLN*, adopted at the First Congress of the FSLN on July 21, 1991, state that: "in government, the FSLN led a far reaching agrarian reform that democratised land ownership and contributed to modernising the entire countryside. Nevertheless, it did not win the support of broad sectors of the peasantry, the pillar of society and national production. As the government and as a party, the FSLN carried out policies that negatively affected their economic interests and which ignored their characteristics. For this reason, this important segment of Nicaraguan society continues to be the FSLN's main challenge." The program is reprinted in Vanessa Castro and Gary Prevost's, *The 1990 Elections in Nicaragua and their Aftermath* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1992).
- 4 Vanessa Castro, "Electoral Results in the Rural Sector," in Vanessa Castro and Gary Prevost, *The 1990 Elections in Nicaragua and their Aftermath*, pp. 130-131.
- 5 Eduardo Baumeister, "Agrarian Reform," in Thomas Walker, ed., *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Nicaragua* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), p. 242.
- 6 Vanessa Castro, "Electoral Results..." pp. 136-37.
- 7 Shelley A. McConell, "The Electoral Defeat of the Sandinista Regime: a Postmortem," *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 31, no. 1 (1996), p. 219.
- 8 Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, *Democracy and Socialism in Sandinista Nicaragua* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. 144.
- 9 Gary Prevost, "Nicaragua Surprise: Sandinistas Split; Somoza Party Gains," *Commonwealth*, May 3, 1996 (v. 123, no. 9) p. 9.
- 10 *NACLA Report on the Americas*, Nov.-Dec. 1994, vol. 28, no. 3, p. 32.
- 11 *El País* (Madrid) June, 24, 1996, quoted in Maurice Lemoine, "Des Elections Decisives sur Fond de Desastre Social: La Nicaragua tente par un retour au passe," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, October 1996.
- 12 Maurice Lemoine, "Des Elections Decisives..."
- 13 "Nicaragua's \$1 Billion Battle: Can the Government make the Sandinistas Give Back their Homes?," *U.S. News and World Report*, v. 111 (July 29, 1991) pp. 35-6.
- 14 *New York Times*, January 19, 1997.
- 15 D. Dye, J. Butler, D. Abu Lughod, J. Spence and G. Vickers, *Contesting Everything, Winning Nothing: The Search for Consensus in Nicaragua, 1990-1995* (Washington Office on Latin America and Hemispheric Initiatives, November 1995), pp. 21, 9, 30, 28.
- 16 Dye et. al. *Contesting Everything...*, p. 9.
- 17 Francois Houtart, "Echec du modele neoliberal..."
- 18 Puerto Rico/USA Foundation, "Socioeconomic Statistics for Caribbean and Latin American Countries Compared to Puerto Rico." [www:pr-eda.com]
- 19 J. Jonakin, "The Impact of Structural Adjustment and

Ecuador

Radical left divided in response to crisis

Jean Dupont

On 18 February the Congress elected Fabian Alarcón as Ecuador's new president, after Abdalá Bucaram was forced from power by an unprecedented social mobilisation (see last month's *International Viewpoint*). Heinz Moeller, leader of the Social Christian Party (PSC) was elected to preside Congress itself.

This parliamentary solution to mass unrest was supported by the Social Christians, the Christian Democrats, the social democratic Democratic Left, Fabian Alarcón's own Alfariista Radical Front, the Liberal Party, and five of the six radical left deputies of the "rainbow" coalition Pachakutik.

Rosendo Rojas Reyes, Pachakutik Member of Parliament for Azuay, and a leader of Socialist Democracy, the 4th International group which helped found the rainbow movement, voted against Moeller's appointment.

"The popular will expressed itself very clearly," Rojas explains. "People wanted fundamental changes. The People of Ecuador wanted to get rid of Bucaram, but they didn't just want to change the names of the top people. People rose up against the corrupt politicians' games, against manipulation and graft, against the old-style politics, which has always marginalised the majority of people.

"People protested against neo-liberalism, and for deep, radical democracy. In short, popular will has rejected the old Ecuador. The Social Christian Party and Dr Moeller were and still are part of the old politics. When the PSC was in government, we saw its true face: repression and disappearances. How can we help them back into power?"

The other left deputies justified their vote as being part of a series of measures around which there was a national or progressive consensus, "in the spirit" of the popular mobilisation. Rojas disagreed. "The popular mandate didn't require that we vote for the social Christians. Voting for Moeller means the defeat of the hopes which were liberated in the demonstrations of February. It is a defeat within the victory of the anti-Bucaram movement."

Since coming to power, Moeller and

the Social Christians have themselves undermined the proposed measures, by vetoing the appointment of junior "new deal" team members who were unacceptable to the establishment. These included Teodoro Coello, rector of Azuay University, proposed by that state's Popular Assembly as Contralor General, a kind of fiscal ombudsman, and Manuel Chiriboga, proposed as Agriculture Minister by the country's peasant and indigenous organisations.

Rojas' position does not mean a split. Fourth Internationalists still consider Pachakutik to be a great step forward for the mass movement, for democratic-minded citizens, who, at last, were able to speak with their own voice and of their own hopes. We will continue working to strengthen the movement.

"What happened was a political disagreement within the parliamentary block. It has happened before, and may happen again. After all, Pachakutik is a pluralist and democratic movement. It still represents the best of Ecuadorian society, and we will continue to defend it. And the best way to defend and strengthen the movement is to remain faithful to its principles.

"The bloc is not split, and neither is the movement. The different, contradictory points of view should not be hidden, but they are what they are: differences on the tactics of the moment. All of us in the movement should continue and reinforce the debate about where we go from here. In this way, we will continue to develop the image and profile of our forward looking, independent movement."

The failure of the parliamentary negotiations (from the point of view of the popular movement) has since led Pachakutik to re-state its link to the social movements, stressing that "we must not fall into the trap of parliamentarisation."

The next national conference promises to be particularly animated. Different components of the alliance have interpreted these recent events in different ways. Strategic differences over next year's parliamentary elections, and other matters, are crystallising. ★

- Property-Rights Conflicts on Nicaraguan Agrarian-Reform Beneficiaries," *World Development*, July 1996, pp. 1179-1191.
- 20 Nicaragua's equivalent to a Prime Minister.
- 21 See Pierre Laramee's interviews with Victor Hugo Tinoco (Izquierda Democratica) and Dora Maria Tellez (MRS) in *NACLA-Report on the Americas*, March/April 1995, and Gary Prevost, "Political Infighting at Sandinista Special Congress," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, July-August, 1994.
- 22 Sheldon Rampton, "Contradictory Realities: The Nicaraguan Elections of 1996."
- 23 Lemoine, "Des elections Decisives..."
- 24 Rampton, "Contradictory Realities: The Nicaraguan

Elections of 1996."

- 25 Mark Caster, "The Return of Somocismo?..."
- 26 Mark Caster, "The Return of Somocismo? The Rise of Arnoldo Alemán," *NACLA Report on the Americas*, vol. XXX, no. 2, (Sept.-Oct. 1996), pp. 6-9. Lemoine, "Le Nicaragua tente..." Gary Prevost, "Nicaragua Surprise," *Commonwealth*, v.123 (May 3, 1996), p. 910.
- Stephanie Rillaerts, "Une Reconstruction qui se fait Attendre: menaces d'extreme droite sur le Nicaragua," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 1994, discussed the possibility of an Alemán candidacy and victory, after the impressive triumph of Alemán forces on the Atlantic coast in 1994.

Elections change little

The *Pakistan Muslim League* headed by Nawaz Sharif won an unprecedented landslide in the February 3rd parliamentary election. B. Skanthakumar discusses the election with London-based journalist and activist Arif Azad.

Arif Azad: In one sense the result is an extension of the old order. Nothing has changed for the majority. The huge mandate that Nawaz Sharif [leader of the *Pakistan Muslim League*] has received was the result of a stitch-up between President Farooq Leghari and the military to the advantage of this pro-establishment candidate. The *Muslim League* is now the national party of Pakistan and has expanded from its base in Punjab province. It has solid representation in Sindh, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province.

The *Peoples Party* has been reduced to its strong-hold of Sindh province - where former president Benazir Bhutto has land and family connections. Even before the election, many Sindhis sensed a change in attitudes of the Sindh towards Bhutto and her Party. Many of her core supporters deserted her by not voting in the elections at all. [Voter turnout was 36.36%, down from 43% in 1993].

The *Mohajir Quami Movement* [party of urban, Urdu speaking migrants from India] has made a comeback in the Sindh capital, Karachi, its stronghold. Benazir Bhutto did the military's dirty work for them by crushing the *MQM* and 'order' has been restored in Karachi though political and sectarian murders continue. The *MQM* will form the next provincial government in Sindh with the support of the *Muslim League*.

The *Baluchistan National Movement* has won a sizeable number of seats in that province. This new party was formed only a month before the elections by Ataullah Mengal. He is a regional autonomist and a key figure in the past insurgency movement there, subsequently in exile in London in its aftermath.

In North-West Frontier Province, the *Awami National Party (ANP)* was runner up to the *Muslim League*. The *ANP* is no longer a regional autonomist party.¹ They know that they can only rule their province with the support of the military and in collaboration with a Punjabi party. They have ditched their commitment to social justice and are now simply a party for the Pashtun people.

Many moderate bourgeois politicians who had previously been pro-military openly criticised the role of the military in the dismissal of the Bhutto government and accused them of rigging the elections to oust them from the scene in a clean-up of politics. Even a leader of the religious party *Jamiat-ullami-*

Islam, which is traditionally pro-military was extremely critical of them. Meanwhile Benazir Bhutto didn't have a word to say against the generals. She needed their support to save her future political fortune and to protect her family, particularly her husband, Asif Zardari, who is under arrest on corruption and murder charges.²

• **Benazir Bhutto was associated with the struggles against Zia-ul-Haq's military regime and benefited enormously from the populist legacy of her father's administration and the "pro-poor" rhetoric of the Pakistan Peoples Party. And yet the dismissal of her government by the President on November 5th 1996 was greeted by popular indifference, even enthusiasm...**

Some influential columnists and newspaper editors advocated this course of action four or five months preceding November. This strengthened the hand of the President.

In the February elections, Benazir Bhutto was voted out on her record in office. She really disillusioned the whole country. Her government is associated with high inflation. People are groaning under the burden of the rising cost of living. Benazir was perceived as being very arrogant. Even during her election rallies she never apologised for her mistakes and instead denounced the President for dismissing her, at every opportunity. Nawaz Sharif spoke at rallies which were far larger than his rival's. He was contrite about the record of his government while Prime Minister between 1990 and 1993. He seemed to be more in touch with the grievances of ordinary people.

Bhutto's biggest handicap was her husband, Asif Ali Zardari. From Mr. Ten Percent, he became known as Mr. Thirty Percent, representing his commission on business deals he negotiated using his influence]. When the President asked her to clamp down on Zardari's corrupt businesses, she appointed him as Minister for Investment!

One of the scandals which contributed to her downfall is "Surreygate". The Bhuttos are rumoured to have a 350 acre estate and mansion in Surrey, England. Zardari also imported a stable of horses which were fed on an expensive diet while the poor are scraping by. All this swelled public anger. The press went to town on these facts. During the campaign, Benazir was low-key and conciliatory. She probably wants to strike a deal with the new government for her husband's release and was prepared to lose the election for this purpose.

Many members of the PPP believe Benazir should cut her ties with Zardari and concentrate on revitalising the party organisation and return to the populist traditions



of her father in the early 1970s. While her government didn't attack the interests of the business class, bureaucracy and the military, Benazir herself said that her dismissal was the result of a conspiracy by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These institutions are using the rhetoric of "good governance" to criticise the kickbacks and rampant corruption, which reduces the profits of foreign capital.

• **What has happened to the Islamic fundamentalist parties which were so influential in Pakistani politics and seemed to define the agenda even of mainstream secular parties?**

The *Jamaat-i-Islami* boycotted the elections, though the *Jamiat-Ullami-Islam* did win a few seats. For most people, ideology takes second place to the day-to-day struggle. People pay lip service to Islam but very few Pakistanis want an Islamic state. They know the record of fundamentalists in areas where they have influence.

Secondly, the new Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif appeals to the same layer that is most supportive of these fundamentalist parties especially the bazaar merchant and the petty bourgeoisie more generally. He has captured this vote. Interestingly the rhetoric of these movements has also changed. They are less strident in their use of Islam as ideology and now focus on social justice questions. In fact they are to the left of Bhutto's *Peoples Party* on a number of issues. It is the state of the economy which pre-occupies people. Many voted for Nawaz Sharif thinking that, as a businessman, he would manage the economy well and at any rate he couldn't be any worse than his predecessor!

Fundamentalist movements have lost their influence. But given Pakistan's history, and its *raison d'être* as a state created for Muslims, these parties are not going to go away. Their electoral representation has always been low but these cadre based parties are the best organised. Over the past few years they have expanded their activities throughout the country, in every sector of society. They have cells in the armed forces and in universities. There is a sizeable presence in the Railway workers union and in the Pakistan International Airlines union.

The fundamentalists have moved with the times. When I was a student, the student wing of the *Jamiat* banned students in hostels watching videos, because these would import decadent western values and Indian popular culture or could be pornographic. Now at their rallies they play popular music. Television is no longer frowned upon.

Like other fundamentalist parties around the world they have a welfare wing which draws them political support. They are the most vocal on social questions. When as frequently happens the police harass and abuse common people, it is the youth wing of these parties which marches to the police station and demands an end to this misconduct.

If the Left doesn't unite, and rediscover its role as tribunes of the people for economic justice, social justice, women's equality, and land reform, *Jamiat* will reap the benefits.

• **The western media lavished attention on former international cricketer Imran Khan. They were intrigued by this Oxford University product, socialite and now son-in-law of the billionaire businessman Sir James Goldsmith. However Khan's *Tehrik-i-Insaf (Movement for Justice)* polled very poorly.**

By highlighting the issue of corruption which was the sole plank of his party's electoral campaign, Imran Khan really played into the hands of the establishment. He was given a lot of air time to call for corruption charges to be slapped on the Bhuttos. In other words he was furthering the agenda of the military. The establishment sees corruption only in politicians because they are public figures. The corruption of the bureaucracy and the military is hidden. People are encouraged to loathe politicians. They are being persuaded to lose belief in the electoral process. This of course can only strengthen the argument for a political role for these unelected forces.

Imran Khan had nothing to offer in his political programme. He campaigned on the basis of his personal charisma. He didn't have a team or a vision. Whatever he may think, he is not a man of the people. He is aloof and arrogant. The allegations made about his fathering a child which he has refused to accept as his own also damaged him. He keeps company with the most corrupt individuals in Pakistan and invited many of them to his wedding but at his election rallies he promised to hang the corrupt upside down. He was always going to be a marginal figure and it was only the western media which gave him prominence.

• **Before the elections, the caretaker government created the Council for Defence and National Security. Is this a new institutional role for the President and the Armed Forces?**

The Council will act to deflect any demands made by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund for the reduction of the military budget which consumes 40% of national income. All economic policy has to be vetted by this institution. This means they

Genocide's creditors

Three years later, we still know too little about one of the biggest genocides in human history. In less than three months, one million Rwandans were exterminated, simply because they were or were thought to be Tutsis.

Tens of thousands of Hutus were also killed: political opponents of the regime and people who refused or might have refused to join in the genocide.

With few exceptions, neither the authors of the genocide nor those who carried it out have been brought to trial. The victims' families face terrible material and psychological conditions.

The direct complicity of (in particular) the French and Belgian authorities is being covered up or is simply denied.

The deadly role of the macro-

economic policies imposed by the multilateral financial institutions - World Bank and IMF - is also being obscured. The patent failure of non-governmental organisations is being white-washed.¹

Perhaps worst of all, the "international community" is forcing survivors to pay for the weapons that were used to massacre their families and neighbours.

Eric Toussaint*

The anti-Tutsi genocide was planned in the early 1990s by the authoritarian regime of General Habyarimana. This regime produced a genocidal ideology that was steadily exuded at every level of the system, from the central committee of the National Revolutionary Movement for Development (MNRD) - a sort of single ruling party consolidated by Habyarimana and his entourage over the course of 20 years - to key cells inside the

can strike a bargain with multi-lateral lending institutions, to protect their privileges and pass the social costs of the structural adjustment program onto the poor. Another dimension is that under the aegis of this Council, the President has improved his own standing *vis-à-vis* the office of the Prime Minister and has concentrated more power in his own hands. There are tensions between the Chief of the Army Staff, General Jahangir Karamat and the President on this score. General Karamat may suspect the President is trying to undermine the role of the military through the Council. The military has strengthened its vice like grip over the country and the Nawaz Sharif government knows it.

• **The caretaker government appointed a Pakistani vice-president at the World Bank, Shahid Javed Burki, as Special Economic Advisor. This unelected technocrat introduced the economic reform program which has been inherited by the new government.**

The World Bank and Pakistani governments have a long relationship going back to the early 1950s when economic policies were framed by the Harvard School of Economics. Harvard university had a scholarship scheme through which it attracted the brightest Pakistani students and

Key dates

1947-57 Multi-party system with Muslim League and Republican Party. 1958 - 1969 Field Marshall Ayub Khan's martial law regime.

1969-71 Ayub Khan forced out by popular movements and hands power to new army chief, General Yahya Khan

1971-77 Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party comes to power.

1977-85 Bhutto ousted in military coup (later executed). General Zia-ul-Haq becomes Martial Law Administrator

1985-88 Non-party elections. Zia becomes President. Martial law lifted.

1988-90 Zia dies in plane crash. Benazir Bhutto's PPP comes to power.

1990-93 Benazir Bhutto's government dismissed by President. Care-taker government of Moeen Qureshi takes over. Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League elected.

1993-96 Nawaz Sharif's government dismissed by the President. Benazir Bhutto returns to office. In November 1996, Bhutto government dismissed by President. The care-taker government is headed by Prime Minister Meraj Khalid though many believe that President Farooq Leghari holds real power.

1997 Nawaz Sharif is elected.

disciplined, hierarchically controlled state bureaucracy. The size of the army was increased eightfold from 1990 to 1993. The creation of the *Interahamwe* militias ("those who fight together") in 1992 was the finishing touch to the arrangements. At the end of 1993 the killing machine was in place: in each of Rwanda's 146 municipalities, 200-300 armed men, about one for every ten families, were ready to act. In the rural, hilly areas, everybody knows everyone else: the militias drew up lists identifying the "lukewarm" ones, the "suspicious" ones, and the "avowed Tutsis".

In the capital, Kigali, the plans were drawn up even more carefully. In early 1994, municipal employees double-checked who lived in each house. They put red signs on some houses, green signs on others. "It's for the census", they assured the surprised inhabitants. In April 1994 the killing teams would know exactly which houses they had to stop at. To complete the arrangements, the *Free Radio and Television of the Thousand Hills (TLM)* was set up in 1993. The famous "Radio of Death" or "Radio Machete" was born. It was housed across from the presidential offices and supplied with electricity from across the street.

The militias began carrying out mas-



sacres as early as 1992-93. By the beginning of 1993 2,000 people had already been assassinated. Each action was preceded by a meeting, often organised at the highest level: the chief of state and his wife took part. During these meetings the targets were painstakingly defined. The necessary means were put at the killers' disposal: petrol coupons, vehicles - often cars or trucks belonging to the municipality - and weapons. The *gendarmierie* or the army provided the operation's cover: uniformed men closed off the roads, finished off the work or got rid of inconvenient witnesses. In January 1993 the Rwandan Federation for Human Rights published a report that stated, "The preconditions are present for genocide."

French advisors, right from the start

During this whole preparatory phase, General Habyarimana's dictatorial regime enjoyed very considerable international support. French authorities were front and centre. The *Interahamwe* militias were trained by French troops stationed in Rwanda. According to Janvier Afrika, who took part himself in massacres in the early 1990s, "The French taught us how to catch people and how to tie them up. There were also Frenchmen in the 'registration centre' in

trained them. The two most recent Caretaker governments in 1990 and between November 1996 and February 1997 have been effectively headed by current employees from senior levels of the World Bank.

This has paved the way for the introduction of anti-poor austerity measures which even nominally democratic governments could not afford to bring in. This advisor, Shahed Javed Burki wrote a book extremely critical of the economic record of the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto government (1971-77) Burki argued that if any democratically elected government tried to revert to the populist policies of that period it would be ruined.

When he finally got his shot at handling the economic portfolio, Burki was shuttling between Islamabad and Washington DC to plead with the World Bank to release more loans for Pakistan which they didn't do. However what they did give him was a blueprint for *any* incoming government.

A few days before the election, Burki briefed Nawaz Sharif on this economic plan, and made it clear that he would be expected to stick to and implement it once in office.

The foreign debt is now US\$30 billion and debt-servicing consumes 45% of the budget. The Caretaker government removed state subsidies for necessities. The price of sugar increased four times in those few months, from Rs. 10 per kilo to Rs. 31 per kilo. [60Rs. = 1 US dollar] The price of ghee

[cooking oil] has reached Rs. 80 per kilo. Prices of wheat flour, milk-powder, cement, electricity, gas, bus fares and rail fares all increased. You can see the effects on the faces of the poor. They are so hard pressed that they find it difficult to even breathe.

• Privatisation will be accelerated by the new government. How are trade unions responding?

There hasn't been widespread opposition to privatisation. Many trade unionists see the floating of the Allied Bank of Pakistan as a model. Workers and management bought a majority stake in the bank and its financial situation has improved. Trade unionists see this as a future strategy. A way to protect jobs while maintaining profitability.

There is a small core of independent trade unions and left wing activists who are trying to mobilise on anti-privatisation issues and they have formed a loose network which is a promising start. Aside from this there was also an electoral coalition formed at these elections based upon progressive trade unionists and left wing groups³ It stood on a clearly workers agenda. Historically the Pakistani Left⁴ has always been entangled with bourgeois parties and more recently in the *Peoples Party*. We are at an embryonic stage but this is a welcome break. The road ahead is long. General Zia-ul-Haq crushed popular opposition and de-politicised the

youth. This generation knows nothing about politics and left wing ideologies. Instead they understand politics only along ethnic, clan and regional and religious sectarian lines. ★

Arif Azad was a student activist and leader while at medical college in Lahore and involved in protests against the martial law regime of General Zia-ul-Haq. He was on the executive council of the Pakistan Medical Association and a contributor to the left-wing Pakistani magazine *Viewpoint*.

Notes

1. The Awami National Party is a successor to the National Awami Party, a left-wing party led by Maulana Abdul Hamid Bashani, a Maoist. In the North-West Frontier Province, Wali Khan was its best known figure. His father, Ghafar Khan had close ties with the Congress party in India and was dubbed the "Frontier Gandhi".
2. Zardari is accused of the murder of Benazir Bhutto's brother and bitter political rival, Murtaza, killed in a shoot-out with police in September 1996. Few believe that Zardari ordered the murder. Instead he is a convenient scapegoat. Murtaza Bhutto's Lebanese-born widow, Ghinva, now leads his party (which won only one seat) seeking punishment for his true assailant - the latest in the long line of "widows in politics" in South Asia.
3. Including the Pakistani affiliate of the Committee for a Workers International ("Militant")
4. The Communist Party in post-partition Pakistan was the remnant of the Indian Communist Party which anyway had been weak in those regions. The main leader of the Communist Party migrated from India to rebuild it. However the Cold War environment and the close relationship with the United States of America government contributed to the crushing of this party. In the notorious Rawalpindi Conspiracy case of 1958, the main leaders were rounded up and jailed. The Communist Party never recovered. Trade unions were prominent in the 1960s with the expansion of the industrial working class and a left wing movement. Trade unions and the Left supported Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and propelled him into power. However their militancy was too threatening to him and he curbed them.

★ Rwanda

downtown Kigali where the torture sessions took place... Soon after the training courses began, the first slaughters began, in early 1992. This didn't keep the French advisers from continuing the training."² The Belgian lawyer Eric Gillet also said as early as 1991 that he had seen Frenchmen in uniform observing prisoners' interrogations in the registration centre.³

French support for Habyarimana goes back to 1975, when a first military co-operation agreement was signed by President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing. Before this time Rwanda did not seem to be an active part of France's foreign policy.

In contrast, Belgium, the former colonial power, was omnipresent in Rwanda. It provided military aid to the Rwandan army that was maintained up until the genocide began on 7 April 1994. The Belgian king, Baudouin, and Queen Fabiola considered Juvenal Habyarimana a friend. He regularly visited the royal palace. "Each time he visited, the president rushed to the royal chapel and kneeled with his forehead to the ground, in the great charismatic tradition."⁴ When King Baudouin died, Habyarimana attended the

official ceremony (an honour which President Mobutu of Zaire did not have). The MNRD, the ruling party Habyarimana created, was financed and supported on the international political scene by the Christian Democratic International and the Flemish and Walloon Christian Democratic parties.⁵

The Elysée's relations with Habyarimana

France greatly increased its military aid after the rebels of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR) launched a military offensive from Uganda in October 1990. François Mitterand quickly sent paratroopers stationed in Bangui (in the Central African Republic) in order to support the Rwandan regime and evacuate foreign residents. "The excellent relations that had developed between Jean-Christophe, the French president's son, and Jean-Pierre, the Rwandan president's son, with Mobutu's blessing, did the rest, all the more so because Jean-Christophe ran the Elysée's African cell at the time."⁶

The French troops - there would eventually be more than a thousand of them -

saved Habyarimana's bacon several times between October 1990 and 1993, even though Paris saw where the Rwandan regime was heading. The desire to increase French influence in the region proved decisive. When the Arusha accords were signed in January 1993 - accords for a democratic transition between the Habyarimana regime and the FPR - Mitterand reaffirmed his total support for the regime. In reality he was afraid of what implementing the accords would lead to, since they would mean a reduction of French influence. "Whatever the Elysée may say, its embassy never joins initiatives in support of human rights; on the contrary, it is busy making contacts with extremists inside the regime."⁷

The genocide

On 6 April 1994, the signal was given to begin the genocide when a missile destroyed the plane bringing Habyarimana and his Burundian colleague from a negotiating session in Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania). Within a few hours, hundreds of Hutu political opponents were assassinated according to a minutely prepared plan. The prime minister herself was assassinated. Ten Belgian paratroopers, members of MINUAR - the UN multinational force - were massacred while trying to defend themselves. The MINUAR command let it happen. The provisional government that took over held its meetings in the French embassy. The massacre of opponents and the launching of the genocide was directed from there. Several hundred thousand people died in a few weeks. By the end of June 1994, the genocide was an accomplished fact.

Opération Turquoise was launched by France ten weeks after the massacres began, essentially in order to allow what was left of the Rwandan army and the genocidal militias to retreat into Zaire, bringing hundreds of thousands of civilians with them as hostages.

The policies of the multilateral financial institutions

Policies imposed by the international financial institutions, the Habyarimana regime's main funders, accelerated the process leading to genocide.⁸

In the early 1980s, when the Third World debt crisis broke out,⁹ Rwanda (like its neighbour Burundi) had very little debt. Elsewhere in the world the World Bank and IMF abandoned their active lending policies and preached abstinence. They adopted a different attitude towards Rwanda. The World Bank and IMF decided to cut off all credits to Nicaragua, since its authentic revolution had installed a revolutionary regime. By contrast, these institutions took it upon themselves to lend liberally to Rwanda.¹⁰

The dictatorial regime in power since 1973 guaranteed that Rwanda would not adopt policies of progressive, structural change. It was actively supported by Belgium, France and Switzerland. The regime was seen as a potential bulwark against countries in the region that were clinging to old notions about independence and progres-

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sive change (neighbouring Tanzania, for example). During the 1980s and up until 1994, Rwanda received many loans, of which Habyarimana appropriated a considerable share.

These loans were meant to insert the Rwandan economy more tightly into the world economy by developing its three main export products - coffee, tea and tin, at the expense of crops meant to satisfy local needs. The model worked until the mid-1980s, when tin prices collapsed, then coffee prices, and finally tea prices. Rwanda was also hard hit by the US-provoked break-up of the coffee cartel.

Use of international loans to prepare the genocide

Several weeks before the Rwandan Patriotic Front (FPR) launched its rebellion in October 1990, the Rwandan authorities signed an agreement with the IMF and World Bank in Washington to set in motion a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). This SAP took effect in November 1990, whereupon the Rwandan franc was devalued by 67%. In return the IMF granted quick-disbursing credits and hard currency in order to enable the country to keep up the pace of imports. The money lent in this way made it possible to keep the balance of payments in balance. Import prices increased dizzyingly: petrol prices went up by 79%. By selling these imports on the national market, the government was able to finance the pay of the growing number of troops. The SAP forecast a cut in government spending: there was a wage freeze and layoffs in the civil service, but part of this saving was transferred to the army.

While import prices rose, the purchase price paid to coffee farmers was frozen, as required by the IMF. The result was ruin for hundreds of thousands of small-scale coffee producers.¹¹ Other measures imposed by the World Bank and IMF through the SAP included increased taxes on consumption, lower taxes on companies, higher direct taxes on low-income families through reductions of tax benefits for large families, and cutbacks in credit facilities for peasants.¹²

These farmers and the most impoverished city-dwellers constituted from then on a permanent source of recruits for the *Interahamwe* militias and the army.

In order to justify use of "quick disbursement" loans, Rwanda was authorised by the World Bank to present old bills for purchases of imported goods. This system enabled the Rwandan authorities to finance massive purchases of weapons for the genocide. Military spending tripled from 1990 to 1992.¹³ The World Bank and IMF sent several expert missions during this period: the experts stressed various positive aspects of Habyarimana's austerity policies but threatened to suspend payments if military spending continued to grow. The Rwandan authorities perfected tricks to hide military spending: trucks bought for the army were covered by the Ministry of Transport budget; much of the petrol used by militia and army

vehicles was covered by the Ministry of Health budget, etc. Finally, the World Bank and IMF turned off the financial aid tap in early 1993. But they did not block the bank accounts that the Rwandan authorities held in major banks abroad; major sums in these accounts remained available for arms purchases.

Rising social contradictions

In order for the genocidal project to be set in motion, more was necessary than a regime that conceived it and assembled the tools to carry it out. There also had to be a mass of impoverished, lumpenised people, ready to carry out such a bloodbath. In Rwanda, 90% of the population lives in the countryside, and 20% of the peasant population has less than a half-hectare of land per family. Between 1982 and 1994, there was a massive process of impoverishment of the majority of the rural population, with an impressive accumulation of wealth at the other extreme of society. According to Professor Jef Maton, the richest 10% of the population took in 20% of rural income in 1982, 41% in 1992, 45% in 1993, and 51% in early 1994. The catastrophic social impact of the policies dictated by the IMF and World Bank and the fall of coffee prices on the world market (which also had something to do with the Bretton Woods institutions' policies) played a key role in the Rwandan crisis. The enormous social discontent was channelled by the Habyarimana regime towards genocide.

Genocide's creditors

Rwanda's main arms suppliers in 1990-94 were France, Belgium, South Africa, Egypt and the People's Republic of China. China supplied 500,000 machetes. Egypt - whose deputy minister of foreign affairs in charge of relations with Africa was none other than Boutros Boutros Ghali - offered Rwanda an interest-free loan so it could buy infantry weapons for a total of \$6 million. Once the genocide was under way, and although the UN had decreed an arms embargo on 11 May 1994, France and the British firm Mil-Tec supplied arms to the criminal army through Goma airport in Zaire.¹⁴

Once Kigali fell to the rebel FPR, several high officials responsible for the genocide were received at the Elysée palace. The Rwandan authorities in exile, with the help of the French army, set up a new headquarters of the Rwandan National Bank in Goma, Zaire. From this office they continued authorising payments for arms sales until the end of August 1994. Private banks - Belgolaise, Générale de Banque, BNP, Dresdner Bank - accepted orders of payment from the perpetrators of genocide and reimbursed the genocide's creditors.¹⁵

Today, Rwanda's total foreign debt is almost \$1 billion, almost entirely contracted by the Habyarimana regime. Beginning in 1998, Rwanda will have to pay back \$155 million each year to its creditors, mainly the Bretton Woods institutions. Can we accept that those who survived the genocide will be forced to pay for the weapons with which the crime was carried out? ★

Source: Article (forthcoming) written in French for *Politix La Revue*

*Eric Toussaint chairs the Brussels-based Committee for Cancellation of the Third World Debt (COCAD).

Notes

1. Rwanda used to have the highest density of Western Non-Governmental Organisations per square kilometre of any Third World country. Most of the NGOs that were involved in development projects did not see the genocide coming. Some of them, and not the least of them, find it too distasteful to evaluate their activities critically.
2. Colette Braeckman, *Rwanda, Histoire d'un génocide*, Fayard, 1994, pp.159-60.
3. Braeckman, op.cit., p. 159.
4. The last Belgian troops that had been serving in the Rwandan army returned to Belgium in mid-April 1994. Until they left Rwanda they wore Rwandan uniforms.
5. Belgium is a federal state; each of the three major Belgian political currents - Christian Democratic, Social Democratic and Liberal - is divided into a Flemish party in the Dutch-speaking region and a Walloon party in the French-speaking region.(trans.)
6. Colette Braeckman, op.cit., p. 255. France's African relations have been managed for years in large part by an "African cell" in the presidential palace rather than by the foreign ministry.(trans.)
7. Colette Braeckman, op.cit., p. 261.
8. Michel Chossudovsky, "Somalia and Rwanda", in *IMF/World Bank/WTO: The Free-Market Fiasco*, IIRE Notebook for Study and Research no. 24/25, Amsterdam, 1995; Michel Chossudovsky, "IMF-World Bank Policies and the Rwandan Holocaust", *Third World Resurgence* no. 52, 1994; Charles André-Udry and Jean-François Marquis, "Le Rwanda: escamotage ou rouerie?", *Dossier CADTM no. 6-7*, Brussels, 1992. Among the NGO-connected authors who minimise the World Bank's and IMF's negative role is: David Woodward, "The IMF, the World Bank and Economic Policy in Rwanda: Economic, Social and Political Implications", Oxford, Sept. 1996, unpublished ms.
9. The crisis exploded when the Mexican authorities announced in August 1982 that they were no longer able to make their scheduled payments. The origins of the crisis lie further back, however: the mushrooming of Third World debt - and of debt in the rest of the world - took place in the 1970s. The foreign debt of Sub-Saharan Africa grew from \$7 billion in 1970 to \$84 billion in 1980, thus multiplying by twelve in this period. The World Bank pushed countries in the South to borrow massively throughout the 1970s. Nor did private banks hang back. The debt burden became unbearable when skyrocketing interest rates coincided in the early 1980s with price decreases for Third World exports. Today the Sub-Saharan African countries pay back about \$10 billion each year in debt service. This is four times the sub-continent's total budget for education and health care. (see Denise Comanne and Eric Toussaint, "Dettes, ce nouvel esclavage de l'Afrique: Analyse et proposition", in *Banque mondiale, FMI, OMC: Ça suffit!*, CADTM, Brussels, 1995)
10. Rwanda's foreign debt was multiplied by twenty between 1976 and 1996. In 1976 it was \$49 million; in 1996 it was \$1 billion. The country's main creditors are the World Bank, the IMF and associated institutions. The World Bank and IMF played the most active role in getting it into debt. These institutions hold over 75% of Rwanda's foreign debt.
11. Jef Maton, *Développement Économique et social au Rwanda entre 1980 et 1993: Le dixième décile en face de l'apocalypse*, University of Ghent, Faculty of Economic Sciences, 1994. See also Michel Chossudovsky, op.cit.
12. Marie-Chantal Nduhungirehe, *Les programmes d'ajustement structurel: Spécificité et application au cas du Rwanda*, Catholic University of Louvain, Faculty of Economic Sciences, 1995.
- (13) *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- (14) Eric Toussaint, *Nouvelles révélations sur les ventes d'armes aux responsables du génocide au Rwanda*, Dossier CADTM no.19, Brussels, 1996. See also François-Xavier Verschave in *Billets d'Afrique* no.44, Mar. 1997, Paris.
- (15) See the interviews with Pierre Galand, president of the Belgian National Centre for Development Aid, in the daily newspaper *Le Soir*, 27 Feb. 1997, and in *Téléoustique*, Mar. 1997. See also the final declaration of the COCAD international meeting on 25 February 1997, available at the COCAD website.

Get in touch with the Committee for the Cancellation of Third World Debt!

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Prejudice, poverty and AIDS

AIDS has overtaken tuberculosis as the worst pandemic (multiple epidemic) in modern history. Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is now present in all parts of the world. In most countries, the number of infected persons is rising rapidly. HIV affects people of every social layer, but with particularly devastating consequences for the poor and marginal.

No treatment has been proved effective at stopping the full Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) from developing. New treatments seem promising, but they are so expensive that only the richest can afford them. Even Britain's National Health Service refuses to provide the drugs.

Without advanced treatment, AIDS patients all die, of a range of painful infections. No drug has proved capable of eliminating HIV from the body. All that medical science can do is reduce the "viral charge", the number of microbes circulating (p.32), thus extending the lives of people with HIV.

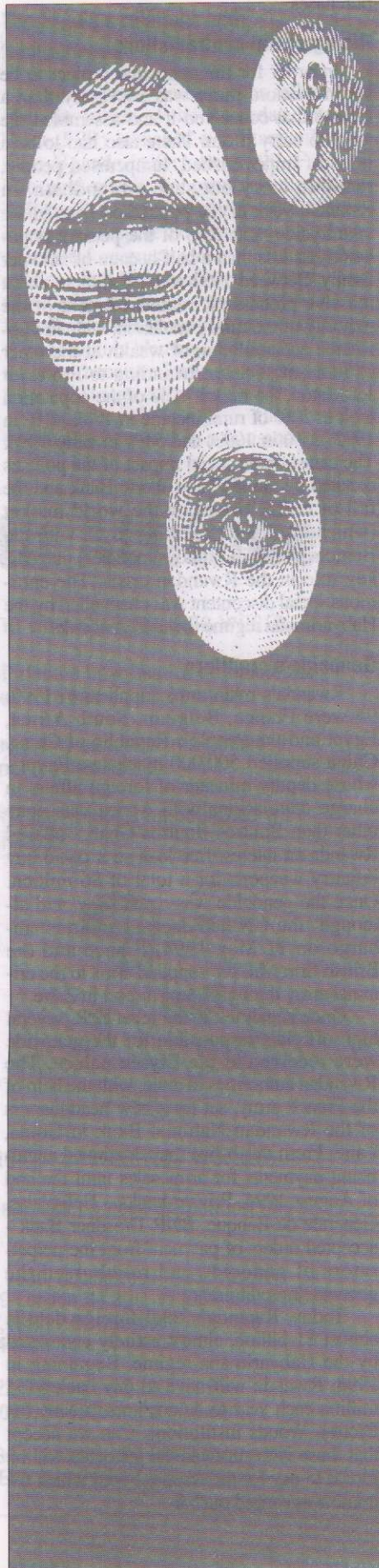
To begin this report, Cyril Rousseau and Frank Prouhet describe the HIV pandemic in the third world, and the link between poverty, prejudice, and infection. Ken Davis' reports on the effect of the epidemic on the most vulnerable groups – prostitutes, gay men and intravenous drug users.

In the second part of the report, activists in Europe and North America describe how a movement against AIDS developed, first in the gay male communities, but now spanning all groups at particular risk from infection. Tavis Barr of Act Up New York exposes the limits of profit-driven medical research, and explains why the search for a vaccine has been abandoned (p.32). Marc Nectar, President of Act Up Paris, explains why it is essential to resist the "de-prioritising" of AIDS prevention, now that (expensive) treatments are stabilising the number of victims in the richest countries. (p.30) And Lise They looks at the latest research, and asks whether spermicide creams can provide the same protection as condoms. (p.34)

AIDS cannot be understood, let alone controlled, in any one country or continent alone. Nor can the pandemic be fought effectively, without attacking poverty and sexual oppression ★

Note

This dossier was produced by activists from six countries on three continents. It was published in French in *Inprecor* #410, February 1997. Selected articles are also available in Spanish.



The disease spreads through blood, semen, and mothers' milk. Elemental elements of life, surrounded and distorted by discrimination, oppression, poverty and inequality.

Cyril Rousseau

Here it is: the plague of the 21st century. A deadly virus which, unless there is a major scientific breakthrough, will not be eradicated for another three or four generations.

A number of factors came together for AIDS to appear. "Natural" evolution has always led viruses to become less, or more dangerous over time, evolving and mutating into forms that affect different species, including our own. Then there are the human factors: the explosion of international exchanges has allowed this virus to spread like lightning, compared to earlier epidemics. HIV expanded along the main highways of human communications, and flourished in the main areas where human beings concentrate. The closer the better.

The economic crisis of the last 25 years has also contributed to the spread of HIV. Typical left rhetoric? Who can deny that the collapse of health care in many third world countries, rural exodus, and the increasing numbers of refugees, displaced persons and migrants has encouraged the spread of viruses like HIV?

Over 30 million people live with HIV. About eight million have developed AIDS. Every day, 10,000 people catch HIV. The word epidemic is no longer adequate. This is a heterogeneous pandemic: a collection of regional or continental epidemics, each with their own dynamic, but cross-fertilising.

HIV has already depressed the demographic, fertility and economic statistics of many third world countries.

The richer countries of the world have managed to absorb the cost of HIV and AIDS into their health budgets, the rest of the world faces proportionally much higher costs. Not only is the disease more contagious in the third world, but the consequences of the loss of a wage-earner, the cost of care, and the cost of a funeral are much greater for the family concerned.

Common discriminations

Pragmatic researchers have come to very simple conclusions. The evidence reveals a number of factors which increase the risk of HIV infection: poverty, and oppression and discrimination of all kinds against drug addicts, women, and "sexual minorities".

The link between poverty and HIV is as clear in the Latino ghettos of New York as in a Kenyan shantytown or a Black Sea port.



Wherever health care is unavailable, wherever it is hard to test and cure the "minor" sexually transmitted diseases (which increase vulnerability to HIV), and wherever condoms are not available, then all sexually active people are at risk. Alcoholism, prostitution and drug use all increase the risks.

Recent years have seen neo-liberal reforms of health care systems around the world. The result, predictably, is always and everywhere the exclusion of wider and wider categories of patients from health care. In the third world, reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund often mean that people must pay for access to hospitals. Even Britain's National Health Service does not provide certain, effective anti-protease drugs. A monthly dose costs £240 (US\$ 370).

Government repression of drug users and homosexuals only increases the difficulties of effective disease prevention and treatment. France criminalises drug users, Vietnam refuses to admit that homosexuality even exists. The major religions refuse to support prevention campaigns which do not condemn the "sins" of drug use and homosexual activity. The Catholic Church doesn't even authorise the use of condoms to prevent infection during extramarital liaisons.

It isn't over till it's over

We have reached an equilibrium in the rich countries. In other words, the number of new infections each year is about the same as the number of deaths. The disease is not spreading faster and faster. But people are still catching it, and still dying. Europe has about 600,000 HIV+ residents.

In Africa, Asia and Latin America, the diseases is still spreading exponentially, though the rate of growth varies enormously. Africa is the most severely affected region, and the AIDS debate is at the centre of public attention. In other regions of the third world, the catastrophe is still looming. Chinese authorities recently admitted having given contaminated blood products to the country's haemophiliacs. The People's Republic officially records only 150,000 HIV+ residents. The real figure is certainly higher.

No-one knows how fast HIV is spreading in the former Soviet Union. But the socio-economic catastrophe there is creating all the preconditions for a massive growth in this kind of viruses. The number of recorded cases of syphilis in Russia has doubled every year since 1990.

What now?

The big story in 1996 was the development of new treatments, and evidence of the beneficial effects of the combination of two or three anti-viral treatments. The results are spectacular. But much remains to be done: developing drugs which patients will be able to tolerate with less side-effects.

The development of a treatment which can stop the virus multiplying, (but not eradicate it) is certainly good news for the sufferer. And even better news for the pharmaceutical industry. An expensive drug that doesn't cure people, but stops them getting sicker, if they take it for the rest of their lives. Perfect!

The battle for access to new drugs isn't won, even in the rich countries. The French budget for anti-viral drugs only covers the treatment of 5% of patients. And while 1 in 3 French patients has access to anti-protease drugs, this drops to 1 in 7 in Belgium, 1 in 35 in Spain, and 1 in 42 in Italy.

Medical research has been completely distorted by the short-term profit motives of the major pharmaceutical companies. These profiteers want (need) to extract every dollar of sales value from each product *before* they introduce the "new improved" version they have already prepared.

For ten years now, these companies have been accumulating "super profits" by developing one anti-viral drug after another. And, of course, Africa's penniless HIV sufferers are of no interest whatsoever to the private drugs companies.

These same companies have actually stopped research work on potential vaccines against HIV, arguing that the research so far is "too hypothetical." There are real challenges in developing a vaccine. But who should decide whether this is a priority or not? The shareholders of the pharmaceutical multinationals?

The bloated budgets of these private pharmaceutical companies are much higher than the public health research programmes. And in an age where private sector initiative is better than charity, and charity is better than public provision, the public sector limps along as best it can.

At the July 1996 Vancouver Conference, activists demanded the unilateral reduction of the price of treatments, so as make them available to third world patients. They were quickly excluded from the "real" discussion on managing the AIDS crisis.

And yet, mass production of the necessary anti-viral treatments, would mean much lower unit costs. Production could be decentralised to the countries most affected, and the necessary technology could be transferred to local use.

There is another solution. The plague which devastated Europe in the middle ages was not eradicated by medical advances, but by increases in hygiene and diet, made possible by new productive forces. Raising the standard of living in the third world would dramatically reduce the HIV infection rate, giving societies more room for manoeuvre in working towards its eradication. ★

AIDS

How many people are affected?

With over 1.5 million deaths officially estimated in the last 12 months, AIDS is overtaking and interacting with other mass killers. In mid 1996 the United Nations (UNAIDS) estimated that 28 million people had contracted HIV infection world-wide, of whom 6 million had already died. 94% of people with HIV are in Third World countries. Of the 22 million adults with HIV, 42% are women, a percentage that is steadily rising.

Although these global estimates are far more realistic than the official figures the World Health Organisation used to record, they are still probably underestimates. As access to health services in Sub-Saharan Africa and South East Asia deteriorates, more and more people become ill and die without treatment or diagnosis. Few countries can maintain comprehensive databases of HIV infection or AIDS mortality, and few can afford effective surveillance testing.

For political and economic reasons, many countries minimise the dimensions of their problem. Indonesia's official cumulative AIDS mortality is only 66. But researchers at the University of Indonesia recently published their estimate that the country suffers 30,000 unrecorded AIDS deaths every year.

Life expectancy in several countries with well established epidemics has already begun to fall. Life expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa will decrease from 62 to 47 years by the end of the century. In Zimbabwe, life expectancy for

women is expected to fall from 58 years to 30-35 years by the year 2000.

The interaction of HIV infection with tuberculosis (TB) has emerged as a dangerous and key trend in the second decade of the epidemic. TB itself is easily transmissible, particularly to non-HIV positive children and grandparents in the domestic environment. TB can reactivate quite soon after HIV has started to impact on the immune system. The underlying HIV infections often remains undiagnosed in overworked TB wards and clinics. For example, while Cambodia reports only 235 AIDS cases so far, foreign and local TB specialists maintain that the overwhelming majority of the 13,000 adult TB deaths in the last year have been in people with HIV.

Resources for HIV testing in the Third World have been deployed with little regard as to how testing will benefit affected communities and individuals. Much testing takes place through de-linked surveys, where pregnant women, blood donors or soldiers are tested, often without explanation, and without individuals being told results or offered support. The effect of knowing, as did the pre-massacre Rwandan army, that over 60% of the group will develop a fatal illness, can be disastrous. In some countries, such as Cambodia, those found positive even in individual diagnostic tests are not told, since it is considered socially wrong for a doctor to give a patient such bad news. [KD] ★



Sex and poverty

The geographical distribution of AIDS "hot spots" is neither random nor unavoidable. The main zones of infection are those areas of the world where sexual oppression is most cruelly combined with underdevelopment.

Frank Prouhet

African AIDS sufferers are not concentrated in isolated villages, with ritual mutilation and superstition worse than even the white settlers' nightmares. AIDS in Africa is a problem of the cities and shantytowns: the Africa of migration, structural adjustment programmes, and the destruction of health and education systems under the watchful eye of the International Monetary Fund. AIDS is not the result of the "backwardness" of the third world, but its modernity.

AIDS is spreading so quickly in Africa because of the oppression of women. Not so much the traditional oppressions, but the new ones: absent husbands turn to prostitutes, while sexual tourism increases the range of diseases on offer. The same is true in India, Thailand and Brazil. The third world has 6% of global AIDS health care spending, 7% of the global AIDS prevention budget, and 95% of the victims.

The oh-so-modern third world AIDS crisis is visible in the metropolises of the North as well. In the United States, the epidemic among white gays, who formed the first wave of anti-AIDS activism, seems to be stabilising. Meanwhile, a third-world type epidemic is developing in the black and Latino ghettos of North America, where drug use is a frequent refuge from social, racial and sexual oppression. In New York, three of

every four intravenous drug users are black or Hispanic. Three of every four HIV+ women in the USA are black or Hispanic. Nine of every ten babies with HIV are black or Hispanic. The "Big Apple" even has 30,000 homeless people with AIDS.

The infections that kill people with AIDS get a foothold because our biological immunity is weakened. In a similar way, AIDS itself spreads wherever a part of society is less protected than the rest. Spreading through sexual, i.e. social contact, AIDS is a terrible indicator of the state of our societies.

In just a few years, AIDS has become a terrible pandemic, exploiting all the upheaval in human society, and the reduction of men, women, and even blood itself to commodities. Contributory factors include:

- massive poverty in the third world, particularly among women.
- worsening health, as a result of cuts in health care to repay the foreign debt.
- sex tourism, the politely ignored underside of the mass tourism which developed in the 1970s.
- development of a new range of blood products for medical use, without the necessary quality and safety controls, thanks to cutbacks in public health in the North.
- the growth of the global economy in illegal drugs. Second only to oil in terms of revenue, the drugs sector brings together peasants impoverished by the shift to export-oriented mono-culture, local ruling classes (this is the only sector of the world economy dominated by economic interests within the third world), first world banks, and the frustrated, miserable and desperate drug users in the lower class districts of the north.

Intravenous drug use grew very rapidly in the 1980s. Nevertheless, governments

refused to adopt risk-reduction strategies.

Meanwhile, sexual liberties did improve in a number of countries, but many homosexuals still live in virtual or real ghettos, and many people, gay and straight, are confronted by puritanical restrictions on sexual education, and on information campaigns about safe sex and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases.

In short, AIDS is overwhelmingly and increasingly third world, poor and female.

Seven of every ten HIV sufferers live in Africa. In South Africa, the infection rate is 60 times higher for blacks than whites. In some central African towns, 30% of the population is HIV+.

Most victims are women. This means that any serious struggle against AIDS must include specific demands, like:

- a higher minimum age for marriage for women, and a lower minimum for men.
- a significant reduction in dowry payments. Some African governments are trying to popularise symbolic dowries, or replace the dowry with a European-style wedding ring.
- abolishing a man's right to repudiate and later reclaim his wife.
- making divorce easier for women to obtain.
- increasing the length of compulsory school attendance for girls, and really enforcing attendance.
- mixed education, with a frank treatment of questions of sexuality.
- a right to sexuality for unmarried women.
- campaigns against the sale of children, and prostitution.
- developing work possibilities for women, and increasing the social recognition of work women are already doing.

These issues are probably more important than current campaigns to tell people to use condoms to protect themselves against AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases. These issues are among the preconditions for a real solution to the pandemic.

Over the last few decades, the third world has been "globalised" Traditional village agriculture, in which women played a major role, has been destroyed, and its place taken by export-oriented mono-culture, where men dominate. Meanwhile, the process of rural exodus means that huge numbers of men leave home for the cities, or for seasonal work in another region. These men might be married in the village, but they live a bachelors life in the town. China alone has at least 100 million internal migrants.

This generalisation of monetary exchanges has reinforced men's control over their wives, daughters and sisters, since in the new cash economy the men are often the ones earning a cash wage.

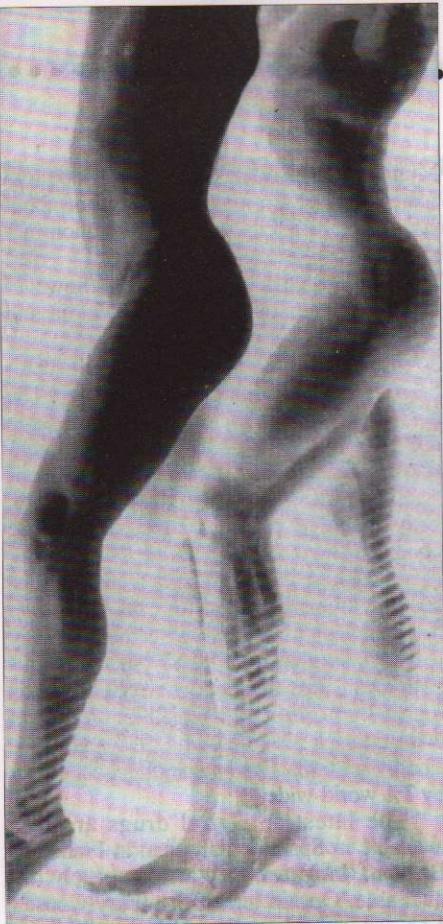
AIDS

Commercial sex

AIDS has led to increased repression of women in the commercial sex industry in many countries. Governments and religious NGOs have assumed that if women and girls "trapped" in prostitution can be tested, gaoled, retrained or relocated, then the "real" problem – the infection of heterosexual male clients with "innocent families" will be eliminated. In fact, none of Asia and Africa's many moralistic or anti-prostitution programs have reduced the overall numbers of commercial sex transactions. On the contrary, every time the Cambodian, Vietnamese, Thai

or Filipino governments declare war on the brothels, they reopen in increased numbers. Every ex-prostitute retrained in a craft and sent home is replaced on the street by a younger woman.

Better results in slowing the spread of HIV have been achieved by projects which help sex workers organise for their rights, educate each other, increase access to non-judgmental sexual health services, stand up to employers, and enforce safe standards in their working lives. Sex worker groups have achieved inspiring successes in cities from Nairobi to Phnom Penh. [KD] ★



AIDS

The socio-economic impact

The social and economic impact of the epidemic on several Sub-Saharan African and South Asian countries is already profound. The direct costs of the epidemic include costs of education, testing, the increased use of healers, medicines, clinics and hospitals by people with HIV-related illnesses, funeral and mourning expenses, and care of the surviving and now-destitute elderly and orphans. UNICEF estimates there are already 1.5 million orphans with parents lost to AIDS in the most affected African countries.

HIV related illness is an extra burden that threatens to overwhelm the health systems of almost every nation in Africa and Asia. A local hospital or clinic will use scarce resources on treatable conditions, rather than deploy medicines and beds for care of patients that cannot be cured. If a person sick with something they believe to be HIV related knows that the local clinic or hospital can offer no treatment or cure, they will not travel or spend money uselessly, and will not even become an HIV statistic. For most of the affected communities, the direct cost of caring for a family member with AIDS is greater than the annual income, and just one AIDS death can plunge the family into irredeemable poverty. In countries where people rely on medical aid or insurance schemes for their health care, families already affected by HIV cannot afford to pay the premiums. People testing positive for HIV are excluded.

Because of its predominantly sexual transmission, HIV strikes disproportionately at those of working age. In some countries it has threatened the urban, trained and skilled labour force. In other areas, AIDS has removed tens of thousands of people from agricultural labour. Few countries can afford a drop in productive labour or the reversion of farming methods to below-subsistence levels, as children and the elderly take up the burdens previously born by the parents and young adults.

HIV provokes disastrous indirect costs to the economy through absence from work, loss of productivity and the difficulty in replacing skilled labour. There is a significant loss in school attendance in families with an adult illness or death. Discriminatory responses to people with HIV in the education and health systems and in the workplace also carry an economic burden, through unnecessary screening, premature dismissals and industrial disruption.

In Thailand HIV may cost 20% of the GNP by the year 2000. Kenya's adult HIV rate of 14%, has caused an estimated 15-25% cuts in profits to non-capital intensive businesses over the last 10 years. In Tanzania, the cost of replacing teachers lost to AIDS over the next decade is estimated at US\$40 m. Zambia relies for 90% of its export earnings on its copper mines (which are now being privatised at the insistence of the IMF), yet almost 60% of the mines' skilled employees have HIV. In 1991 the Zimbabwe Trade Union Congress estimated that over one fifth of its membership had HIV or AIDS.

At a family level, the death of young adults from AIDS disrupts the generational flow and socialisation patterns. At a national level, AIDS deaths undermine the central infrastructure, with the most expensively (often foreign) educated being disproportionately affected and increasingly difficult to replace with experienced cadre. All eleven of Zambia's air traffic controllers have died of the disease. Such "turnover" of higher echelons can lead to national de-stabilisation. Some UN bodies have made HIV rates a key factor in their assessment that some nation states in Africa are becoming "unviable".

Many nations fear that international awareness of their high rates of HIV will affect investment and tourism. The first example was Haiti, where the discovery of high rates of AIDS in 1983 resulted in the decimation of tourist income, then that country's major earner.

Wars and UN interventions have quickened the spread of HIV, through troop movements, sex for money and rape. The UN interventions in Cambodia and Mozambique meant more commercial sex transactions and HIV incidence, with infection of local women and foreign soldiers and officials.

The escalation of South Africa's HIV epidemic has occurred only in the 90s, much later than the countries to its north. The country now has an estimated 2.4 million people with HIV, which represents an unparalleled socio-economic challenge. The costs of an epidemic of this scope, though well-predicted, were not factored against the promises of housing, jobs, health care and education in the ANC's (virtually-abandoned) Reconstruction and Development Program. Nor have they been accommodated within the current neo-liberal framework of policy making in the new South Africa. [KD] ★

In the mushrooming cities of the south, large new generations have grown up, formally forbidden from sexual relations before marriage, and without the resources to pay a dowry. These people are marrying later than their parents. And this has encouraged the massive development of prostitution in all the cities of the third world.

Things have not been helped by the increasing number of wars, and the collapse of neo-colonial states like Rwanda, Zaire and Liberia. Millions of Africans have been forced to migrate.

All these social factors have obvious consequences for sexual behaviour. An economic and social structure based on the family is exploding, to be replaced by an atomised, disjointed social framework, where traditional relationships are altered and overlaid by market relations. Sexual conduct has changed accordingly.

In many Moslem and animist villages, men used to pass one night with each of their wives in turn. Today, most of their multiple partners will be drawn from a relatively small pool of prostitutes. This acceleration of sexual exchanges has little to do with sexual liberation. Pleasure and promiscuity don't go hand in hand when they are reserved for men only. The right for both men and women to choose their sexual relationships implies liberty, discussion, exchange and respect. It is much easier to integrate the use of condoms into this kind of relationship.

There is no point in advocating fidelity instead of male promiscuity, which is a generalised phenomenon. The solution is sexual equality. Only sexual equality can enable men and women to achieve sexual pleasure and, in this age of AIDS, to discuss, and protect themselves. Human laws will never control our sexual behaviour. Today more than ever, we have need of new social laws



AIDS Censorship

Northern governments and international institutions boast of the resources they have committed to prevention and education campaigns worldwide. The reality is that, in country after country, explicit information about HIV transmission has been prevented by censorship.

Governments as diverse as Vietnam, Indonesia and Zambia say that condom promotion offends national morals, and

that all resources should be devoted to promotion of abstinence, monogamy and family values.

Effective AIDS education includes solidarity with people with HIV. It also requires the widest possible distribution of empowering sex-positive messages. Unfortunately, religious influence over government and NGO programmes often prevent or hinder this. [KD] ★

which will prioritise equality, rather than accepting the spread of death.

Many women have no choice but to accept the traditional authority of their husband. When the number of children is a sign of wealth for a man, and social recognition for a woman, how many will use condoms?

Other women are alone with their children. 29% of Latin American and Caribbean families are single parent, compared to 26%

of families in the rich developed countries (OECD). 21% of African families are single parent, and 14% of Asian families. These are the poorest families, with the highest rates of child labour and prostitution, and the lowest participation rates in the education system. Not surprisingly, this is where AIDS hits hardest, and most frequently.

In some countries, most men have sex with prostitutes as well as with their wives.

AIDS Failure of international programmes

In 1994, the World Health Organisation estimated that 10 million new HIV infections could be averted by the year 2000, if global spending on STD and HIV prevention were increased 10-15 times, to US\$1.5-2.9 billion per year.

UNAIDS, whose objective is to coordinate the efforts of six UN agencies in combating AIDS, was launched one year ago.¹ With continuing conflict between the various bodies, lack of commitment by national governments, and without the promised funding, it has been able to channel only minimal resources to HIV programs in the poorest countries, barely able to assemble infrastructure for its own offices, staff and consultants.

Within bilateral aid packages, a very small percentage actually provides resources for care or prevention at a community level in the most needy countries. For most donor countries, 90% of aid money is spent at home, purchasing testing kits or advice on training, needs assessments, planning or evaluation from profiteering pharmaceutical or development consultancy corporations. At the increasingly large and expensive international Aids conferences, those on the circuit of "technical advisers" grow ever richer, while the rhetoric grows more hollow, and the inaction by governments more criminal.

The recent success of anti-retroviral combination therapies among many people with HIV in the imperialist nations throws into stark relief the al-

most complete lack of access to any but the simplest treatments for symptoms or common opportunistic infections for people with HIV in the Third World. The lives of people with HIV are being squeezed out in a vice. On one side are the very opulent profits of the major drug companies, (Glaxo-Wellcome, Ciba-Geigy, Roche, Abbott, etc.), and on the other, the enforcement of debt repayments and the structural adjustment plans.

Precisely at the point at which HIV emerged as a large scale epidemic in Sub-Saharan African nations, governments were implementing — as demanded by the IMF — major cuts to public health spending, and dismantling primary health care services. In Zambia *per capita* annual expenditure on health fell in the 1980s from US\$23 to \$5. Where only user-pays or private health care exists, AIDS victims will only present themselves at a very late stage of the disease, and after the main bread-winner dies, families affected by HIV will be unable to access any care.

While there has been some progress, hopes for effective, cheap and available vaginal viricides, female condoms, and vaccines are a long way from being fulfilled. [KD] ★

Note

1. The lasting products of the former Global Program on AIDS, under the malevolent and slow bureaucracy of the WHO, were national Medium Term Plans, expensively written by government officers, short-term consultants and UN representatives. In most cases, hardly any of the positive interventions outlined have been implemented, and often the budget allocations never appeared.

Mumbai (Bombay) has at least 200,000 prostitutes, servicing a male population of about six million. The city's HIV+ population increases by 60% every year.

This terrible concentration does however carry the seeds of a solution. In India and elsewhere, it is the prostitutes of the "pleasure districts" who are leading the campaign to popularise the use of condoms. The country's family planning policies are of little use here — 44% of Indian couples use contraception, but in 7 out of 10 cases, the contraception used is the sterilisation of the wife. Only about five percent of men say they use condoms "regularly."

The international organisations that encourage third world governments to educate their populations about AIDS simultaneously force those governments to cut their education and health budgets. UNICEF estimates that total third world spending on education fell 35% between 1980 and 1995. The proportion of girls attending school fell by 7% world-wide.

The latest anti-viral drugs are less available in Spain or Italy than in France or Belgium. In Africa, they are completely unavailable. One in ten of the Ivory Coast's 12.5 million citizens has HIV. In 1994, the country imported exactly 600 doses of AZT, the main anti-viral treatment. Even the basic pain relief drugs, and treatments for the most common secondary infections are unavailable.

Over the last 20 years, the International Monetary Fund has forced most third world countries to cut their health spending. UNICEF estimates that total third world health spending fell 50% in the 1980s. Among the programmes cut in many countries are facilities for diagnosing and treating sexually transmitted diseases. The result is more genital lesions, which make more people more vulnerable to HIV.

Only a minority of the African population can afford medication, all of which is imported. At most hospitals, patients buy

Networking

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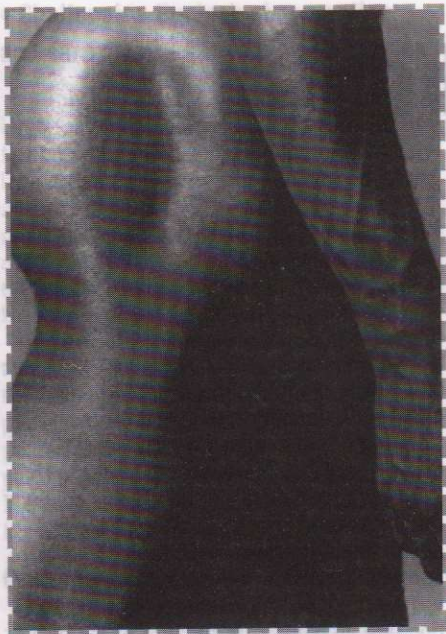
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AIDS

Discrimination against people with HIV

AIDS testing usually means screening out HIV+ applicants for housing, medical aid schemes and insurance, military and police recruits, immigrants, potential public and private sector employees, applicants for training, and medical patients.

In some provinces of South Africa, one in five applicants for housing loans simultaneously receive their rejection letter and the news that they are HIV+. One in ten Thai Army recruits are sent home with no ongoing support – rejected because of HIV.

Several countries use HIV testing as a means of repression against migrant workers, refugees, those suspected of drug use, prostitution or homosexuality. In many cases, the penalty for testing positive is indefinite detention, or forced relocation. In 1993, HIV+ Burmese sex workers deported from Thailand were immediately killed by their country's military regime.

Even in countries with very high rates of HIV and AIDS, there may be very few

people publicly known as HIV+, and those suspected of HIV may be subject to extreme measures of rejection and persecution in their communities.

Supportive self-organisations of people with HIV are well-established in Thailand and some countries of East Africa, but weak or absent in other Asian and African nations.

Organisations of people with HIV in Asia and Africa, dedicated to exercising leadership in AIDS education, or to fighting for basic rights, are even more fragile, despite the efforts of the Global Network of People with HIV (GNP+), the International Council of AIDS Service Organisations, and the repeated manifestos of international conferences since 1983. [KD] ★

their medicine dose by dose. These hospitals no longer have the US\$1 needed to test each blood sample before transfusion. As a result, the World Health Organisation estimates that 5-10% of HIV infections in Africa are caused by blood transfusions. The figure rises to 20% of infections of babies.

Condoms are made from latex, most of which comes from the third world. The finished product is usually too expensive for local people. In the most miserable bars of Africa, buying a condom adds 50% to the basic cost of sex with a prostitute. In 1991, Zaire imported 16 million condoms for its 40 million inhabitants, most of them young, and presumably sexually active. Many regions of the country have a 10% HIV+ rate.

The only solution to the African AIDS crisis is to transform the factors which make the population particularly vulnerable to infection. The foreign debt should be written off. IMF-imposed Structural Adjustment Programmes should be abandoned. Health and Education budgets should be increased. Development policies based on social needs, food, water, education and women's rights should be adopted. The corrupt regimes which steal the AIDS treatment budget just like they steal from the rest of the state budget must be swept aside.

In narrow health terms, Africa needs a co-ordinated policy ensuring the widespread availability of the 200 basic drugs identified by the World Health Organisation, and serious disease prevention programmes, concentrating on tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases.

The price of anti-viral drugs to treat HIV must be brought down to a level where they are available to African patients. In other words, prices which will not include any profit margin, and generic (non-branded) production processes. Those who worry about extending costly tri-therapy to Africa might be encouraged to know that vaccines, once identified, cost only a few dollars for each dose. ★

AIDS

Golden Triangle?

The "War on Drugs" makes HIV spread faster, argues Ken Davis

As rural populations in the Mekong delta are forced to cut opium production, scarcity causes local modes of consumption to switch from traditional smoking, to injection of the "value-added" heroin, often with shared and contaminated injecting equipment. The most dynamic axis of the epidemic is a South-East Asian "corridor" stretching from North East India, across Burma (where 70% of drug injectors are HIV positive), Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Yunnan and Vietnam. This HIV axis thrives on two economies, the trafficking in opiates and in women.

International and domestic political pressures have led several countries to intensify repression of drug-using groups. In Vietnam, the "struggle against social evils" targets drug abuse, prostitution, pornography and gambling as the unwanted side-effects of the re-introduction of capitalism.

The strategy in Ho Chi Minh City, where most HIV in Vietnam is centred, has been to round up all drug users and sex workers, confining them to two large "rehabilitation" and detention centres. Inmates are HIV tested, and those found positive cannot be released. Many are newly infected through sexual

or drug using activities inside the centres. For the majority of people detected with HIV in Vietnam, the future holds only incarceration until death.

Yet also in Vietnam there have been experiments in allowing the training and development of peer education programs for injection drug users, sex workers and gay men — though more recently these peer groups have become more controlled by local Party cadre. There are trial needle exchange schemes in three districts of Hanoi, and pilot projects in care of HIV positive drug injectors in their family homes.

Similar "harm minimisation" and peer-organising projects for drug injectors have been operating in Nepal, Manipur, Cape Town, Malaysia and Thailand. Even in Yunnan, where China's HIV epidemic is centred, highly repressive responses alternate and co-exist with some more effective and pragmatic interventions.

Minimising HIV transmission through drug injection is largely incompatible with the application of repressive measures against drug users, because repression prevents the creation of a civil space in which users can organise and inform themselves. ★



“We might as well die shouting!”

Act Up is the most militant current in AIDS activism. It combines direct action tactics, including “zaps” of rich and famous bigots, hypocrites and profiteers, with an incredible development of expertise – intervening in the medical and scientific debates, and encouraging people with AIDS to take a leading role in their own treatment programme.

Only a minority of Act Up members have a background in left or gay politics. Most became radical when they, or someone they knew, caught HIV.

This “who we are” statement by the Paris Act Up Paris, Europe’s oldest, illustrates the thinking and tactics of the current.

Act Up-Paris was created at the Gay Pride in June 1989, a march which every year brings together thousands of gay men and lesbians in the streets of Paris. A dozen lay down in the middle of the street. On their tee shirts was Silence = Death – a still unknown equation in France – and the pink triangle, symbol of the Nazi deportation of male homosexuals. But this triangle pointed upwards, showing their resolve to create a clear and positive response to an epidemic which had decimated thousands of gay men.

At the origin of Act Up is the anger of some homosexuals. Some were HIV+, others were not. All of them were very aware of the indifference, silence and contempt that HIV+ and People With Aids (PWAs) still encountered. Aware of the indifference of society, media and public opinion, still believing that AIDS only affected marginals: homosexuals, drug users, and others of whom it could be said *a priori* that their illness was only the sign of a corrupt life. Aware also of the indifference of those in power, because AIDS policies consisted at most of makeshift repairs and adjustments, which only dealt with the short term. PWA’s were still medically insignificant (not as important as cancer or cardio-vascular patients), and above all politically insignificant. In France, there is no homosexual or drug user’s vote.

At worst, AIDS was seen as a godsend by the most reactionary, who saw it as a justified and effective way to get rid of a large section of certain minority groups. Generally, it was considered to be a problem of secondary importance. Concern about AIDS meant concern about gays, a group which has never

been taken very seriously by serious politicians. At best, AIDS was a new “important social problem” about which one should utter a few contrite platitudes- because, as everyone knows, important social problems “are nobody’s fault”.

Meanwhile, a whole section of the homosexual community was being decimated. We saw ourselves being led to shameful and unmarked graves. We saw our networks of friendship and love crumbling around us.

Some groups organised themselves to stave off the growth of the epidemic before it was too late. They quickly took complete charge of providing information and prevention work, thereby running the risk of relieving public authorities of their responsibility for doing this. And the world went on unchanged. The “exemplary behaviour” of homosexuals was noted and praised, and attention moved on to something else.

Act Up’s first rallying cry could have been, “Our friends are dying like flies and nobody gives a fuck”. Followed by the obvious conclusion: if we’re going to die like flies, then we might as well die shouting out our rejection of shame- the only condition we’re allowed. We might as well show ourselves, so nobody can say that they didn’t see or didn’t know what was happening. All the while hoping that we could shout loud enough and be visible enough so that we all wouldn’t share the same fate.

We had a model: the New York group set up in 1987. They have made PWA’s and their problems visible, using the weapons which we have taken from them: the pink triangle, provocative posters and succinct slogans: Silence=Death, Action=Life.

At the origin of Act Up-New York was a similar anger, and the same intuition that this anger could not go unheeded, that it would be more productive if we came together and made a united front against the AIDS epidemic: Anger=Action. However, Act Up-Paris is not and was never conceived of as being a branch of ACT UP-New York. The American association is a reference for us, a group with which we occasionally co-ordinate our actions and information, as with all other Act Ups in France and the world; but it is not our headquarters.

Act Up-Paris started out as a sectional and “hysterical” group. But faced with AIDS, we couldn’t stay in a strictly emotional position. Your own sickness, the sickness of your friends, your lover’s death, all confront you with a barrage of issues that are essentially political. In the industrialised countries AIDS didn’t strike indiscriminately. Instead it hit readily identifiable social groups: homosexuals drug users ethnic minorities prisoners and now women (who are still neglected in the medical research).

AIDS is not only a human or collective

tragedy. It is still a tragedy that targets certain precise social categories, defined by their practices and their differences in comparison with the dominant model. In this sense, AIDS has nothing in common with the “Everyone is equal before death” mythology of previous epidemics- (though the plague, leprosy and cholera also had their political dimension.)

AIDS is transmitted by certain types of conduct, not just through social contact. Thus AIDS attacks our way of life. If this conduct does not conform to socially acceptable and/or majority behaviour, those who have adopted it will be the most exposed to the virus. They will be excluded from prevention, research and care because of the discrimination which they suffer. For this reason, fighting AIDS means calling into question the very basis of our society, and constituting a front of minorities, against the blindness and cynicism of the “right-thinking”.

This first general conclusion is accompanied, in Act Up, by a whole new way of looking at certain givens:

Challenging medical authority

In the same way that AIDS has occurred everywhere there are social deficiencies, and primarily targets those who don’t have the right to express themselves, the illness places patients in a position of absolute dependence on their doctors. They are deprived of their status as adults, and can only remain silent while awaiting the verdict. However, AIDS has seriously discredited a part of the medical establishment, and the establishment has seriously discredited itself in turn- through the infection of haemophiliacs and transfusion patients, and the corporatist reflexes of certain doctors who quickly close ranks against the patients who they don’t know how to treat. Fighting AIDS is about teaching AIDS patients to regain the upper hand and establish a dialogue with doctors as equals, to give them the chance to choose their treatments and decide their own future.

• Challenging the scientific research programme

AIDS has dealt a death blow to the fiction of disinterested medical research. Fighting AIDS means understanding that the research mechanisms are interwoven with political and economic considerations. It also means confronting procedures which are extremely closed off, and increasingly unsuited to the speed and violence specific to the HIV epidemic. Out of this arises the importance for patient associations to control and accelerate these processes, i.e. to change our relationship with scientific research and with pharmaceutical companies, from that of mere consumers to that of service users who can have their say.

• Challenging the lack of prevention and care provided by public authorities

Only the State has the means to provide a large-scale policy of prevention and care. But fighting AIDS means being confronted daily by a denial of responsibility on the part of the authorities. In 1992 French government ministers were brought to trial [and mainly absolved of their criminal responsibility for transfusions of non-tested (and HIV infected) blood to haemophiliacs in 1984-85.]

This "infected blood scandal" is only the tip of this iceberg. It means being aware of the neglect of all the public services; hospitals, schools, prisons; where systematic policies of information, prevention and support could and should have been established. Not to mention the Third World, once more left to its own silent tragedy.

Challenging the "moral authorities"

Positions taken by the moral authorities in civil society can considerably influence behaviour. And the State's decisions depend in part on the positions taken by these authorities. Fighting AIDS means questioning these authorities, combating the criminal silence of some media, political parties, intellectuals, and artists, and the criminal declarations of others media, the Church and the far-right.

Challenging the anonymous and daily accomplices of the virus

We point the finger at charlatans, corrupt pharmaceutical companies, pharmacists who refuse to sell syringes, those who throw us out of work, and those who betrayal our medical and personal privacy.

Public and moral authorities assist in the spread of the epidemic through anonymous relays in daily life: small acts of exclusion, discrimination and contempt which isolate PWAs and HIV+, as well as homosexuals, drug users, the destitute, the homeless, women, and male and female prostitutes. These acts make them ideal targets for the virus. Fighting AIDS means fighting all these ordinary despicable acts.

The first Act Up militants had to move very quickly from an individual, moral and emotional position to a political understanding of the disease. The fight against AIDS became a political war against the forces that assist the work of the virus. Fighting against AIDS is no longer just a psychological battle against despair and fatality. It is a battle against the decision-makers and the political, economic and symbolic powers which, each in their own way, constitute solid relays in the spread of AIDS. Today more than ever Act Up is confronted by the bastions of our society: the inaccessibility of science, the uncontrolled separation of authority and responsibility which allows people to say "responsible but not guilty", the moral order and Puritanism which send adolescents to the slaughterhouse, the exclusion of minorities.

Act Up-Paris has had to defend and develop the support networks between minorities to the greatest extent possible; fight for

sexual freedom, the rights of PWAs, the right to be different; fight against all processes which would create ideal victims. And above all, fight to enable those who didn't have the right to speak for themselves to make their voices heard.

Activists, lobbyists & militants

Being a member of Act Up means realising that the traditional party and association structures are not able, are no longer able, or do not want, to respond to the AIDS epidemic's particularity and the speed at which it is spreading. Faced with this series of partial dead ends, it was necessary to seriously stir things up. To destroy the passivity of politicians, the timidity of the associations and the impotence of leftists. To destroy the traditional distinctions between local and universal fights. Every day the fight against AIDS moves to a new front, discovering new enemies and new allies.

The political cards have had to be reshuffled. Act Up is not part of the old philosophy of camps which thinks there is an intangible difference between the left and the right. Most of us consider ourselves to be leftists. But the story of AIDS has unfortunately shown that those who call themselves progressives often prove to be as reactionary, homophobic, puritan and indifferent as those they claim to be fighting. This is how it is in all wars- you have to know who is playing into the hands of the AIDS epidemic and who is not.

A new political formula has to be developed, to articulate the constantly shifting minorities front. This should be based on the fact that there are more and more political minorities (since white heterosexual men observe a serious abstinence of sex and drugs, they aren't that numerous; though it is true that they are pretty much the only ones to have a voice). The cynical but unfortunately realistic fact that today's sick minorities will be tomorrow's majorities if the anti-AIDS policies remain as they are. Act Up's strength and the increasing numbers of those who join our demonstrations very closely follows the epidemic's progression.

The Fight For The Communities

Act Up cannot fight the war against AIDS alone. We need allies (doctors, associations, artists, moral authorities, etc.) to lead an effective combat on each front. But we also and above all need relays, to give coherence and unity on these different fronts. These relays are the communities. This is why Act Up could only really establish itself around this issue of defending and strengthening the communities. To fight for the communities means working and fighting for their survival and expansion. But it also means working so that they can become open communities within the larger society; and not degenerate into communities by default, pariahs.

Fighting for the homosexual community - to which we are still closest

- means fighting those who think that the homosexual issue is now settled and that their fight is rear-guard. It also means fighting those who block, like by challenging the idea of a mixed homosexual community.

We are not certain that there can ever be one "AIDS community." The Arab, black, homosexual, and feminist communities are too heterogeneous. We prefer the idea of a coalition, a term which we take from the American meaning of the initials ACT UP (AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power). The fight against AIDS can in fact help to create solidarity networks between these diverse communities, thus making them both stronger and more open. Act Up is without a doubt one of the only associations in France where every week militant homosexuals, drug users fighting for their rights, feminists, former prisoners, suburban social workers and radical deaf-mutes come together. While they all have a very clear and deep feeling of belonging to their community, they meet in a common fight which engages and brings their battles into contact.

It is useless to believe in miracles- a therapeutic vaccine or a magic formula won't happen overnight. Advances will be made, but slowly. And they will be made available to everyone even more slowly. But only through the establishment of community networks, which set up a common front where different struggling minorities can come together, will a majority of people be able to benefit from these advances when they happen, and not be forgotten about. Rather than passively dreaming of a universal and adult community which knows how to fight AIDS, better to start by defending, rebuilding or even creating communities which have a real ability to resist the disease.

This is why our fight takes place in two time perspectives:

- **Immediate:** because our friends are dying every day and the disaster must be stopped at any price, by unreservedly applying the series of measures we have been recommending for four years;
- **Long term:** to organise resistance as long as nothing medical and definitive will have been found to cure the disease, and as long as those it threatens or strikes are in danger.

Surrounding The Fight Against Aids

When the day finally comes, and Act Up-Paris can close its doors because we will have finally beaten AIDS, no doubt most of us will be dead. Of AIDS. But, at least we





will have done everything in our power to speed up the research processes, to benefit and enable others to benefit from new drugs, to contribute to making treatment and hospitalisation conditions more acceptable. That is our main fight.

But there is something more. AIDS is Act Up's only and sad reason for existence. But we know that we cannot fight AIDS without at the same time joining in other fights. Fights for the dignity of patients, blacks, drug users, homosexuals, women, prisoners, immigrants. Fights against everything that makes AIDS possible today, that existed before and will continue to exist afterwards. These fights go beyond the strict limits of the fight against the epidemic.

The accomplices and relays of the AIDS offensive would still be our enemies, even if there was no AIDS issue.

- Without AIDS, the guilt attached to homosexuality and sexuality in general would cause less deaths — but it would be equally abject.
- Without AIDS, the expulsion of HIV-positive foreigners from French territory would cause less deaths — but it would be equally abject.
- Without AIDS, the organisation of the French prison system would cause less deaths — but it would be equally abject.
- Without AIDS, the current abandon of the Third World would cause less deaths — but it would be equally abject.

And so, while it is true that the fight against AIDS is everyone's fight for their rights, and in particular their right to live, it also gives them a perspective on the other struggles they come in contact with.

To fight for yourself, your life, your sexuality, your work is already to be fighting beyond yourself. Firstly for your community, for all those who share your condition. And very close behind are the others who you don't normally meet: drug users if you've never taken drugs, prisoners if you've never been one, and homosexuals if you're heterosexual.

There is a final motivation to our fight against AIDS, which is both the most superficial and the most profound: an ethical commitment or concern for the greater good. Many of us in Act Up are going to die. But even if we do die, because nothing will have been found in time to save us or cure us, better to have chosen our own deaths. Because dying or suffering with dignity, without shame, without debt, is an achievement.

We will have said it, shouted it, and spat it in the face of those who don't give a damn or are happy to see us die. Because even if it was they who condemned us, we won't have allowed them to avoid the spectacle of our death. And even if ultimately we don't die, we won't have sadly looked elsewhere while complaining and waiting for it to pass. Not just not to have accepted death, but to have kept it out of your own life until the end. To have been able to keep dancing and piss off all the bastards in the story. Until the end. ★

Vulnerability and resistance

Interview with Marc Nectar, president of Act Up Paris

• When did Act Up come to France?

Marc Nectar: Act Up France was born in 1989, inspired by Act Up New-York, formed two years earlier by the gay writer Eric Rameur. Since then, Act Up Paris has been linked to the momentum of the Gay Pride movement, since here in France AIDS is still an epidemic which mainly affects the gay community (40% of the HIV positive are homosexuals). Our goal is to put pressure on the authorities and the institutions on all questions linked to the epidemic.

Back in 1989, the authorities talked as if "queers and drug addicts" were the only people affected by AIDS. And we were left to sort things out by ourselves. A range of organisations like Aides and Vaincre le Sida were formed, to look after the sick, and fight for better access to health care and against discrimination.

Act Up was founded by people who wanted to politicise the AIDS debate. We are not a support group for those with HIV, but a political association. Our strategy is pressuring the powers-that-be using non-violent action and the media.

Act Up has organised a whole series of short actions ("Zappings"), which aim to shock public opinion, and generate the images and reactions which will oblige the media to discuss the problem in the terms set by us. We were determined to stop the pathetic "oh how sad that these poor people are dying so young" treatment the issue was receiving.

Our most spectacular action was the December 1993 action at Place de la Concorde. We also played an important role in exposing the scandal over contaminated blood products. At first, the haemophilic associations were reluctant to link their "innocent" infection with ours. That changed when we were able to explode the whole scandal.

In 1990, Act Up occupied Notre Dame Church, right in the heart of Paris, to denounce the complicity of the religious hierarchy in homophobia, and the Catholic Church's refusal to approve the use of condoms to protect people against this epidemic.

We work in a completely democratic way. We have learned from the mistakes of many of the groups created after May 1968. Particularly the various homosexual organisations, which became nothing more than talking shops. Act Up is a much more structured, disciplined association, with clear responsibilities and a leadership. But also with an open weekly meeting in which all members are encouraged to participate. Over the last seven years, attendance has fluctuated

between 50 and 300. But every Tuesday there has been a meeting.

We only have three full-timers, for the technical secretariat. The rest of the work is done in permanent commissions or workshops, which allow members to deepen their understanding of a particular theme, and choose what kind of action they want to take.

Act Up is a mainly homosexual association, created in the homosexual community. But this doesn't make us the mirror of a ghetto. There is no ghetto, except in some peoples' heads. Act Up is sensitive to all the marginal communities: drug users, immigrants, prisoners and so on.

Take prisoners. The prison protests and strikes of the 1970s led to little change, because no-one in society really supported the prisoners. Today, Act Up is ready to use its energy and its prestige to relay prisoners' concerns, and help find solutions to some of their problems. Act Up will help communities which the state ignores completely.

Act Up challenges a number of established ideas. Notably the nature of scientific power. AIDS emerged at a time when science seemed able to solve all our problems, and society looked forward to total mastery over our environment. AIDS changed all that. Science found itself helpless, confronted with a new, mutant virus and a new epidemic. Sixteen years later, science has still not fully understood the mechanisms of AIDS. This challenges the legitimacy of the scientific and medical establishment.

In the first decade of AIDS, doctors knew no more than their patients. Indeed, it was often the patients who taught the doctors about HIV, and the various treatments being developed, particularly in the USA. The patients gained a real power which, today, is being extended to other pathologies. This is profoundly modifying the relationship between doctor and patient, though of course the process is still fragile and embryonic. The patient is more and more a partner in the healing process, an associate in the treatment programme, and no longer just "patient" in the sense of calmly waiting for a more powerful party to decide to act.

AIDS hasn't just changed this in philosophical terms, but in research practice too. AIDS is the only pathology where the patients are linked to the research process on a daily basis, in France through the National AIDS Research Agency (Agence nationale de recherche contre le Sida). In the USA too, no new treatment is applied without the agreement of the patient. Nor is any new treatment put on the market without the agreement of the associations of HIV sufferers.

Act Up has shown that we can make the authorities take our concerns into consideration, and modify their behaviour.

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• **The new "tritherapy" (combination of drugs) has led some experts to claim that the epidemic is under control.**

Therapeutically, things changed considerably in 1996. We are in a new, uncertain phase. One year ago, the US Congress suggested a new treatment, combining "protease inhibitors" operating on different parts of the virus, in different ways. It seems that, in combination with existing treatments for HIV, this new therapy in many cases improves the health of HIV+ people considerably, allowing them to regain strength, and, of course, to live longer.

The media and public opinion have embraced the protease inhibitor news very enthusiastically. But they are crying "victory!" a little too soon.

Act Up recognises the importance of protease inhibitors, and the improvements they seem to have brought. But we are also concerned about problems of resistance to this new treatment. Clearly the new treatment is unsuitable for some patients. So we still need a range of treatments to become available, to compensate for those which, tomorrow or the day after, may prove to be ineffective.

There is a risk that people will become less militant because of this new treatment, even though many questions are still not solved. Issues like access to treatment, the social security provision for HIV+ people in marginal situations, HIV+ prisoners, the lack of social recognition for homosexuality, the pressing need to de-criminalise drug use, and begin helping drug addicts.

If the public really begins to think that the epidemic is over, we will find it much more difficult to continue our mobilisation, and to deal with a number of social questions which are at the very heart of the AIDS crisis.

The central issue for me today is vulnerability. Contamination happens where there is vulnerability. If we don't understand this vulnerability, we can't explain why, despite the prevention campaigns, despite the fact that most people know that you must use a condom or a clean needle if you take risks, the number of new infections has hardly dropped in the last 12 months. There were 4,796 new cases of HIV in 1996, only 300 less than in 1995.

No "superdrug" therapy will solve the AIDS crisis, until we deal with this vulnerability, with the fact that individuals and social groups are vulnerable to infection. Homosexuals are vulnerable because it is hard, in France and elsewhere, to admit to being homosexual.

Drug users continue to get sick because they are seen as criminals, rather than people who suffer. In Africa, women are more vulnerable to AIDS because they lack weight in society.



AIDS activists should link up with other progressive struggles. This French poster says "the expulsion of a sick person [an African with HIV] is no "accident." It is the automatic consequence of [the government's] policy of mass expulsions!"

• **What do you say about drug use?**

The central question is this: why are drug users 30% of the HIV+ population? If so many drug users are contaminated, it is surely because we have a juridical framework which defines drug use as crime and drug users as criminals. As a result, drug use can only be secret. Within this secret world, little attention is paid to public health messages from outside. And only since 1995, 15 years after the epidemic began, have French NGOs been allowed to distribute clean needles to drug users.

For years now, Act Up has been arguing for the installation of automatic syringe distributors in the appropriate locations. Local politicians avoid making the decision, for fear of upsetting their reactionary voters. There is only one public syringe exchange/distribution machine in the whole of Paris! The only town which has made a real effort (eight machines) is Marseilles, which has a right wing mayor.

Act Up has a number of proposals:

- the abolition of the 1970 law criminalising drug use, and the introduction of a real prevention policy, directly addressed at drug addicts, and recognising these people are fully responsible adults, not children or criminals. Let's stop thinking that public health materials about dirty needles has to be like a comic strip!
- improving drug addicts' access to health care. The special health services created for drug users are certainly useful, but why are they less well funded and equipped than the rest of the health service?
- challenging the Ministry of Health's authoritarian substitution programme. The Ministry tries to bring drug addicts "back into line," using AIDS as a means of controlling addicts, by providing tranquilliser products. These substitutes could be much

improved. Act Up demands that a range of products, and substitution methods be made available, covering the whole range of drug products actually in use.

- the distribution of heroine, under medical supervision. For some drug addicts, this is the only solution.

• **The new tri-therapy will never be commercialised in the third world...**

On World AIDS Day, 1st December 1996, you could see that the media, the authorities, the voluntary sector and public opinion are less concerned about AIDS than they used to be. People are saying, more or less, that the epidemic is over in the northern countries, and that the only big problems are in the south.

This very "politically correct" discourse usually urges us to do more for HIV patients in the third world, who represent 95% of all sufferers. In reality, AIDS is no more a priority in the south than in the north. The French Ministry of [foreign] Co-operation recently decided to stop prioritising the struggle against AIDS in its African programmes. Why? Above all because of lobbying from the right-wing within the governing coalition (not even the far right). These politicians want France to prioritise aid to obstetrics and maternal care, rather than AIDS as such. Obviously, these are important questions, since there are many HIV infections from mother to child. But the new orientation is based on side-tracking AIDS.

Same pattern in the north. The most reactionary parts of the right are trying to stop the public health system from talking about AIDS even here.

Why the shift? Quite simply because these new therapy rely on administering several expensive drugs in combination. No country, no aid programme official wants to admit that sufferers in the south will never receive the most effective treatments which have been developed in the north, and that the North will never make the necessary huge funds available to introduce treatments like AZT in the South.

Their only solution is to de-prioritise AIDS. If public opinion pressure fades, the embarrassing question of why these treatments are not available in the South will not have to be faced in the same way.

At Act Up we say that "the priority is everywhere, or it is nowhere!" When they de-prioritise AIDS in public health programmes in the North, part of the reason is to "solve" base financial questions in the South. This is scandalous and criminal. We must keep shouting: "the epidemic isn't over!" ★

Source: Interviewed for *International Viewpoint* by Sonia Leith. Previously published as "On nous parle d'espoir!", *Inprecor* #410, pp.9-11



The cocktail hour

Powerful and expensive new combinations of drugs can delay the development of AIDS for years. If they don't kill the patient first, warns **Tavis Barr** of Act-Up New York.

According to the mainstream American press, 1996 was the year when AIDS became a chronic manageable illness. "The end of AIDS?" asked a *Newsweek* cover suggestively in December, while AIDS researcher David Ho,¹ found his way on to the cover of *Time* as AIDS research poster boy *extraordinaire* and *Time's* "Man of the Year."

The cause of all this hoopla is a new class

of drugs called protease inhibitors, which, when taken in combination with a regimen of previously available drugs called reverse transcriptase inhibitors, keep HIV at often undetectable low levels for lengthy periods of time, possibly several years. These combination therapies can consist of up to 20 pills a day, and are referred to euphemistically as "cocktails." For people who are sick, such cocktails probably extend life expectancy by several years. Ho's attainment of poster boy status was spurred not so much by any leading role he held in the development of these drugs² as his advocacy of a "hit hard, hit early" treatment strategy. The idea behind such a strategy is that the earlier you counter an HIV infection, the more likely you are to contain the virus entirely inside blood cells;

if you can contain it for a couple of years, those cells will die off, and the infection may disappear completely.

High risk

In practice, "hit hard, hit early" is an entirely unproved concept. Researchers made the same claims about AZT (the first reverse transcriptase inhibitor) when it came out. Subsequent research showed that although AZT makes people with AIDS healthier for longer, it is so toxic that it does not increase people's life expectancy. Those who were "hit hard" and "hit early" with AZT actually saw their life expectancies decrease.

The new cocktails are a bit more promising in this regard: They do appear to be able, in some patients, to disappear the virus for almost enough time. But just as these cocktails are dramatically stronger than AZT, the risks associated with a "hit hard, hit early" strategy are dramatically more dangerous. Already, more than ten percent of new HIV infections in the US are resistant to AZT, and these resistant strains of HIV are more powerful and more deadly than the non-resistant ones. Strains that are resistant to AZT are also more resistant to other reverse transcriptase inhibitors, and even somewhat to protease inhibitors, a trait known as "cross resistance." The resistance and cross-resistance created by drug cocktails is clearly higher.

This means that people who "hit hard, hit early" and fail will be left in a few years with an infection that is more virulent, resistant to other available drugs, and probably resistant to many future drugs as well. AIDS service providers already report a new potential outbreak of resistant HIV as men on drug cocktails, whose viral load sometimes drops to undetectable levels, believe that they are not contagious and begin having unsafe sex with — and infecting — their partners.

Huge profits

What "hit hard, hit early" does unambiguously do is boost drug company profits, by putting people on expensive drugs who may not need them. And these profits have been enormous: The first protease inhibitor to be released, Hoffmann-LaRoche's Invirase (saquinavir), was priced at \$7,000 per year. Then, Abbott released Norvir (ritonavir) at \$8,200. Finally, Merck chose to distribute its protease inhibitor, Crixivan (indinavir) through a single pharmacy retailer, Statlander's, which marked up the drug 38% to over \$6,000 per year.

A co-ordinated effort by several AIDS activist organisations of fax zaps, meetings, and letter writing got Statlander's to agree to negotiate about the price. Finally, after four ACT UP/New York members were jailed for posting signs on Statlander's store in a

AIDS

III World gays struggle for survival

Sexual transmission of HIV between men makes up a relatively small part of overall HIV incidence in the Third World. But, as Ken Davis reports, the infection rate within homosexual and transgender sub-cultures in many countries are devastating.

In many cities, organisations of sexual minorities pre-date AIDS. In Burma, China, Malaysia, Taiwan, Singapore and other countries tentative gay rights organising grew out of 1980s youth upsurges for democratic rights. In other Asian and African nations, the advent of HIV has allowed activists from homosexual and transgender communities to claim space and resources.¹

Traditional transgender identities and sub-cultures are being transformed because of imperialist economic, ideological and cultural expansion, but also because of AIDS. The *leiti* in Tonga have their own association, sponsored by the royal household. Indian *hijras*, *baklas* in Filipino barrios, *waria* in Indonesia and *kathoey* in Thailand receive small international grants for AIDS peer-education. From Soweto to Suva, drag beauty contests are being transformed into health education rallies.

Gay organisations have gained some level of official recognition, at least with government health departments, through being able to initiate grassroots AIDS education and support, and provide input to AIDS policy development and planning. Groups making full use of this limited legitimisation include *Citra Usada* in Bali, *Gaya Nusantara* in Surabaya, *Bombay Dost* in Mumbai,

Pink Triangle in Kuala Lumpur, *Library Foundation* in Manila, and *FACT* in Bangkok. In other centres, such as Fiji, Hong Kong and Singapore gay activism has been able to clothe itself in the garb of general AIDS service NGOs.

Last year's Ninth Conference on AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) in Africa, held in Kampala, allowed a ground-breaking meeting of lesbians and gay men to establish an information network across dozens of African countries.

The added urgency of organising against HIV among homosexual sub-cultures, and the need for more open discussion of sexual behaviours has led to demands for the repeal of colonial laws against homosexual activities still retained in countries such as India, Singapore, and Zambia.

In China and Vietnam, local pragmatism about AIDS prevention has allowed small, and discrete gay groups to form in major cities. In Beijing local health officials worked with a small gay group to produce a leaflet about HIV and safe sex to be distributed to men meeting for sex in parks. ★

Note

1. See Peter Drucker's article "Third World gays fight back," *International Viewpoint* #282, November 1996, pp. 13-16]

largely gay area of New York's Greenwich Village, the company agreed within 24 hours to lower the price to the still-ridiculous amount of \$5,000 per year.

The prices of Invirase and Norvir have not yet budged, so that someone on a regimen of several drugs can pay up to \$30,000 for a year's supply. Not surprisingly, Merck saw a 1995 after-tax profit rate of 22%, Abbott of 16%, and Hoffmann-LaRoche of 22%, even after amortising their research and development expenses for these drugs.

These leading pharmaceutical companies are in full marketing mode, holding off on newly-developed life-saving drugs until the current ones have run out their profitability — like so many new model computer chips. Glaxo-Wellcome, the manufacturer of AZT, has already developed a new reverse transcriptase inhibitor known as "1592," which is supposed to be ten times as effective as AZT and dramatically less toxic. But the company does not want to begin large-scale (Phase II) clinical trials for "1592" until demand for AZT is exhausted.

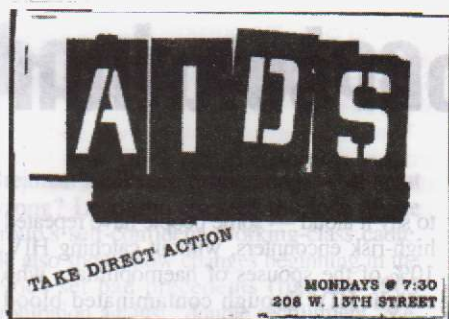
How much is YOUR life worth?

With these kinds of prices, drug companies have excluded all but the wealthiest Americans, and those lucky enough to have good insurance, from effective, up-to-date treatment.¹ There is a joint federal-state program, known as the AIDS Drug Assistance Program (ADAP), which provides drug assistance to middle-income people with AIDS. However, in 35 of the 50 American states, ADAP does not cover protease inhibitors (coverage was saved in New York only through the dramatic and persistent interventions of AIDS activists), and is already running bankrupt in states that do cover them.

The federal government was forced to inject \$167 million more into ADAP midyear in order to pay its share of the costs for protease inhibitors, but even so, the ADAP Working Group (a Washington-based industry/community lobby group) estimates that this money will fall \$270 million short of demand. Without help from ADAP, Americans with AIDS are forced to spend themselves down to extreme poverty levels, so that they qualify for the social health program, Medicaid.

Meanwhile, AIDS is increasingly a disease borne by the poor and people of colour; new CDC estimates suggest that seven of ten newly-infected gay men are black or latino, and the numbers are even higher among IV drug users and heterosexuals.

To protest such high drug prices, ACT UP held a march last October in Washington, DC., on the weekend that the AIDS quilt was being displayed. In a deeply moving political funeral, protesters threw the ashes of about twenty-five people on the White House lawn to protest the federal government's lack of action. In response to ACT UP's actions, outgoing National AIDS Policy Co-ordinator Patsy Fleming promised, "I would be happy to meet with [drug companies] about lowering their prices." However, she did not indicate whether Vice President Al Gore



brought up price gouging when he met with pharmaceutical manufacturers twice last year. Nor has she since announced any concrete action on the topic.

Far less noted, but just as profound, is the ideological coup that the new drugs have created for the corporate research agenda. Only two years ago, it was widely accepted that the government had pursued high-tech drugs at the expense of a basic research agenda, while promising but unprofitable treatments were widely ignored. Studies of the effects of various vitamins and nutrients were not widely performed until 1994. Nor were cheap clinical trials of widely available substances that some people with AIDS were using, but which had not been clinically tested.² There was an effort in 1995 to restructure entirely the Office of AIDS Research (which was made acutely more difficult when right-wing senator Jesse Helms used this effort as an excuse to attempt to abolish the office), and move more funds into basic research (the way HIV causes AIDS is still not entirely understood) and broader treatment studies.

AIDS activists had been able to seize the

government's failure as an opportunity to gain a great deal of publicity for some points they had been making all along: How the research agenda is governed by corporate interests, how its decisions are based on profitability and not the needs of people with AIDS, and how a more participatory program, directed by a wider range of doctors, epidemiologists, and people with AIDS — and notably not by corporate interests and representatives — could solve some of these problems.

Two years later, with drug cocktail makers promising miracles, AIDS activism has been largely reduced to issues around drug pricing and access, while larger questions of the research agenda will be ignored for as long as the current wave of high-tech drug lasts.

The purpose of this research agenda has been clear for some time. To quote ACT UP/Boston Member Rich Rochon, who gave the opening presentation for the VIIIth International Conference on AIDS in Amsterdam in 1992: "Often I'm asked if I believe a cure will come and I strongly say *No!* I do believe that we, and I hope it's we [it wasn't; Rich died a year later], will see AIDS progress into a chronic, manageable disease. Just because I believe this does not mean that I'm not fighting for a cure. In my theory, imagine how much money a single drug company would make if it comes up with a cure. Imagine the profits. Imagine how much several drug companies can make by coming up with treatments for infections, keeping people with AIDS alive, allowing us to continue to get sick and be treated with drugs on an ongoing basis. Imagine the profits."

As long as drug pricing and access to treatment are the immediate and pressing issues, activists will be fighting for them forcefully. But when the glory of the current set of high-tech drugs begins to fade, we must again raise the larger issues of who controls AIDS research and where those people are taking it. ★

Notes

Tavis Barr is a member of the US socialist organisation Solidarity and of ACT UP/New York.

1. fully rebounded from his recent courtly disfavour (his research funds had been threatened the year before by those closer to the centre of the AIDS power structure, allegedly because he supported reform at the National Institutes of Health's Office of AIDS Research)
2. The idea of using protease inhibitors against HIV has been around for at least a decade, and those currently available were developed by several different companies.
3. Currently, 53% of PWAs are covered by Medicaid, 22% by private insurance, 25% by neither. Of those insured, about 3/4 get their protease inhibitors covered.
4. For example, curcumin, an extract of turmeric that was claimed to boost levels of CD4; anti-depressant. Although these substances seemed to delay the onset of disease progression, their study and production were not supported at all by the federal government.

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Do the workers have a country?

by José Iriarte "Bikila"

◆ £2.50/\$4. Cheque payable to P. Rousset, IIRE, Postbus 53290, 1007 Amsterdam, Netherlands.



A non-condom solution?

Tests show that the spermicide foam Nonoxylol 9 destroys the HIV virus. Good news for women at risk of infection through heterosexual relations? **Lise Thiry** investigates this and other recent developments in AIDS research.

The early evidence of Nonoxylol 9's anti HIV effects came from studies using test tubes, and cats. The results on Kenyan prostitutes (the perfect test group — very sexually active, but not using condoms) were less encouraging. Nonoxylol 9 caused ulceration in the vaginal mucus, thus increasing the risk of infection. The dose they were given, was 5-10 times stronger in Nonoxylol 9 than commercial spermicides used in the USA. Luckily, the women in the test group did not develop HIV any faster than the women in the control group, who had used a neutral product instead of Nonoxylol 9. A similar trial in Cameroon using a lower dose of Nonoxylol 9 (2-3 times stronger than commercial spermicides) did seem to reduce the risk of HIV infection for prostitutes.

Unfortunately, it is difficult to create an effective antiviral spermicide, which is not a vaginal irritant for women who have sexual intercourse more than once every 24 hours, unless one uses more expensive bicyclam drugs. (Laurent Bélec, in *Transcriptase* n°46, June 1996)

Research is being hindered by the inflexible position of the World Health Organisation, which demands not just total safety, and the stability of the treatment in tropical conditions, but even that the new cream "must be suitable for application well before the sexual contact, so as not to affect the spontaneity of the relationship," and "must respect the women's desire to procreate." Two preconditions which condoms fail.

Meanwhile, every 25 seconds a woman somewhere in the world is infected with HIV. Surely it's time for a new, less-than-perfect treatment, alongside the less-than-perfect alternatives: the condom and fidelity.

Obviously, the availability of vaginal sprays and creams with an anti-HIV effect is no miracle liberation of women. In some cultures, women associate sexual relationships very closely with their role as potential mothers. The ideal anti-HIV product for these women would be one which killed the virus but let the sperm swim through! Perfect sperm, not weakened or damaged by the activity of the anti-HIV agents. No biologist is ready to develop such a product!

Lower genetic resistance?

The evidence is there, even if we hesitate

to say it aloud — some people have repeated high-risk encounters, without catching HIV. 10% of the spouses of haemophiliacs who caught HIV through contaminated blood products (but did not know of their sickness, so did not have safe sex) caught HIV in the year following their partner's infection. The others did not. And many continued to be HIV free during years of unprotected sexual relations, in the period before their partners' sickness was diagnosed.

Some people catch HIV after one unprotected sexual exchange. Others have sex hundreds of times, without catching their



AIDS

Women's rights

Sexual inequality is a key factor behind the HIV epidemic

Since more than three-quarters of HIV transmission world-wide occurs during heterosexual sex, the rights of women are already a key determinant in the epidemic. In the long term, women in Africa and Asia will bear an even greater burden. In response to HIV, many men are selecting younger partners. In Zimbabwe, 83% of under-20 year olds with HIV are women.

It is utopian for AIDS campaigns to encourage women to negotiate condom use with their male partners, independently from struggles against rape, sexual and domestic violence, female genital mutilation, for sexual and reproductive self-determination, for reforms to marriage, divorce, inheritance and property laws, and struggles to increase access by women to health services, basic and technical education, and employment opportunities. [KD] ★

partner's infection. It was originally thought that this was because there were a variety of strains of HIV, some more, and some less contagious. But it is increasingly suspected that in fact humans have a variable personal resistance. While many of Nairobi's prostitutes have contracted AIDS, because their clients refuse to use condoms, others have been on the game for years, without any sign of HIV. It has proved impossible to infect these women's blood with HIV, even in laboratory tests. Similar results have been observed among groups of homosexual men with high risk lifestyles.

The strange thing is that this resistance only applies to recent strains of HIV. These "lucky ones" are still vulnerable, in laboratory tests, to older strains of HIV, collected and archived when the disease was first observed.

One explanation is that these people's resistance to HIV has been acquired by a "vaccination" contact. Other researchers suggest a genetic explanation. It seems that genetic factors could only 'protect' 1% of the European population. And the "lucky" genes seem to be completely absent in the African population.

There is still a lot of work to do. No-one knows why such a genetic immunity should have developed, millennia before AIDS appeared. Nor is it clear if the apparent immunity of a minority of the population is absolute, or only covers certain strains of the HIV virus.

Mother and child

Pregnancy does not increase the threat of AIDS among HIV-positive women who eat properly. In one Kenyan study, 17% of HIV positive pregnant women had a severe vitamin A deficiency, and 32% passed their infection to the foetus. Among mothers with adequate vitamin A levels, "only" about 7% of foetuses became infected. A comparable study in Houston, Texas reported that 13% of all foetuses of HIV-positive mothers became infected. In other words, the high infection and contagion levels in Africa are not due to some primitive practice, but to poverty.

Vitamin A deficiency is also responsible for a higher rate of contamination through breast-feeding. 100% of vitamin-deficient women in the same Kenyan study had traces of HIV in their milk, compared to 38% of women without the deficiency. In other words, the rate of HIV contagion is inversely linked to overall nutrition. Just as with tuberculosis, the poor diet of the poor is one of the main factors behind their vulnerability to HIV. ★

Lise Thiry is a virologist at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, and a member of Gauches-Unies

[Source: *Inprecor* #410, February 1997 p.12]

book notes

Trotskyism in the United States: Historical Essays and Reconsiderations,

George Breitman, Paul Le Blanc, and Alan Wald

reviewed by Peter Drucker

Paul Le Blanc and Alan Wald don't argue that Trotskyism has all the answers or that it is *the* basis for rebuilding the US left. But they do highlight Trotskyist ideas that are still important and achievements of which American Trotskyists can be rightfully proud. Most important, they begin a debate about what Trotskyism does or does not have to contribute to the "next left."

The SWP at Its Best...

Le Blanc and Wald focus on the Socialist Workers Party, which for over forty years was the largest Trotskyist group in the US (at times the largest in the world, though it never reached 2,000 members). Given the role the SWP played in the 1940s and again in the 1960s and '70s, its story is well worth telling.

In the late 1930s and 1940s the SWP built up the largest trade union current to the left of the CP, and rooted its own internal life and culture in the working class. After McCarthyism decimated its trade union base, it recruited widely on campus and played a key role in the anti-Vietnam War movement. In its publications and schools it taught thousands of radicals to understand and use (still-)important ideas inherited from Trotsky like "transitional demands," "united fronts" and "permanent revolution." Leaders like C.L.R. James (who went from the SWP to the WP and back in the 1940s before founding his own group) and George Breitman made a major contribution of their own through their writings on African-American nationalism.

Trotskyism in the United States gives us a feel for the SWP at its best. It lets us sample the best of the SWP's thinking and educational work by reprinting George Breitman's 1974 talks on "The Liberating Influence of the Transitional Program." The talks are a model of revolutionary pedagogy: clear without oversimplifying, engaged but critical-minded. Breitman's account of the SWP's 1938 labour party debate is historically significant as well, and enlivened by his recollections of his own role. It gives a sense of the extraordinary freedom and democracy of discussion in the party in 1938-39, when 40 percent of the membership fought and voted against the position Trotsky advocated.

What went wrong?

Le Blanc's account of what became of the SWP by the 1980s is as depressing as

Breitman's talks are exhilarating. What went wrong? Le Blanc stresses the loss of the group's self-confident, working-class cadre. He also shows how changes beginning in the 1960s set bad precedents (like the 1965 prohibition against "double recruitment," i.e. explaining minority standpoints to potential new members). But then party-leader James Cannon is, in Le Blanc's eyes, virtually beyond reproach.

Even Wald, who is more critical of the Trotskyist tradition in general, only ventures in the book's last pages to say that Cannon's 1946 assertion that the SWP was already "destined" to lead the US revolution "must be rejected as a model for today," and that the Trotskyist tradition is lost unless it "breaks radically" with the idea (voiced by Cannon ally Morris Stein) that Trotskyists "can tolerate no rivals." (pp.279-80)

Le Blanc expresses "quite sharp" disagreement with Wald's picture of the SWP's past (pp.x-xi). In fact Wald could have gone further. Cannon's 1946 claim that the SWP, with fewer than 2000 members, would itself become the organisation of millions that could lead a US revolution was far-fetched. Even worse was the SWP's decision in 1965, when its working-class base was gone and its membership was down to 420, to reaffirm its 1946 self-proclamation as part of its basic "doctrines." (p.53) Le Blanc also fails to see the kernel of truth in charges of bureaucratisation raised by many SWP minorities. Concerned about "permanent discussion, driving out the workers," Cannon allowed political debates to be crowded off branch and leadership agendas by deadly administrative routine and policy to be set largely by the full-timers (120 of them by the mid-1970s). This ensured that once most of the older, independent-minded cadre were gone and Barnes had the full-timers in hand, his regime was secure against challenge.

What now?

In the last two of the book's six essays, Wald tackles the question of what all this means for the US left now and in the future.

On the one hand, he warns against repeating the 1960s New Left's mistake of re-enacting the Old Left's tragedies by failing to study its history, expressing dismay at how little contemporary "rethinking" is informed by all the rethinking done in the past. Trotskyism itself is the fruit of such rethinking, he points out: learning from the Russian revolution's bureaucratisation in the 1920s, learning from the disastrous consequences in 1973 of relying on Chilean bourgeois democracy, and so on. We forget these lessons at our peril. At same time, Wald shows a healthy sense of proportion about how little Trotskyism has really accomplished. He points out some of the many ways in which the politics of a new left must be genuinely new: on ecology, lesbian/gay liberation, Eurocentrism, new forms of imperialism, etc. His discussion of the day-to-day dynamics that lead to factions and splits reveal how much we have to learn from the feminist realisation that the personal is political.

All this leads Wald to the sensible conclusion that "activists emerging from Trotskyist experiences" should neither try to build a new Trotskyist vanguard nor renounce their past, but instead try to act as "a well-integrated current (not tendency or faction) within a broader organisation of the far left." (p.262) ★

[a longer review of this book by Peter Drucker will be published in a coming issue of *Against The Current* magazine.]

Humanities Press, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1996 (hbk \$60)

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The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: an overview

by Catherine Samary

◆ £5/\$6.50. Cheque payable to P. Rousset, IIRE, Postbus 53290, 1007 Amsterdam, Netherlands.



Indonesian underground

Visiting Indonesian in December as a guest of the PRD underground movement, Australian video maker Jill Hickson travelled extensively across the country meeting workers, student activists and human rights defenders.

The result is a 30 minute documentary, titled **There is only one word, Resist**. It provides background to the explosive political and social conditions inside Suharto's Indonesia, and examines developments in the Indonesian pro-democracy movement, in particular the emergence of the Peoples Democratic Party (PRD) which has been banned and forced underground.

Bankok: health and safety

A workshop on workers' health and safety and the rights of industrial accident victims will be held in Bangkok from May 10-13. The event is organised by labour NGOs from Thailand and Hong Kong. May 10, 1997, will mark the 4th anniversary of the Kader toy factory fire in which 189 workers were killed and 469 were injured.

For further information, contact: Mr Chan Kam Hong, Association for the Rights of Industrial Accident Victims (ARIAV), 3/F, 57 Peking Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. Fax: (852) 2724 5098, or Ms Alice Kwan, AMRC, eMail amrc@hk.super.net

PRD members smuggled a camera into prison for an exclusive interview with Dita Sari, the president of the independent trade union, *Centre for Labour Struggle* (PPBI) and a leading member of the PRD.

The documentary interviews underground members of the PRD who talk about the crackdown, the systematic hunting down of their members and the situation they are operating in underground. One tells of his torture at the hands of the military.

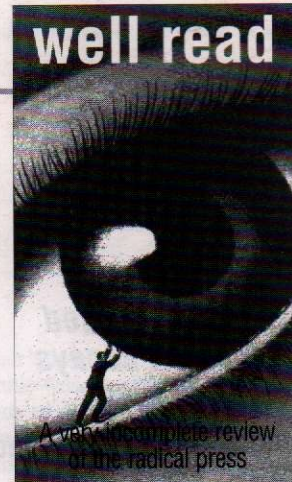
The documentary also features footage of the July 27 military attack on the PDI headquarters which housed Megawati supporters where many people were killed and wounded. This incident sparked off a full-scale riot where many hundreds of people were bashed and arrested.

The documentary was launched in Australia on March 21. An Indonesian-language version will be smuggled back into Indonesia for use by the PRD.

Action in Solidarity with Indonesia and East Timor (ASJET) welcomes public showings by organisations with a view to funds raised going to the **Free the Political Prisoners Campaign**. The video costs US\$60 including postage. A copy for private use costs US\$35 including postage. All tapes VHS. Please specify whether you want NTSC or PAL format.

ASJET: PO Box 458, Broadway 2007, Australia

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www.peg.apc.org/~asiet/



Zapatista Women

This 30-minute video, produced in 1994, presents interviews with women insurgents of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN). In it they tell what it means to be indigenous women in Mexico, how they came to be in the EZLN, their life in it, and what their struggle is about.

[Spanish, with English subtitles.]
Cost: US\$20 (postage included). Cheques made out to "Librairie Alternative", Zapatista Direct Solidarity Committee 2035 St. Laurent, 2nd floor, Montreal, Quebec, H2X-2T3, Canada tel (514) 844-3207
E-mail: s_linds@alcor.concordia.ca

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

International Viewpoint 1996 collection

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Bound volumes for previous years ('90, '91, '92 '94, '95) cost £5/\$10.
20% Discount on orders of four or more volumes. Full Index included.

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.

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NetWorking



Women and politics

US feminists have developed a women oriented directory of Internet sites at

www.femina.com

Or point your non-phallic browser at:

F: www.mire.net/penelopes

B: www.amazone.be

D: www.uni-bielefeld.de/IFF/fraueninfonetz/

I: labvenezia.tol.it/~cyber/infoperla

A: www.onb.ac.at/ariadne.htm

USA: www.feminist.com

Quebec: www.csf.gouv.qc.ca/8mars/

The Interparliamentary Union has assembled statistics on women's presence in most parliaments of the world, as well as a series of texts and links concerning the debate on quotas, parity, etc.

www.ipu.org/press-e/gen62.htm

International Viewpoint

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

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

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Eye On Palestine

The Israeli Government is building new settlements and expanding existing ones in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in blatant violation of the "peace" agreements between the PLO leadership and Israel. Chapter 2 Article 31, item 7 of the Oslo II Interim Agreement states that "Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations." Recent declarations and activities clearly indicate the intention of the Israeli government to colonise the Palestinian territories, creating de facto changes that will affect the outcome of any final status negotiations.

This new project of the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ) and the Map Unit of the Arab Studies Society in Jerusalem presents detailed information on each Israeli settlement, supported with facts, activity reports, photos and maps.

www.arj.org/paley

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