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**VIEWPOINT**

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In happier days: Communist Refoundation leaders Cossuta and Bertinotti before the split

## Cossuta joins the centre-left government Rifondazione splits

A rightward split has debilitated Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC), one of Europe's largest anti-capitalist forces

Livio Maitan

**Founded in 1991**, *Rifondazione comunista* described itself as the party of all those who refuse to see capitalism as inevitable. Despite the defeats of the workers' movement, and the failure of the Eastern European "socialist" societies, the party reaffirmed its "class struggle" tradition. In the first few years, the party was able to organise its presence in most parts of the country.

The PRC's natural venue was in the opposition, from where it could begin to articulate its alternative project. The party successfully avoided being type-cast as a party of nostalgics, or a purely propagandistic organisation. It won the profile of a political formation with a mass audience, defending the interests and advancing the demands of the most downtrodden sections of Italian society. It also won a respectable level of electoral support.

In January 1994, Fausto Bertinotti became secretary and effective leader of the party. In March that year, the party participated in the "progressive" electoral bloc, which was dominated by the [ex-Communist, now social-democratic] PDS. When this bloc lost the election, the parties moved further apart. PDS

leaders argued that they should have opened more to the political centre, and less to their left.

Within the PRC, Bertinotti radicalised the communist orientation. The party became increasingly active in its opposition, first to Silvio Berlusconi's government, then to the Dini government. That government had the support of the PDS.

This was the most productive phase in the life of the PRC. It grew in membership, and in organising capacity. On several occasions it launched demonstrations that attracted more than 100,000 participants. It survived, without great difficulty, the departure of several parliamentarians and members of the party leadership (Garavini, Magri, Castellina and others) who supported the Dini government.

New elections were held in Spring 1996. The party signed a "non-aggression" pact with the Olive Tree coalition, dominated by the PDS, but led by Romano Prodi, a member of one of the fragments of the former Christian Democratic party. The PRC campaign emphasised the "class struggle" alternative. It was different from the Olive Tree programme on all key questions: economic orientation, institutional reform, foreign policy, and reform of the education system.

The PRC made no commitment to participate in a left government, or even to use its vote to ensure a centre-left parliamentary majority. But it promised that, if necessary, it would give a Prodi

government an initial vote of confidence - though future support would depend on the government's actions.

The Olive Tree emerged as the strongest force in the new parliament, and Prodi was invited to form a government. Since the PRC held the balance of power in the Chamber of Deputies, its votes would be more than a statement of protest.

Faced with this pressure, the majority of the PRC began to modify its positions. In June, they declared that the party was an "integral part" of Prodi's parliamentary majority. [Influential former party leader] Cossuta, said that he hoped this would remain so until the end of the legislative period. The policy was ratified at the party congress in December 1996.

This new phase lasted until October 1997, when the PRC provoked a parliamentary crisis by threatening not to vote for the Prodi government's budget bill. The threat was almost immediately withdrawn. In exchange, Prodi hurriedly promised to introduce legislation for a 35-hour work week. The PRC began to sit alongside the deputies of the government bloc, though without formal participation in the government. Far from being solved, the tension between participation and independence would continually grow, forcing the party into an impasse.

### Bertinotti's turn

The party's two main leaders had different reactions to the government crisis. Cossuta was clearly overjoyed by the new agreement with Prodi. Bertinotti, on the other hand, was increasingly critical.

At first, he restricted his critical comments to meetings of the central leadership. But after a while he spoke frankly in the National Political Leadership (CPN). With somewhat twisted logic, he argued that a party like the PRC could and should support a centre-left government like Prodi's, but also be in opposition to it.

At the end of 1997, Cossuta opposed Bertinotti in a CPN meeting for the first time. A few months later, the two leaders clashed again. Although both had approved the party's critical judgment of Prodi's economic and financial programme, Bertinotti was determined to organise an open opposition to the legislation when it was presented to parliament in September.

In June and July 1998, the conflict deepened. Bertinotti declared that unless the Prodi government changed direction, particularly in its socioeconomic orientation, the PRC would have to seriously consider breaking its de facto alliance with the government. Cossuta tried to calm the debate, but did not oppose Bertinotti's stark choice: change of policy, or withdrawal of support. [During this period, a minority of 48 CPN members, including the author of this article,



argued that the party should immediately withdraw its support of Prodi and pass over to the opposition.]

It now seems that Cossuta was already playing for time while he assembled support for his future split. Although he continued to vote in favour of Bertinotti's ultimatum, his supporters launched a virulent debate in the mainstream media, arguing that the PRC should not leave the government bloc.

Cossuta admitted that Prodi's new finance law did not represent any new socioeconomic orientation, and that, in principle, a Communist party like the PRC ought to pass over into the opposition. But, he argued, to do so might mean that Prodi would be replaced by a right-wing government, possibly even a return of Berlusconi.

Although Cossuta reiterated the communist principle that all members of the parliamentary fraction should vote according to the decision of the party leadership, he redoubled his efforts to spit the party before the vote came.

The consequences of the split are still unclear. Very few ordinary members of the party have followed Cossuta. Most of those who have left are members of the local and regional leadership. According to the 15 October edition of the PRC newspaper *Liberazione*, only a "small minority" of the 117 provincial secretaries have followed Cossuta, along with four of the 20 regional secretaries.

The greatest loss was in the regional parliaments: 36 of the party's 62 deputies joined the split. In Rome, only five of the 66 secretaries of party circles have left. Even in Florence, long thought to be Cossuta's stronghold, three quarters of the members of the regional committee have remained loyal to the PRC.

The danger is, obviously, that voters will turn away from the party, and that militants will be de-motivated by the whole affair.

At the root of Cossuta's motivation is a simple philosophy: the masses are not mobilising. All we can do is to put pressure on the government to shift its policies somewhat. This we can do if we are part of the government. If we go into opposition, the Olive Tree parties will attack us. Our impact on public affairs will be less, we will have less publicity, and our support will shrink. We will be marginalised, even excluded, from the various institutions of political life.

This kind of thinking was particularly strong among elected representatives in the regional and national parliaments. Classic institutionalist and parliamentary cretinism, combined with short-term opportunism.

Too many of the party's

leading cadre were afraid of losing the exorbitant material and social privileges of their lifestyle. There has been a resurgence of the "lesser of two evils" philosophy and practice, a way of thinking that has done so much damage to the workers' movement over the years, a morale-destroying ideological sickness.

It is no coincidence that Cossuta's supporters have increasingly associated themselves with the old Italian Communist Party (PCI), particularly the methodological and strategic approach of Palmiro Togliatti. They reproach Bertinotti, and particularly the Trotskyists in the PRC, for being outside the tradition of the old party.

Cossuta has spoken a great deal about the alliance – which he claims now controls the PRC – between Bertinotti and Livio Maitan, leader of the Trotskyist current around *Bandiera Rossa* magazine.

Cossuta's new party calls itself the Party of Italian Communists. This allows them to use the same PCI initials as the former Italian Communist Party.

So far, Cossuta has managed to blame the Trotskyists for the split without explicitly returning to the old Stalinist discourse. He has spoken respectfully of those most directly affected by his polemic. On 15 October he told the country's leading newspaper, *Corriere della Sera*, that "I have justified the presence of Trotskyist comrades in our party to all those Communist Parties that considered this unacceptable. So it has nothing to do with Stalinism [when I note that] these comrades have taken completely opposite positions to ours during each of the congresses [since the PRC was formed]. And finally, even although there are only a few dozen of them, they have played a decisive role in bringing down the government."

Of course, the incurable Stalinist nostalgics in the PRC can only be comforted by his comments, and will draw their own conclusions. This may contribute to a degradation of the climate within the left in various sectors.

On the other hand, a number of non-Trotskyist comrades, including Bertinotti, have reacted to these attacks by reiterating their support and appreciation for the presence of the Trotskyist current in the PRC.

The PRC is paying a heavy price for its past weaknesses, ambiguities and contradictions.

The process of renovation and refoundation of the Italian communist movement actually bogged down quite quickly.

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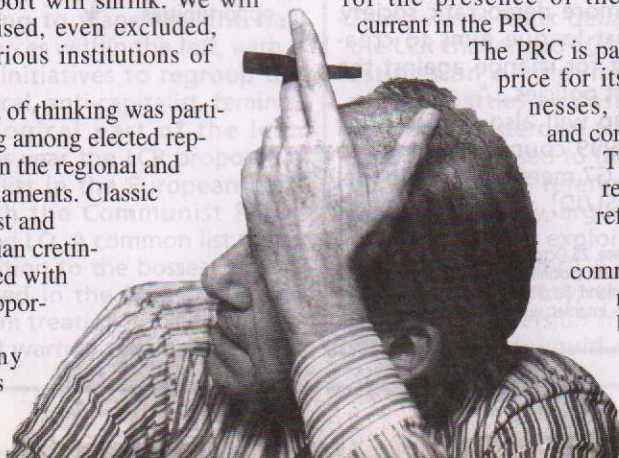
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## ★ Italy

Many fundamental problems for the PRC were dealt with in a fragmented and intermittent way. Sometimes the party leadership was over-cautious, or plain wrong.

As those on the left of the party have long argued, the PRC has failed to produce a strategic alternative that corresponds to the current phase of the class struggle. It goes without saying that the party has never developed any long-term strategy for the anti-capitalist struggle.

The party led an often valuable current of resistance to the government, from its foundation in 1991 until it more or less joined the government in 1996. But the lack of a strategic perspective often limited the party's effect.

More recently, the party's support for the Prodi government has obviously worsened the situation, and reinforced a tendency towards passivity among party members and supporters.

It has also complicated the party's work with the few social movements that have confronted the government. The PRC's ambiguous role affected its credibility among the unemployed movement in the less-developed southern half of the country, and among students. "You are here, but your comrades are sitting in parliament and voting for the education minister we are fighting against," students shouted at members of the Communist Youth during the demonstrations.

The PRC's trade union work has been unsystematic. Although the party has considerable implantation in the labour movement, its sympathisers are divided, even fragmented - even within the broader "class struggle" left in the largest trade union confederation, the CGIL.

The way the split with Cossuta finally occurred also shows a complete lack of awareness in the PRC about how to organise the internal life of a working

class and communist party at the end of the 20th century. In the run-up to the split, a majority of PRC parliamentarians refused to vote in line with policy approved by a very large majority of votes in the party's most representative leading body. And, when the moment came, Cossuta was able to organise a significant split in a matter of days or weeks.

We see, now, what a bad state the PRC was in. On the one hand, the party Secretariat (from which the left minority was always excluded) had too much power, creating a vertical power structure, where the secretary and president had excessive influence and power.

At the same time, it became gradually accepted that party leaders and members of parliament could make press statements whenever they felt like it, including before the party leadership could discuss the issue in question. Not surprisingly, during the key weeks of the crisis with Cossuta, many rank-and-file militants felt that they were being manipulated like puppets. Party leaders were attacking and insulting each other in public, without bothering to consult party members before they did so.

Cossuta even claimed that the party was dominated by "authoritarian dynamics", that it had undergone a "genetic mutation." A strange discovery, for a man who had been a central leader of the party for years, and who had been scrupulously silent whenever the left in the party, or even the majority, had criticised bureaucratic practices.

If the PRC is to learn anything from the split, it must clearly discuss the internal functioning and basic conception of the party at the congress to be held in several months.

### A challenging period

It is too early to evaluate the cost of the split for the PRC. But if parliamen-

tary elections are held soon, the party may lose many of its elected representatives. This would not just provoke a financial crisis for the organisation, but it would be much more difficult for the PRC to play a major role in the country's social movements.

In any case, things will never be the same as before. The political identity of the party, and the way it works can only change.

Before the split, about half the militants were former members or supporters of the PCI. But now, the majority come from other backgrounds: the far left, the socialist left, other currents, or from no particular current.

Excitingly, the Communist Youth - most of whom entered politics too late to have an organic relationship in one of the pre-PRC groups - is increasingly important within the party. Support for Cossuta was much lower among the youth than in the rest of the party.

Most of the supporters of the "Togliatti culture" - the gradualist, moderate, parliamentary, institutional, almost social-democratic approach that was so influential in the old Communist party - have left with Cossuta. Certainly, this current is no longer represented in the party's central leadership, Bertinotti's secretariat.

This obviously increases the relative weight of the left, which previously had the support of 20-30% of delegates to PRC conferences. And there is growing respect for the left, in recognition of its critical proposals since 1994, and particularly since the party joined the government bloc in 1996.

With most of the party's parliamentary group now gone, the PRC will have to put more emphasis on its social intervention. And it is no longer handicapped by its support for the governing coalition.

In the run-up to the next congress, it will be much easier for the left to stimulate discussion on the concept of the party and its work. It should be possible to achieve positive improvements in these areas and in a more general sense, improve the conditions for refoundation and renewal of Italy's Communist left, and the workers' movement as a whole.

The coming months are full of potential and promise. The risk is that the left in the PRC will fail to seize the opportunities... ★

## Young at heart

The Communist Youth of Finland has transformed itself into a party for those of all ages.

The group, which represents a new trend on the Finnish left, is to the left of the Social Democrats and the Leftwing Alliance.

Unlike many Finnish communists, the group thinks the Soviet Union was "state capitalist," and in no way a model of free and democratic socialism.

The organisation, now called the Socialist League, will take part in the 1999 parliamentary elections, as part of the *Muutos '99* (Change '99)

election agreement. But the group insist that "the main aim of our campaign is not fishing for votes but agitation against parliamentarism for a more democratic society. The Socialist league aims to creating a front for change against the neoliberalist policies..."

The group will also mobilise for the June 1999 counter-summits to the EU and G7 meetings in Cologne, Germany. [SL/JD] ★

Source: Press release, 25 October 1998  
Contact: Sosialistiliitto (Socialist League) PO Box 288,  
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# New far-left coalition

France's major far-left parties, Workers Struggle (LO) and the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR) will present joint candidates in the European elections. The new list may pass the 5% hurdle, and enter the European parliament.

Rafael Duffleaux

In the past, Workers' Struggle (Lutte ouvrière - LO) has systematically rejected the development of unitary structures, particularly including "reformists". Usually, LO has preferred to observe from the outside, as new social movements like the unemployed or undocumented immigrants (*sans-papiers*) organise themselves. From time to time, LO has given verbal support, or mobilised its own supporters to make a big splash, banners and all, at a demonstration called by a social movement.

LO has often justified this attitude by their refusal to build movements that include individual or currents "outside the working class." There has also been an organisational choice - LO has preferred to put all its energy in its workplace fractions, rather than disperse its efforts in what it calls "substitutionist" work.

This hasn't prevented LO spokeswoman Arlette Laguiller from attracting 5.3% of the vote in the 1995 presidential election. As well as her own popularity, this shows that there is a current of French society which is in revolt, and which she has been able to articulate.

This tendency was confirmed in the regional elections earlier this year (in which the Revolutionary Communist League [LCR] also participated).<sup>1</sup> The combined score of the two lists exceeded 5% in several *départements*. Most are industrial regions with a strong Communist Party tradition. In the south-western city of Toulouse, LCR and LO polled over 10% of the vote. Two LCR candidates were elected to the regional council there.

## The challenge for the left

For several years now the LCR has been trying to transform the balance of forces within the left, with a series of initiatives to regroup the more radical, anti-capitalist, feminist and ecological part of the left. Earlier this year the LCR proposed a common list in the European elections with the Communist Party, Greens and LO. A common list based on opposition to the bosses Europe, as reflected in the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties.

The LCR warned that defence of a

European project which serves working people implied criticism of France's coalition government. Headed by the social democrat Lionel Jospin, there are also Communist and Green party ministers.

The Greens were not interested. They announced their own European candidates, headed by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a '68 radical who now supports the Gulf War and the Maastricht convergence criteria.

The CP was slower to respond. They rescheduled and cancelled meeting after meeting. In public, their leader Robert Hue proposed an list "with the Communists strongly visible," but open to all the supporters of "a different Europe." He implied that he would welcome an agreement with the LCR, but did not create any possibilities for discussing such a deal.

In reality, the CP leadership was scared that the LCR would come to an arrangement with other far-left groups. Hue's advisors realise that unless they can attract the left to a list which reinforces the Communists' participation in government, many traditional CP voters might shift to a more radical left list.

For a while, there were overtures to the LCR, and a little more criticism of the government's social policy. But, caught in a contradiction, the CP press had to reaffirm constantly that this policy did "go in the right direction." There was no way, for example, that the CP might vote against the government's budget. At most, they might abstain here or there...

This made any joint list impossible. The LCR couldn't allow itself to be used to support and legitimate this kind of balancing act.

Things were different with LO. There was a frank debate, in which the LCR challenged LO's total underestimation of the importance of specific battles against the Maastricht and Amsterdam treaties.

LO even refused to take a position during the 1995 referendum on the Maastricht Treaty, arguing that "the workers will be exploited, with or without the treaty." A specific anti-Maastricht treaty, they argued, would be a diversion from the "real struggle," and would cause confu-

sion, since some right-wing currents are also opposed to the treaty.

## Wide agreement

Despite these past differences, the two organisations reached agreement on the major questions of the coming European elections - resistance to capitalist Europe, the major axes of the "working people's Europe" we need, and a critical evaluation of the current left coalition government.

The details of the common list are still being negotiated. Candidate lists will be composed on a 50-50 basis, ensuring equal visibility and (if enough voters respond) equal electoral representation. Each party will organise its own publicity, in addition to common propaganda and joint meetings.

The LO leadership has already agreed in principle. The LCR will hold a national conference in January to confirm its participation.

The idea of a common list has provoked considerable media interest, as well as animated discussions across the left. Unlike the LO-LCR joint list in the 1973 European elections, the current proposal is seen as more than just a Trotskyist option.

It is not impossible that over 5% of voters will support the list. This would guarantee representation in the European parliament, with at least four deputies (two LO, two LCR). Back in 1973, the joint list attracted just over 3% of the vote.

If it beats the 5% hurdle, the new list will have comparable score to the Communist Party or the Greens. This would be a tremendous shift in the topology of the French left. And a positive catalyst for social movements across Europe. ★

1. *Ligue communiste révolutionnaire*. French section of the Fourth International.



# The devils of Jabiluka

Australia's uranium industry is being outflanked by a dynamic protest movement combining urban protests with a permanent camp in the far north of the country, where a monster uranium mine is being dug in a national park, on sacred land. John Tully was there.

The recent visit by a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) delegation has again focused the world's attention 200km east of Darwin. The visit follows the winding down of an extraordinary seven month long blockade of the mine and the shifting of the focus of the anti-Jabiluka campaign to the big cities and the international arena.

The mine is on leased land, specially "excised" from the Kakadu National Park. The UNESCO visit is in response to a delegation of Aboriginal people who visited the UN's World Heritage Bureau in Paris earlier this year. Representatives of the Mirrar Gagudju people, the traditional landowners, asked the Bureau to put the Kakadu National Park on its list of world heritage areas "in danger" by mining.

The visit has embarrassed even the thick-skinned Australian federal government. Prime Minister John Howard lacks the numbers in the Senate to ram through his government's pro-uranium policies. The government and the uranium industry face growing public opposition. One opinion poll released in July indicated that 67% of Australians are opposed to the mine.

## A long battle

The battle to keep Australia's uranium in the ground has ebbed and

flowed for over two decades. At one stage the movement persuaded both the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU), to oppose the mining and export of uranium. But these policies were "watered down" by right wing forces led by former ALP Prime Minister Bob Hawke.

Nevertheless, the strength of the loose alliance of indigenous peoples, environmentalists and radical labour movement activists did manage to restrict the number of uranium mines to three: Nabarlek (mined out in 1988); Roxby Downs in northern South Australia; and Ranger 22 kilometres away from the new site at Jabiluka in the Arnhem Land region of the Northern Territory.

The election of the right-wing Howard Government in 1996 encouraged the uranium mining lobby. As many as 20 new mines are planned, mostly in the Northern Territory. And over 30 applications for uranium exploration are in the pipeline. The first – and largest – of the new mines is being developed at Jabiluka.

Meanwhile, many uranium-importing countries are either reconsidering the wisdom of the nuclear road, or, as in Germany, deciding to phase out nuclear power completely.

## Corporate greed

The push to exploit Jabiluka shows the corporate world at its most rapacious. By any standard – social, environmental or cultural – the mine is a disgrace. It is situated in the Kakadu National Park, which was bequeathed to the Australian people by the traditional Aboriginal landowners, including the Mirrar people. Kakadu is one of only 17 of the 469 World Heritage areas named by UNESCO for both its natural and cultural value.

Kakadu is of enormous ecological significance. One third of all Australian bird species live there, along with many species of reptiles, fish and amphibians and one quarter of the country's terrestrial mammals. Many of these species live in the wetlands which are menaced by uranium mining.

The cultural significance of the Park lies in the fact that Aboriginal people, including the Mirrar, have lived there for 40,000 years. The region is a treasury of archaeological and sacred Aboriginal sites, including ancient rock paintings of exquisite colour and design.

## Negative impact on Aborigines

The mine's apologists claim that the new mine will bring social and economic benefits to the local Aborigines. But the experience of the nearby Ranger mine indicates otherwise. Most jobs there were taken by white outsiders. As a Mirrar spokesperson Jacqui Katona put it: "We have heard for 20 years of these extraordinary claims about how Aboriginal people are going to benefit from mining, but the reality is that Aboriginal people are still living in Third World conditions."

Katona also points out that "The pressure was on Aboriginal people to spend their royalty money on providing water, power, roads and road maintenance." This is not the case when mines are situated in white areas. The mines have also exacerbated the alcoholism problem. "Until the Aboriginal people have the ability to control their affairs on their land then nothing is going to change."

These facts are not denied by the federal government. Indeed a study commissioned by the Minister for the Environment recognised that "key social indicators such as health, housing and education were sub-standard" and that the Ranger mine had impacted negatively upon Aboriginal communities. The Minister, however, concluded that the





findings would not influence his decision on Jabiluka!

### Negotiations under duress

The mining company and the federal government acknowledge that the Mirrar people are opposed to the mine but maintain that agreements negotiated over 15 years ago give them the right to go ahead. The Mirrar insist that both agreements are invalid as they were negotiated under duress.

The Jabiluka mine will exploit Australia's largest remaining deposit of uranium. Government approval for the mining company, ERA, to go ahead was given after receipt of an amazingly shoddy environmental impact statement. The mine workings are situated on a floodplain in a region that experiences the extremely volatile and unpredictable natural conditions common to the tropical monsoon forests of Australia's "Top End." This means torrential rain, floods and cyclones.

The project involves the clearing of 80.5 hectares of land, in the middle of the world's second largest national park. The ore will be extracted from a 400 metres deep underground mine. Underground mines increase the radiation doses received by the workers in comparison with open cut mines.

### Uranium for French bombs

ERA plans to transport the ore in open trucks along 22.5 kilometres of new road to the existing milling facilities at Ranger. It is envisaged that the mine will yield 19.5 million tonnes of ore over a 28 year period and that this will be refined into 90,400 tonnes of yellowcake (uranium oxide) for export overseas.

EERA claims that it will sell uranium only to countries which have signed the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. The company continued to sell uranium to the French Government throughout the period of French nuclear tests in the South Pacific.

But as the Northern Territory Jabiluka Alliance points out, "regardless of its use, be it for 'peaceful' purposes or otherwise, every ounce of Jabiluka uranium is destined to become radioactive waste".

The mine will put at least 20 million tonnes of radioactive tailings into the Kakadu Park's ecosystem. These tailings will retain up to 85% of their original radioactivity for hundreds of thousands of years.

### No safe mines

Basically, there is no such thing as a safe mine. A spokesperson for the Friends of the Earth uranium collective points out that over the 17 years of its operations, Ranger has been "plagued" with problems, including the periodic release of radioactive water from containment ponds and the discovery in 1983 that for an unknown period of time,

drinking water for the mine had been connected to processing water!

Small wonder that the company has run into such strong resistance from the Mirrar people and their European allies. As the Mirrar elder Yvonne Margarula told the court when she was arrested for "trespass" at the mine site in May this year: "It is Mirrar land... I have the right to go there, because I am the traditional owner." That simple, but powerful statement has reached millions of ears, despite all the lies and mystifications of ERA and their Government allies. ★



## The fight continues

The struggle against the Jabiluka mine has been fought on a number of fronts. The Mirrar people have sent delegations overseas, including to the United Nations World Heritage Bureau in Paris.

The Gundjehmi Aboriginal Corporation, has also mounted a challenge to the mine in the Australian Federal Court.

Yet without the dimension of mass action, it is doubtful that these measures could succeed. Supporters of the Mirrar have staged large demonstrations in Australian cities, and there has also been international solidarity.

The most extraordinary aspect of the campaign has been the seven month long blockade of the mine. Although the blockaders were unable to prevent the development of the mine, they certainly hindered it and the protest kept the issue alive.

Launched in March by the Mirrar people, the protest attracted thousands of people from around the country and even from overseas.

Protesters were issued with "Aboriginal passports" enabling them to camp on an old buffalo mustering ground a few kilometres from the mine site. They were asked to abide by special rules including a strict ban on alcohol and drugs and respect for Mirrar sacred sites.

At least 530 people were arrested. This is enough to clog up the court system of the sparsely-populated Northern Territory for many months. On one occasion, 200 protesters wearing caricature masks of Prime Minister John Howard swarmed over the fence and occupied the site.

Those arrested include Mirrar people - charged with trespass on their own land. Some will appeal their convictions, others have said that they will refuse to pay any

fines. Mirrar leader Jacqui Katona said that the traditional owners have had their basic human rights trampled on. She lambasted the authorities for removing the traditional owners' land rights even when a mining company excludes them illegally.

The Northern Territory, like most Australian states, has a paramilitary police unit, known as the "Tactical Response Unit." This gang, described by one protester as "SS Down Under", responded with terrible brutality. They batoned peaceful protesters, using gouge eyes and pressure points. On at least one blisteringly hot and shadeless day, they took great delight in pouring the water from demonstrators' bottles onto the ground. This gang are trained only to obey orders: and there can be little doubt that they were doing exactly what the pro-uranium Northern Territory government told them to do.

The Mirrar people made the decision to close down the blockade last month because of the impending onset of the wet season. Like most Aboriginal people, they are terribly solicitous of the welfare of guests on their land and believed that the harshness of the summer "Wet" might be too much for many protesters. Rather than have the protest fizzle out, they decided to close it down in a disciplined way.

The Mirrar also recognised that the stress of having thousands of people in their backyard had taken its toll on their community.

Whilst the blockade had ended, the protest would go on, with the focus shifted to the cities where most Australians live. ★

Further information about the Jabiluka campaign can be found on the Northern Territory Jabiluka Alliance's website at [www.jabiluka.net](http://www.jabiluka.net). Messages of support can be sent to the Alliance at PO Box 2120, Darwin, Northern Territory 0801, Australia.



# Colombia not Columbia

Both of Colombia's guerilla movements are preparing for a new phase of struggle.

## "The problem is to stop the war"

Interview with Olga Lucia Marin and Rafael Vargas of the International Commission of the FARC -Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia.

### Does the FARC think that the new Conservative government offers a better chance for peace than another Liberal Party government would have done?

Both the Conservative party and the Liberal Party are of the right. Governments of both parties have perpetrated massacres and been equally militaristic. The Conservative candidate, Andres Pastrana, said he would meet with the guerrillas, visit the FARC's camps, and take the peace process in hand personally, not delegate responsibility to subordinates. He said he would make the peace project the project of his government, and not the other way round, as previous presidents had done.

We thought the proposal was interesting, not because we thought Pastrana was better than the Liberal candidate, Horacio Serpa, or that he would do better, but because if Pastrana went to our camps that would be a big political victory for us.

What is more, Serpa was the continuation of a government that had lost a lot of credibility, and which had many problems with the *gringos*. Serpa wasn't going to be able to solve those problems.

The Conservative candidate had a cleaner image and more strength, because he's a typical representative of the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> We thought it was better to have a strong government capable of pushing the process forward.

And as president-elect his attitude was quite audacious. He visited our camps in a war zone, and spent more than three hours in the hands of the guerrillas. It was a very important meeting, not least because the president himself was quite surprised to see how big, how well organised and how well equipped militarily the guerrilla camps were.

At that meeting Manuel Marulanda (known as *Tirofijo*, or "Sure-shot") the historic leader of the FARC, laid out the FARC's views on peace and the five conditions we see as necessary to create an atmosphere in which we can begin to talk.



We put forward the need to demilitarise five municipalities, in order to ensure a physical space under our control where the different sectors of Colombian society can meet – both the popular organisations and the political parties – and with sufficient guarantees that we won't be assassinated by the paramilitary forces.

We put forward the need to dismantle the paramilitary groups, because we insist this is a state policy – the paramilitaries are trained, financed and armed by the state, and they're organised by the armed forces and the mafia bosses. They know who is responsible, so why not dismantle the groups and remove the civilian figures they use as a front, people like the Castano family, who are a bunch of mafioso.

We also raised with the government the need to decriminalise social protest. In Colombia leaders of the trade unions and social movements are treated as terrorists and guerrillas. They are submitted to anti-terrorist laws and special courts where the identity of the judges and the witnesses remains secret. Judgment is passed with no need for proof.

We asked the government to stop using terms like "narco-terrorist" and "narco-guerrilla" in the media and in official pronouncements. Because as we've long insisted, there is no proof – it is not true that the guerrilla force is involved in drug trafficking.

In fact we believe that drugs degrade the human being and human relations.

Within the FARC, use of drugs is an offence punishable by expulsion from the movement. What is more the big drug barons have financed the death squads so we cannot have any kind of pact or agreement with them.

And there's the question of the soldiers. We have more than 250 government soldiers who we've taken as prisoners of war.<sup>2</sup> And since this is a situation where one army confronts another, we are proposing an exchange of these soldiers for the guerrillas who are also prisoners of war. We know it won't be easy, but we think we will get the prisoners released.

### Your demands have caused quite a stir in Colombia's ruling circles.

We now know that there are big differences at the top. The government is just a part of the picture.

The dominant political class in Colombia is divided between more and less reactionary sectors. There's the militarist sector, both inside and outside the armed forces, which doesn't agree with the peace process, much less with the demilitarisation of territory which we have demanded. This is a delicate area for them, because it is the home of their most important elite counter-insurgency battalion, which is based in San Vicente del Caguan.<sup>3</sup>

We are developing talks with other sections of Colombian society in connection with this process. We want to discuss the ten points we put forward back in 1993; a platform for a government of national reconstruction which addresses the political, economic and social aspects which we think represent the various interests of Colombian society. We've presented this platform to the employers associations, to the bishops, and to members of parliament. This has been an interesting process. It has allowed us to know what each of these sectors is thinking. They've been receptive, but that doesn't mean the job is an easy one.

### The peace processes in some other countries has led to the guerrilla struggle being abandoned and armed organisations being reabsorbed into civilian life.

Nothing we have said means that we are going to demobilise and hand over our weapons. We are looking for a way to end the war, but our weapons will not be surrendered. It has cost us a great deal of sweat and blood to get to where we



are. If the situation really changed, it might be time to put the weapons away, but not to hand them over.

In any case, history has shown that popular movements are always betrayed after they give up their weapons. This is something we've made absolutely clear to the government, the different organisations we've been speaking to, and to the international community.

In fact the top ranks of the oligarchy are less interested in the peace process than the smaller bosses organisations which are more severely affected. What the Colombian oligarchy wants from this process is not to carry out the reforms we are asking for. For them, the peace process is based on the Central American model of demobilisation.

We've told them that we are not going to disarm, because we are not going to convert ourselves into a political current. What we are planning to do is to organise a Bolivar Movement for a New Colombia, as a sort of clandestine version of Patriotic Union (UP), because UP itself was exterminated.<sup>4</sup>

The FARC will not get involved in anything like the Central American peace processes, where the agreements are not respected and the peoples high hopes are dashed.

### **The United States have kept very quiet throughout this process. Could they really put their weight behind a peace process as they did in El Salvador or Guatemala ?**

They are deeply involved in the war, and they intend to remain so. They've always been supporting the war, because they have a lot of interests at stake. All the fuss about the fight against drugs has only served to conceal the extent of their involvement in the war. And if it is war they want, we are perfectly able to give it to them.

We will see if they are really in a position to cope with a Vietnam in Latin America. Because Colombia is not El Salvador or Guatemala. The guerrilla movement here is one of the strongest seen in Latin America.

### **The strength of Colombia's guerrillas depends on the degree of unity between the different organisations. But it seems that each group is going in its own direction.**

The ELN and ourselves are involved in different processes. We don't want to make judgments, because we think its good that each organisation should have its own space and we should allow the work of each time to mature.

For the same reason we will not take part in the coming National Convention for Peace.<sup>5</sup> Maybe we will in the future, if the process continues.

The Co-ordination isn't working.<sup>6</sup> We are waiting for a meeting of the National Leadership. Relations are friendly, but there's no joint activity,

neither political nor military. There are some internal questions we haven't been able to sort out, so we are waiting for this meeting.

### **What about the civilian movement in favour of peace ?**

Well, we are a little bit worried about the orientation that has been given to this movement. Intentionally or not, it has adopted the analysis that the country is facing a conflict between the extreme right and the extreme left, between guerrillas and paramilitaries, with the state as the victim in the background.

Our argument is that this just isn't true. The paramilitaries are a state policy. What is developed in Colombia is state terrorism. We ourselves are a consequence of this war imposed by the state.

We have argued that the problem is not to humanise the war, as some suggest, but to stop it. We have to convince these social groups that it is not enough to stop the shooting. Stopping the shooting won't stop the violence, because the violence is economic, social, political; criminal violence will increase, because we can see throughout the world that conditions will continue to get worse. So we need to try and bring together this whole movement to put pressure on the government to change the conditions, and not fall into the trap of depicting the state as the victim.

### **How far has the movement in Colombia been affected by the collapse of "really existing socialism" and the difficulties in Cuba ?**

It really hasn't affected us much, because we were expecting it. We knew that Gorbachev was in the process of dismantling the social system in the Soviet Union. But we had never been dependent on the Soviet Union or Cuba, so we didn't have problems on that score.

We were also critical of some of the things done there. We do not have any external model of society we want to copy in Colombia; we press on with our own practice, in accordance with our own conditions. What we are convinced of is that the struggle for socialism continues, that this has not lost its validity, and that we have to go on working for the revolution. ★

#### **Notes**

(This interview was carried out by Ion Arregi at the end of September for the October issue of the Basque magazine *Hika*.)

1. The Pastranas are one of a handful of families which have dominated Colombian politics for most of this century. Andres father Misael Pastrana Borrero was president for the Conservative party from 1970 to 1974, and was noted for his offensive against the peasantry. Andres Pastrana himself was formerly in charge of one of the country's main TV news programmes, *Noticiero TV Hoy*.

2. About 45 more prisoners were taken when the FARC overran the southeastern border town of Mitu in the first days of November. Casualty figures have been disputed, but the FARC may have killed as many as 120 government troops when they destroyed the local garrison and then ambushed reinforcements as they tried to make their way to the remote capital of the

Amazonian province of Vaupes. This was certainly one of the biggest military defeats inflicted on government forces during the entire guerrilla war.

3. In the first week after 9 November, when demilitarisation of the five municipalities was due to be complete, President Pastrana insisted that 130 soldiers would remain at the headquarters of the Cazadores Battalion in San Vicente, to provide "logistical" support to the government negotiators based there. The Armed Forces Chief General Fernando Tapias insisted that their weapons would be kept in storage.

4. Union Patriótica (UP) was launched by the FARC and the Communist Party in 1985 as a broad electoral front, following a peace plan presented by the Conservative president Belisario Betancur three years earlier. It was hoped it would become the country's third political force and main opposition party, while providing a vehicle for FARC members to return to civilian politics.

In fact they were the first to be killed in what became a full-scale terror directed against UP by the security forces and their paramilitary substitutes. About 3,000 UP members, including most of the leadership and hundreds of mayors, local government councillors and electoral candidates died in the slaughter which followed.

5. See the Introduction to this section and the interview with Pablo Beltran of the ELN for an account of the ELNs proposal for a National Convention.

6. The Co-ordinadora Guerrillera Simon Bolivar (Simon Bolivar Guerrilla Co-ordination) was set up in the mid 1980s by the ELN and other guerrilla groups which refused to accept President Betancur's peace proposals. After the failure of Patriotic Union (UP) and the resumption of armed struggle by the FARC, it too joined the CGSB. In the previous round of peace talks, held in 1991 and 1992 in Caracas and Tlaxcala, Mexico with the government of Cesar Gaviria, the guerrillas were represented jointly by the CGSB.

## **The logic of annihilation must change**

Interview with Pablo Beltran of the Central Command of the ELN (National Liberation Army)

### **Who wants peace in Colombia ?**

The conflict in Colombia is complicated. It is more than just an armed conflict. It is a situation of very serious and growing poverty, of unemployment, political oppression and repression, of dirty war and state terrorism.

So, in that sense, it's the majority of the people who have most interest in peace.

On the other hand, in as much as the ruling classes invest many millions of dollars in a war which they aren't winning, they too begin to realise that this is a bad investment, and begin to understand that a political solution might be better. Although there still is not a consensus amongst the ruling elite on this.

### **There seems to have been a growing sentiment in favour of peace in Colombian society in recent years**

Yes. There have been more and more voices across society demanding peace. This has a positive aspect. It indicates people are becoming more active, participating more.

In other words these are the seeds of a long-term process of organising a legal opposition, so that this role is not limited



## ★ Colombia

to that of the armed insurgency. What's the weak point? Well, the paramilitary strategy is to push the war to extremes of barbarity and indiscriminate violence, attacking unarmed civilians so that, firstly, they stop supporting any movements for social change in Colombia, and secondly that they call for peace at any price.

Fortunately, we've been able to counter this tendency and we've already had some success in persuading people that peace is not just an end to the fighting, but the achievement of justice too.

### What are the ELN's aims with this National Convention?

The National Convention is intended to allow those who have no voice to express their opinions about the crisis through which the Colombian nation is passing, and the solutions which are needed. That's the spirit of the National Convention.

The country needs to be given a new lead; we can play our part in giving that lead, letting people know our proposals. We want society to know what the ELN thinks. And with the emergence of a social movement demanding peace, the best thing is to come together in dialogue with these sectors, to develop ideas together with them, but also to debate out the differences we do have. For us it's very important that they should know more about us and what we are proposing, but also that they should have this opportunity to criticise us and push for corrections and improvements in our positions. We think everybody can gain from this.

### Assuming it does happen, what organisational shape will the Convention take?

There should be some preparatory meetings, to draw in representatives of the different mass social movements. We don't want the Convention to be filled just with personalities. It has to involve people from the grass-roots, from the communities and social movements. They must first have the chance to debate the issues, so that their representatives can bring their proposals.

The minority will be observers from the government and other branches of the state, from NGOs and various international observers.

In other words there will be a majority which discusses and decides, and a minority which just observes.

### What repercussions have the talks in Mainz had in Colombian society?

The whole Mainz process raised huge expectations in all social sectors in Colombia. This reflects how badly people want peace. Any step forward in this critical situation generates immense illusions. This is positive in so far as it shows the growing intensity of people's



demands. But it also indicates a weakness, because the media have really been building the whole thing up. When the results people want are not forthcoming, there will be a feeling of despair. And then the elite can step back in and say "You see, you have to follow us, because change is impossible".

It has also provoked a dispute within the ruling classes, over who should or shouldn't have been talking to us.

Because we gave priority to civil society, the central state is getting jealous. Talks with the government haven't begun. This doesn't fit into their framework, which assumes that talks will be between the state and the insurgents, and that everyone else's job is to listen and nod in approval. They want to conduct the music from a single score – but we don't want just one conductor.

We have traditionally underestimated the political struggle in Colombia. And, even more so, we have underestimated the importance of the international arena for conducting this struggle.

We've found people very receptive, very supportive, but very ill-informed. We've made a huge number of contacts in these last three months, with governments, parliaments, parties, NGOs, churches.

Unfortunately, everything in Colombia depends on the US government. The only possible counterbalance to a pressure as great as that of the US is the pressure of European opinion.

For us, it is very important to expose at the international level things like the use of the paramilitaries, and to weaken and defeat the Doctrine of National Security.<sup>2</sup>

This is very important for us, because the whole US intervention in Colombia rests on this strategy. They could easily dismantle the paramilitaries,

but they don't do so. Because they know that the paramilitaries compensate for the inefficiency of the army.

The peace processes in Central America were a lesson for Europe in this sense, because Europe had a decisive impact in some aspects and this was a completely new phenomenon right in the US' backyard.

It showed that when the public opinion of the peoples of Europe really puts pressure on their governments, they feel obliged to act.

Any action of this kind which serves to de-legitimise the paramilitary strategy is absolutely basic to cut short the suffering in Colombia.

In the last two sessions of the UN Human Rights Committee in Geneva, in 1997 and 1998, strong condemnations have been heard from a number of countries. Some others have not taken such a clear position, or have kept quiet. It's not a problem of lack of information; all the countries have their information services, so the silence of the minority is not by chance.

### What are the US objectives in Colombia?

At the moment the US is doing two things in Colombia. It continues to facilitate the development of the paramilitary strategy, and it is trying to strengthen the army, which is demoralised.

Most of the millions of dollars of aid the US government sends to Colombia goes to finance the war. The US has important interests in the area, like the Panama Canal and the Venezuelan oil fields. What is more, they don't like the example the Colombian guerrilla movement sets.

### Isn't the US irritated by Pastrana's declarations about peace and his trip to meet with Marulanda in the jungle?

No, it is all part of the propaganda show. They all pretend to be for peace. But in reality their actions in Colombia serve to encourage war.

### Why is Pastrana making this offer of peace? What does it mean?

He is doing the same as all newly-elected presidents in Colombia – talk about peace. Now he has to turn the words into deeds, but he's got serious difficulties. He said he'd purge the military hierarchy; he hasn't. The same generals with their long records of abuse are still there.

This leads us to ask two questions: is it that Pastrana doesn't want to do it, or that he can't do it? I think it's the latter.

I think he's going to go for the release of prisoners. But there are other things – like decriminalising social protest – which they won't do unless they're pushed.

And if we do push them, then they'll



say "OK, but what are you going to give us in return?"

In other words, the democratic changes will really be kept back as bargaining counters with the guerrilla movement. The only thing Pastrana is really interested in is demobilising the guerrillas.

### **Are the ELN and the FARC following separate paths, with no possibility of convergence?**

We agreed at the beginning of the year that each group would pursue peace following in some ways a similar logic, but at different times and in different areas, and that later on these would converge. We stand by that, and we believe it will be positive to develop the two processes simultaneously. What I don't think would work would be to try and roll the two processes into one.

### **Will there be demobilisation and disarmament?**

One of the differences between this process and those in Central America is that here the guerrilla is not going to disarm, and not going to disappear. Because the guerrilla here is, in effect, a state. It has to carry out its duties in terms of regulating the economy, administering justice, providing security and defence for its zones and the communities living there. So if we are in effect a state, we cannot give up using arms for the purposes of that state which we represent.

So we have to find a political formula that will make such cohabitation possible. The idea that the guerrilla movement is going to disappear needs to be got rid of once and for all.

In so far as confidence builds up, agreements are implemented, and the need for weapons grows less, then the time may come to discuss this again, but for the moment experience has taught us that the experience of Patriotic Union (UP) turned into a genocide. Three thousand of its members were murdered and the party disappeared. Many other guerrillas who laid down their arms were co-opted by the state.

### **As part of a peace process, could the army and the guerrillas be combined into a single army?**

Given how long and bitter the conflict has been, it would be better if each side remained separate and held its own ground.

We also have to think about this peace process, not only in terms of the future, but also of the past, in terms of justice. Our view is that no-one should serve in the country's armed forces if they have been guilty of crimes against humanity.

These problems need to be dealt with if we are to think clearly about the armed forces of the future.

**It seems strange to talk about a peace agreement where each side holds onto its own territory. This is certainly different from peace processes in other parts of the world. You'd expect the state to want full control over the army, the police and so forth...**

Of course, but the fact is that in Colombia a state based on the rule of law does not exist. They do not have a monopoly on the use of force, they do not have control over all the population or all the territory, they do not control many basic functions of a state.

So we have to try and see what form of state there could be. Let's show a bit of imagination! Let's think about some sort of confederation. People say this is very difficult, that it would deny part of the state. We reply that whilst preserving the territorial unity of the nation, we should try to find a political formula. Would this be better or worse than just going on fighting?

### **So what does the future hold?**

Peace will come when the ruling elite in Colombia changes its logic. At the moment their logic is one of intolerance: the insurgency and any other opposition must simply disappear.

When they reverse this and recognise that we are a legitimate force and they can't make us disappear, then we can begin to work out some form of cohabitation and mutual recognition.

But so long as all their peace plans are aimed at eliminating the insurgents and forcing them to capitulate, then it's not even worth sitting down to talk.

The war has been going on for forty years. The discussions must focus on the structural changes that are needed. Not just about a few political reforms. Beginning this political journey is a tortuous business, but it is worth it. We will make progress. But people should not be impatient, or expect very rapid results ★.

#### **Notes**

(This interview was carried out by Ion Arregi at the end of September for the October issue of *Hika*. It has been edited for reasons of space.)

1. The proposal for a National Convention, bringing the ELN together with representatives of different sectors of civil society, and with government delegates in attendance, to discuss an agreed agenda of national issues, was the main outcome of the preliminary meetings held in Mainz, Germany in July this year. At a subsequent meeting held at an ELN camp in the south east of Antiochia province on 11-12th October (a meeting which the government allowed two jailed ELN leaders, Francisco Galan and Felipe Torres, to attend), agreement was reached on a concrete timetable and procedures.

The National Convention is set to be inaugurated on the 13th February 1999. It will then hold five meetings on different themes, before presenting its conclusions at a final meeting on 12th October 1999.

2. The Doctrine of National Security is the cold-war philosophy which informed US policy towards Latin America though most of the post 2nd World War period. In the 1960s and 70s it provided the framework for promoting and training military dictatorships in much of the continent. In the 1980s it gave birth to the strategy of Low Intensity Warfare applied in Central America. The Colombian guerrilla movements would argue that it continues to inform US covert support for the war against them, often under the guise of combating the drugs trade.

3. See introductory note for details of the 8th July meeting.



# A Profile of Poverty

Antonio Hercules looks at the causes of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa, and evaluates the anti-poverty strategies on offer.

**Far from harmonising** human life chances in different parts of the world, the current phase of globalisation – widening and deepening of international flows of trade, finance and information in a single, integrated global market. – has increased regional inequalities.

Trade liberalisation will increase global income by US\$212-\$510 billion in 1995-2000. These gains come from greater efficiency and higher rates of return on capital, as well as from the expansion of trade.

But the losses from this process will be concentrated in those countries that can least afford it. The least developed countries stand to lose up to \$600m a year. Sub-Saharan Africa will lose \$1.2bn. Foreign exchange losses will translate into pressure on incomes, a diminishing ability to sustain imports and increased dependency on aid. Revenue from trade will be lost, undermining the capacity of governments to develop the economic and social infrastructure on which sustained reduction in human poverty depends.

Around the world, from the traditional social-democratic “welfare states” of Western Europe, to the independent states of the Third World, the ideological thrust of globalisation, neo-liberalism, has created a new orthodoxy – predicated partly on the notion that in order to revitalise the market, national governments have to decrease social spending.

The French economist Maxime Durand (1998) writes that the offensive against the public sector and social services has become universal and world-wide. “This is not only an attack on the notion of public property in a ‘public sector’. It is also the motor behind a wrenching change in the way societies meet human needs. Because this change operates at such deep levels, it has been difficult to mount a counter-attack.”

Durand explains that the welfare state, public services, and full employment were the global solution to the crisis that began with the Great Depression of the 1930s and led to fascism and the world war. Most mainstream economists concluded that the market, organised in this manner could overcome the contradiction between the unceasing search for maximum profits and the need to expand markets to absorb a rapidly growing production. The public sector, broadly defined, therefore fulfilled an economic function.

The system could now claim that it could prevent future crises, that it could guarantee jobs for all, a high-quality social safety net, and a rapid growth in purchasing power. The neoliberal offensive represents a total reversal of this system, and a concerted effort to discredit the previous model.

Economic policy is being formulated in a new global environment which glorifies the liberalisation and privatisation of social services traditionally provided by the state. As Durand puts it, “there is a consciously orchestrated policy of systematic social regression. Capital has stated that full employment and social security have become luxuries it can no longer support.”

The impact is being felt across the world, including Sub-Saharan Africa. Reducing the meagre vestiges of welfarism in the poorest region of the world means that millions more of the poor face a desperate slide even further into barbarism and utter despair.



## The causes of poverty...

The World Bank (1996) identified the main causes of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa as:

- Inadequate access to employment opportunities.
- Inadequate physical assets, such as land and capital, and minimal access by the poor to credit even on a small scale.
- Inadequate access to the means of supporting rural development in poor regions.
- Inadequate access to markets where the poor can sell goods and services.
- Low endowment of human capital.
- Destruction of natural resources leading to environmental degradation and reduced productivity.
- Inadequate access to assistance for those living at the margin and those

victimised by transitory poverty.

- Lack of participation, failure to draw the poor into the design of development programmes.

This is clearly a “technicist” and superficial analysis. It does not provide an historical account for poverty. Nor does it explain regional economic relations within the global economy. It ignores the influence of global politics and power on the issue of poverty within the Third World.

## An history of poverty creation

At its base, the roots of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa lie in the historical path of economic and political development. The tragedy of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa today is the outcome of this path.

According to Leys (1996), the causes of human poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa include:

- “Neo-patrimonialism”, “rent-seeking” and the exploitation of ethnic differences leading to a systematic misuse of public resources
- Governing abuse and corruption
- Lack of trained and experienced entrepreneurs and people in senior and middle management and technical positions led to delays and inefficiencies in the use of resources in all sectors.

Leys links these factors to two underlying problems. First, the African experience of centralised colonial authority, colonial trading monopolies and the colonial exploitation of ethnic differences. Secondly, the sum of the surpluses taken out of Africa by foreign companies since independence through “transfer pricing”, predatory “management fees”, tied “aid” and other forms of unequal exchange which have significantly handicapped the region’s development.

He argues further that today we need a “general explanation in which all the determinants... find their place in an appropriately multi-levelled and historical framework”.

## Regional economic relations

Within the “multi-levelled and historical framework” one critical cause of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is the region’s location in the global economic order in relation to the major regional blocs of global capital, such as the US (and NAFTA), the European Union, and Japan.

The origins of Africa’s tragedy



clearly lie far back in the emergence and evolution of the world capitalist economy. The mammoth task of surmounting the political and economic reality in Africa today, particularly Sub-Saharan Africa, is therefore also bound up with the fact that the leading industrial states have recently chosen to abandon that system of regulation to which the global economy was subject at the time when Africa was launched into independence.

Leys argues that by the end of the 1980s the economies of Sub-Saharan Africa could no longer ensure the survival of a growing proportion of their inhabitants. World demand for the region's products is growing slowly or even declining, while world supplies are being constantly expanded. Many of the agricultural commodities in question are increasingly being produced more efficiently outside Africa under market conditions of production.

Since the early 1970s the poorest countries have suffered a cumulative decline of 50% in terms of trade. For the Third World as a group the cumulative terms-of-trade losses amounted to \$290 billion between 1980 and 1991.

Much of this catastrophic fall was due to the decline in real commodity prices – in 1990 they were 45% lower than in 1980 and 10% lower than the lowest prices during the Great Depression in 1932. Third World countries' terms of trade for manufactured goods also fell — by 35% during 1970-91.

This forces prices steadily downwards towards levels at which Africans will no longer be able to live on what they can earn by producing them.

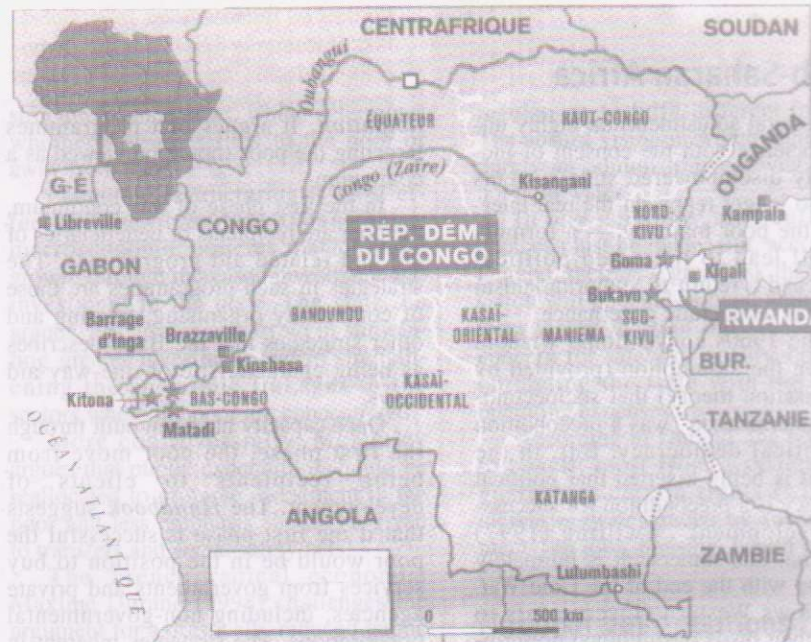
In other words, the equilibrium wage level in many African countries is increasingly likely to be below the level of subsistence. As André Gorz puts it, "more and more Africans are becoming supernumeraries of the human race".

### The influence of global politics

Most African countries are going through decisive strategic shifts in their respective modes of governance. Massive changes are underway in countries emerging from war (Angola, Mozambique, Eritrea), "ethnic" conflict (Uganda and Sudan), centralised one party regimes (Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya), structural adjustment (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Egypt) among other "maladies".

In particular, countries going through World Bank-driven structural adjustment programmes are fundamentally redefining the structure of their economies and respective modes of governance, with far-reaching implications for local urban governance. Many countries are trying to initiate or consolidate multi-party democracies at a time when the consequences of urbanisation in ecologically fragile contexts become apparent.

The older more established and stable polities like Botswana, Kenya, and



Ivory Coast are going through changes in their systems of local governance as they adjust to the changing balance of global power, economic liberalisation and increased local and international demands for adherence to human rights obligations.

According to Swilling (1997), a shift in thinking is taking place across the globe regarding the nature of the state and its relationship with society. "The shift from a noun (government) to a verb (governance), from structure to process, from things to relations, from independence to inter-dependence, from linearity to (feedback) loops, from rational struc-

turation to patterns of chaos, is influenced by the combined universal disillusionment with the nature of the state and the impact of the post-modern imagination that has abandoned the myth of human self-unification and the vision of a utopian end-state. It was the World Bank's 1989 report on Sub-Saharan Africa that forced the word governance into the mainstream debate."

There are other approaches to the emerging governance debate. Leftwich (1993) views governance as an ideological device that post-Cold War Western Governments have chosen to mask the imposition of capitalist market policies

## Migration

Migration to urban areas is often a survival strategy for the rural poor.

- In Mali this migration occurs village to city, village to village, or sometimes internationally (to Côte d'Ivoire and France).
- In Senegal, migration usually occurs from the interior to the coast, from the North to the South, from Senegal into the Gambia and to France.
- In Niger migration occurs from rural areas to other rural areas that may have better commercial agricultural opportunities, coastal areas, oil fields in Algeria and Libya, gold fields in Burkina Faso, and small and large towns in Niger.

The movements to coastal areas are becoming an increasingly crucial issue for the environment in these regions.

In West Africa, for example, the coastal countries have absorbed an estimated 8 million people in the past three decades. This figure is

likely to increase to about 20 million in 2020.

Despite the fact that the majority of the population and the poor in particular remain rural, urbanisation has become one of the most conspicuous consequences of the agricultural decline in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Urban culture is more secular, individualistic, and commercially oriented than rural culture. Traditional coping strategies no longer work; traditional cultures are breaking down; family and neighbourhood patterns of solidarity no longer prevail.

Women are particularly affected by this social transformation. Without an increase in the demand for labour, many unmarried women who have no opportunity to contribute to family enterprises such as farming and services will be forced to make a living for themselves and their children in an increasingly hostile social environment of crime, violence, prostitution and Aids. ★



## ★ Sub-Saharan Africa

(via structural adjustment) on highly unequal societies with the consent of increasingly disempowered state systems which no longer represent the real interests of the poor majority — a formula that will lead to increased political conflict and a return to authoritarianism rather than democratic governance.

In the 1960s conventional wisdom rested on the assumption (provided by modernisation theory) that socioeconomic “modernisation” was a precondition for political democracy. But, in the 1990s, it is being asserted that political democracy is a precondition for successful “development”. Swilling (1997) argues that this somersault is intimately bound up with the end of the Cold War. This allows Western Governments to impose their own constitutional prescriptions. The rise of pro-democracy movements have also played a role in forcing democratisation onto the agenda.

### Reaching the poor

Macro-economic adjustments imposed by structural adjustment — or self-imposed in the case of South Africa — have worsened the plight of the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa. While most adjustment policies target trade, exchange rates and agricultural sector policy reform, the accompanying fiscal discipline imposes stringent boundaries on social spending.

Adjustment policies have resulted in severe cutbacks and in some cases the elimination of social and economic programmes. As the ideology of the market as the answer to the world's ills gains global hegemony there has been a near universal decline in welfare and social expenditure as the key means to reaching the poor.

Development practitioners and politicians now favour approaches that would render governments largely free from caring for the poor. One example of this is the World Bank's *Handbook on Par-*

*ticipation*. It argues that programmes targeting the poor should be viewed as a continuum.

In the first phase of this continuum, the poor are recipients or beneficiaries of aid and related aid programmes. The strategies in such programmes are those of community organising, training and other strategies that the Bank describes as being characteristic of one-way aid flows.

Once capacity has been built through the first phase, the poor move from being recipients to clients of development. The *Handbook* suggests that if the first phase is successful the poor would be in the position to buy services from governments and private agencies, including non-governmental organisations. The strategies inherent in this phase revolve around providing micro-credit for self-employment. This would see a proliferation of market-based financial institutions, the decentralisation of authority and strategies to strengthen local level institutions.

The next phase of the continuum involves the poor becoming owners and managers of their assets and activities, “influencing and sharing control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which effect them.”

There are some merits in this continuum. Except that the first two phases of the continuum seem to run concurrently, and neither of them very successfully. Only in the last stage do the poor — theoretically — actively shape and determine the programmes that will impact on their lives. This includes the poor making inputs into macro-economic policies that ultimately effect their lives.

It is certainly true that much anti-poverty work has had little effect. In many Sub-Saharan countries the favoured government anti-poverty measures were public works programmes. Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zim-

babwe and more recently, South Africa have launched ambitious programmes to generate employment while building much needed infrastructure such as roads and clinics. While there has not been a comprehensive evaluation of these programmes in all these countries indicators are that in South Africa, the Public Works Programmes create at most, cyclical employment at wages below trade union-suggested minimum levels.

In response, some development practitioners have developed participatory approaches. For example, the “Organisational Workshop” methodology was first developed and implemented in South America and more recently in Zimbabwe. The method has at its core objective the transference of organisational and entrepreneurial skills that will remain with participating community members long after the roads and clinics have been built.

Key to the organisational workshop is that the participants determine the ‘products’ that are to be built, they determine the composition of the teams that will build the products and how these products will be built. Participating community members also decide the rate at which they will be paid and how these payments will be made and utilised.

However, even progressive interventions such as these become pedantic and meaningless if the poor are not mobilised to articulate their needs in the bigger political sphere. The poor far outnumber the privileged. It is time that the political and economic cultures reflected this.

A commitment to participation and including the poor in decision-making is the first step in any anti-poverty programme. And this commitment to participation should be extended to all aspects of development programming including the managing of aid flows and growing the capacity of the poor.

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## The poor and the market

Within the framework of structural adjustment in Sub-Saharan Africa, the World Bank seeks to bring the poor into the very market which has isolated and marginalised them. The Bank observes that although most (rural) poor have some assets, the value and uses of these assets vary considerably. Most farmers operate on a small scale; and the kinds and small quantities of commodities produced often mean these products are not part of the market economy.

In Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Malawi, for example, the rural poor grow 60% of their food, and in Tanzania the poor produce 50% of what they consume. Subsistence farmers sell virtually nothing of what they produce in the market.

The Bank concludes that the poor are only marginal *producers* for the market, but important *buyers* in markets for consumer goods. Thus, "only to the extent poor farmers produce tradable products will they be affected by broad macroeconomic developments."

The degree to which the poor interact with the market as sellers of their agricultural produce or labour depends not only on the demand for these products and for labour in the urban centres, but also on accessibility to the urban market, determined by distance and quality of the road infrastructure that connects their community to these markets.

These limitations, particularly on the rural poor, restricts their ability to use modern technologies and inputs and prevent them from benefiting from subsidies for inputs such as fertilisers.

In addition, the participation of the poor in the labour market depends not only on their skills and location but also their gender. The notion that a large supply of "surplus" labour exists among the poor applies more to males than to females. In general, females have little, if any, surplus labour to supply because they are often fully employed.

There is no doubt that investment is the driving force of economic growth under market conditions. The issue is whether investment in the poor is growth enhancing. McKinley (1997) asserts that what matters is not simply the level but also the composition of the output – whether the production of goods and services enhances human well-being.

According to McKinley, what matters most is the character of economic growth, which is determined in part by the structure of the economy and by government policy. Pro-poor growth occurs when growth of output is concentrated in economic sectors in which most of the poor labour, and this output generates income for the factors of production they possess. This requires an enabling environment which determines whether the poor have access to resources and can use them efficiently. Central to this enabling environment is the

structure of incentives, which determines whether resources flow to the poor or away from them.

Economic restructuring is most effective when based on expansionary macroeconomic policies that promote growth through increased investment and investment in the poor. The state, he argues, has an important role in stimulating greater investment and in strengthening the economic linkages to the sectors where the poor are concentrated.

More controversially, McKinley argues that public expenditure should be reallocated to promote investment in the poor and less emphasis should be given to transfers and social safety nets!

The French radical economist Maxime Durand (1998) challenges the argument for a drastically reduced public sector. Thirty years ago, he points out, most economists agreed there was a theoretical justification for the existence of a public sector. According to Durand, the arguments used then have not lost their weight today.

"One primary example applies particularly well to the networks (health, transport) built up using public funds. Heavy infrastructure means large investments in upkeep, extension and modernisation. If these networks are opened to private exploitation, investors will obviously do their best not to shoulder any of these expenses and they will see it as completely natural that such support should come from the national budget.

It would therefore be necessary to create regulations and to define a system of financial obligations, and later to ensure co-ordination between the various private enterprises involved. That is why, even in the most ultra-liberal programmes, it is necessary to draft

regulations to fulfil different functions. The absurd vision in which regulation is purely an administrative deviation does not hold water."

In any economy, difficult social choices must be made. But, according to Durand, there is a great risk that privatisation will go hand-in-hand with a short-term vision that not only leads to less concern for safety or quality, but entails burdening the state with the bill for operating expenses.

According to Durand, the poor stand to benefit most from a system which guarantees certain rights (which are increasingly demanded by social movements) to jobs, housing, health care, and education.

## National policy options

Third World countries, like those in Sub-Saharan Africa, face a particularly difficult challenge in the new world order. Despite the immensity of the tasks facing countries in Africa, there are still a number of practical policy options open to governments. Even without overtly radical policies, there are things countries can do to increase their economic space without having to succumb to the logic of globalisation.

- Manage trade and capital flows more carefully: national governments can exercise more discretion when adopting policies of liberalisation.
- Invest in the poor: greater social expenditure (education, etc.) in national populations are required to meet the demands of increasingly complex world of work.
- Encourage small enterprises: local economic development which is based on facilitating small home-based enterprises to emerge and

## Rural-urban inequality

Although urban income-poverty is growing rapidly, the income-poor are still overwhelmingly found in rural areas. In Third World countries, 43% of rural men are illiterate, more than twice the share in urban areas. For women, the shares are 66% and 38%. This rural-urban inequality in literacy reflects the general differential access to social services.

There has been a rapid rise in the urban population in recent decades. The population of cities like Nairobi, Dar es Salaam, Nouakchott, Lusaka and Kinshasa, increased 700% between 1950 and 1980. Africa's urban population is growing at 6% per year. By the year 2000, between 40 and 50% of the population will be living in urban areas.

The urban poor are confronted by a different set of constraints than their rural counterparts, including the need to rent accommodations, pay higher costs for transportation, seek work where employment opportunities are scarce, and deal with abysmal sanitation facilities. In addition, the urban poor pay higher prices for urban land, when it is available. This land often receives no services. Many of the poor live in peri-urban (peripheral) areas, and have no access to formal land markets.

Per capita consumption in the Cameroon capital, Yaounde, dropped 45% between 1983 and 1993. The average resident consumes 10% less than in 1964. (Source: World Bank, 1995, Cameroon Poverty Assessment). ★



## ★ Sub-Saharan Africa

flourish within a community setting benefits the poor more.

- Promote labour-intensive enterprises above mechanised/automated technology: Labour-intensive enterprise development favours the poor when operating within accepted minimum-wage regulated industries.
- Develop and implement long-term poverty eradication strategies: These should involve at their core the poor, from design to implementation.
- Promote political democracy, and increased participation of the national population in the daily running of their own lives: Increased empowerment and ownership of the poor will increase the likelihood of them mobilising to eradicate the patterns of poverty and inequality.
- Promote international relationships between the poor: Globalisation is an international phenomenon – we need international networking and solidarity-building to meet the challenges of organising and mobilising to block neoliberal market impulses. ★

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## Income poverty

People in Sub-Saharan Africa remain among the poorest in the world in real income. Some 220 million people in the region are income-poor, and it is estimated that by the year 2000 half the people in Sub-Saharan Africa will be in income-poverty. According to the World Bank (1996), about 45% of the 590 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa in 1992 lived below the national poverty line. In 1993, an estimated 40% lived on less than US\$1 per day.

Over half these people are from five East African countries and Nigeria. In Gambia and Zambia, nearly two-thirds of the people were income-poor; in Cameroon Guinea-Bissau and Uganda, more than half; and in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya and Nigeria more than a third.

The depth of poverty – how far the poor's incomes fall below the

poverty line – is greater in Africa than elsewhere in the world.

The growth of income in Sub-Saharan Africa has been dismal. Between 1970 and 1992 average per capita GDP in relation to purchasing power parity grew only \$73, compared with growth of \$420 in South Asia and US \$900 in East Asia, regions with incomes comparable to those of Sub-Saharan Africa in 1970.

In 1994, GDP per capita (in 1987 dollars) in Sub-Saharan Africa was \$507, compared to \$823 for all Third World countries, and \$14,473 for all First World countries!

Between 1981 and 1989, per capita GDP fell in 27 of the 42 countries.

In Lesotho the per capita income of the richest 20% is 22 times that of the poorest 20%. For South Africa, the figure is 19 times, and for Kenya 18 times. ★

## Human poverty

Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest proportion of people in – and the fastest growth in – human poverty. Alongside this, the current availability of social services in most Sub-Saharan African countries is the lowest in the world.

There are 22 AIDS cases per 100,000 people in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared to 5 per 100,000 for the Third World as a whole, and 6 per 100,000 in the First World countries.

In the same year, there were 94 tuberculosis cases per 100,000 in Sub-Saharan Africa, 69 in all Third World countries, and 27 in First World countries. There is one doctor per 18,514 people in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared with one doctor per 5,833 people in all Third World countries.

Meanwhile, Sub-Saharan Africans consume 120 cigarettes per year, as compared with 113 for all Third World countries and only 97 in First World countries.

In 1990, 42.25% of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa were illiterate, compared with 29.6% of all Third World countries (illiteracy is virtually 0% in First World countries). Sub-Saharan African women represent 51% of all illiterates in the third world.

Similarly, between 1990-1995, 29% of children did not reach grade 5 in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 25% for all Third World countries, and only 2% for First World nations.

In 1993-1995, 37% of children in Sub-Saharan Africa were not in school, compared with 9% for all Third World countries, and 5% in First World countries.

In 1990, more Sub-Saharan African women died in child-birth than in any other region of the world. There were 971 women deaths per 100,000 live births, compared to 471 for all Third World countries, and just 31 in First World countries.

Thirty one percent of all children under five in Sub-Saharan Africa were underweight, compared with 31% in all Third World countries, and virtually 0% in the First World.

149 Sub-Saharan Africans have radios per 1000 people, compared with 178 for all Third World countries.

In the First World there are 1018 radios per 1000 people. There are 1.1 telephone lines per 100 people in Sub-Saharan Africa, compared with 3.3 lines per 100 people in all Third World countries, and 40.1 in First World countries. ★



# If I were a rich man...

Most analyses of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa are inadequate or superficial. Antonio Hercules outlines the problems in measuring poverty, and takes a critical look at official "poverty profiles" from Zambia, Botswana and South Africa

Many national definitions of poverty are expressed only in income terms (Lok, 1996). At the centre of such definitions is an income or consumption-based poverty line comprised of two elements.

- The expenditure necessary to buy a minimum standard of nutrition and other basic necessities.
- a further amount reflecting the cost of participating in the everyday life of society.

The first part is quite straightforward, and can be derived from minimum nutritional standards (adequate calorific intakes), and related to the cost of food-stuffs in different countries.

The second part is more complicated, and varies a great deal from country to country. Not just in terms of the costs of different items but also in terms of the actual items to be included. These depend on the generally accepted standard of living in a specific society at a particular time. The minimum income needed to stay out of poverty (the poverty line) changes over time. Usually it rises as countries become wealthier. This is partly because the range of goods and services needed to participate in the life of a richer society is much greater than in a poorer society.

These income-based definitions of poverty suffer from four central weaknesses:

- **Relativity:** some analysts emphasise relative poverty as opposed to absolute poverty. This is appropriate when studying poverty in richer countries. But in a country where everybody is starving, relative poverty is relatively unimportant. Where there is starvation, or the risk of it, we need measures of absolute poverty.
- **Common resources:** the income definition of poverty is quite narrow. It pays insufficient attention to the value of common property like communal grazing land, or state-provided services like free education. (Baulch, 1996).
- **Capability:** the maintenance of a certain standard of living depends not just on incomes but also on individual human capabilities which provide individuals with the skills, knowledge or health to acquire income.
- **International relations:** conventional definitions of income-poverty provide relatively little insight into income inequality within specific national social formations. Income poverty definitions may not correspond with the generalised manner in which the specific social formations are stratified in terms of

social classes or layers. This class structure may well provide a more accurate insight into the dynamics producing social and income inequality within these social formations.

Further, the international economic order and the relations between countries of the "First World" and the "Third World" are completely ignored in conventional tabulations of income poverty around the world.

## Human development

Given the limits of the income-poverty approach, many writers have analysed poverty within the "human development" framework. Human development is defined as the process of enlarging people's choices as well as raising the level of well-being achieved.

After all, human poverty encompasses all aspects of human deprivation. The orthodox view of development as the achievement of economic growth and hence improved living standards has been shown to be inadequate. Decades of experience has demonstrated that economic growth does not by itself lead to improved living standards for the majority. It is more realistic to measure human poverty as the denial of opportunities for a tolerable life.

This understanding of poverty is structured to include four main dimensions of impoverished human existence: short life, illiteracy, exclusion and lack of material means.

## Unemployment

The lack of employment opportunities has precipitated income-poverty in urban areas and led to increases in human poverty, where self-employment (predominantly in the informal sector) is the main income-generating activity.

But even the World Bank recognises that self-employment is strongly associated with unstable working conditions and vulnerability.

The informal labour market is usually associated with low wages, low productivity, jobs, temporary activities, sometimes clandestine employment, unsafe labour conditions, and no protection under labour legislation.

Human poverty is understood to manifest itself in the deprivation of people's lives, and often includes much more than a lack of material things – the denial of opportunities and choices most basic to human development – a long healthy creative life, enjoying a decent standard of living freedom, dignity, self-esteem and the respect of others.

This definition of human poverty includes income, but goes far beyond the narrow focus on income, jobs, and the ability of individuals to purchase commodities on the market. Indeed, it raises the social and collective needs of human beings to project a more holistic image of humanity and social progress.

The UNDP (1996) introduced a multi-dimensional measure of human deprivation called the capability poverty measure. This was intended to complement income measures of poverty, by considering the lack of three basic capabilities:

- the capability to be well nourished and healthy
- the capability for healthy reproduction
- the capability to be educated and knowledgeable.

High income-poverty is associated with high human poverty, and low income-poverty with low human poverty (UNDP, 1997). But the two forms of poverty can move in different directions. High income poverty coexists with low

According to the Senegal Priority Household Survey, participation in the public and private formal sector is weak for both sexes and self-employment is the only steady occupational opportunity.

Family enterprises are actually on the rise: men are leaving the formal and public labour market to work in the informal sector and women are leaving the informal wage labour market to avoid exploitation.

These changes result from the interplay between economic crises, a depressed formal job market for males, and increased pressure on women to generate additional income. ★



## ★ Measuring poverty

human poverty in Peru and Zimbabwe, and low income poverty coexists with high human poverty in Côte d'Ivoire and Egypt.

Income-poverty and human poverty statistics tell us different things. For example, income poverty explains only about 10% of the variation in child malnutrition. This is because child malnutrition depends not so much on the income or food available as on the health care available to children and women.

### Country poverty profiles

Poverty indicators form an essential ingredient to national poverty eradication strategies and programmes. They reflect a country's definition of poverty and the strategies or approaches adopted to combat it. They often reveal fundamental assumptions as to the perceived forms and causes of poverty.

Poverty indicators are also core components required to compile poverty profiles. Poverty profiles are analytical tools that summarise poverty-related information in a country and attempt to

answer questions like: who are the poor?; where do they live?; what are the main characteristics of their poverty?; why are they poor?

Usually, the information for developing poverty profiles comes predominantly from service records, and surveys, but also from the analysis of a country's policy framework. Poverty profiles should provide both a snapshot of poverty within a country at a specific point in time, and an indication of poverty trends. Ideally, this should be updated on a regular basis.

Poverty profiles should provide information on the extent, depth and severity of poverty and identify the relevant sub-groups of the poor by their distinguishing characteristics and circumstances, highlighting priority issues and concerns.

They should serve as a guide in the formulation of poverty assessments and the design of national poverty reduction strategies, and as a basis for assessing the possible impact of policy proposals prior to their implementation. ★



# Poverty in South Africa

South Africa has one of the worst records in terms of social indicators (health, education, safe water, fertility) among comparable middle-income Third World countries, and among the worst records in income inequality.

Income poverty in South Africa has a strong correlation with racial discrimination. More than 99% of the income-poor in South Africa are black. Nearly 95% are so-called "African", 5% are so-called "Coloured", and less than 1% so-called "Indian".

Some 75% of South Africa's income-poor live in rural areas, concentrated in the former labour reserves — the Bantustans (homelands). Compared to the urban income-poor, the rural income-poor suffer even higher unemployment rates, even lower educational attainment, much lower access to services such as water and electricity, as well as lower access to productive resources.

Nearly two-thirds of South Africa's income-poor live in three provinces: the Eastern Cape (24%), Kwazulu-Natal (21%) and the Northern Province (18%).

Less than 30% of income-poor working-age adults are actually working. As a result, 40% of income-poor households and 50% are dependent on pensions and remittances as their primary source

of income.

Female-headed households have a 50% higher income-poverty rate than male-headed households. Women suffer from substantially higher unemployment rates: as a result, poor rural women spend more than four hours a day fetching water and wood.

Over 45% of the income-poor are children below the age of sixteen years.

The apartheid era has left a legacy of poverty and inequality in South Africa. In spite of the wealth of the country, a large share of the population has been unable to benefit from South Africa's resources.

A particular problem in South Africa has been the inequality in access to jobs, services, and economic resources for the poor, as well as opportunities to escape poverty (afforded through education, skills training, and better health, for example). Poverty and unemployment status are closely linked: most of the poor do not have jobs, and those who do, work for low wages — often far away from their families. This makes the poor very dependent on pensions and remittances, and hence vulnerable.

Many of the poor live in "sub-standard" housing; most have no access to piped water, electricity or modern sanitation. As a result, they are afflicted with the diseases of

poverty, and have to spend hours every day fetching water and wood. These problems make it extremely difficult for the poor to improve their economic position and escape poverty — especially since apartheid also resulted in the separation and disintegration of families and communities.

While it contains some useful information, the report focused exclusively on income-poverty. The arbitrary manner in which the income-poverty line was chosen for South Africa raises the critical questions of who defines income-poverty, and why. By concentrating on a description of income-poverty and its major characteristics, the report does not analyse the causes or dynamics of poverty, nor make the relevant recommendations.

In reality, of course, human poverty in South Africa has come about as the direct product of colonialism and the historic path of capitalist economic growth.

The economic and social arrangements which today act as the structural foundations of the new South Africa, lie at the roots of how poverty came to be widespread, and came to have the almost exclusively black face that it has today. Any really useful poverty profile would start from an analysis of those issues. ★



# Poverty in Zambia

Zambia is experiencing a social crisis. There has been two decades of decline in the economy, in government services, and in virtually all walks of life. Over six million people, two thirds of Zambia's population, are living below the poverty line. The incidence and severity of poverty has been worst in rural areas, especially in remote areas, but poverty is also widespread in urban areas, where conditions are deteriorating rapidly.

By 1995 the majority of the population had to struggle simply to obtain the basic necessities for their survival.

Among the most critical symptoms of this social crisis are worsening problems of public health and falling life expectancy.

Children's access to education and their level of attainment at school has declined alarmingly. Poverty has led to increasing numbers of children living in especially difficult circumstances, including the estimated 70,000 street children.

## Worsening poverty

During the first decade after independence, Zambia recorded important improvements in the situation of children, with the under-five-mortality rate declining from 220 to 152 deaths per 1000 live births.

Over the same period there were also major improvements in the infant mortality rate, which was reduced from 125 to 80 deaths per 1,000 births.

After 1980 these gains have been reversed. By 1992 the under-five-mortality rate and the infant mortality rate had risen to 202 and 113 deaths per 1,000 respectively.

A similar trend is evident for life expectancy at birth. After reaching a peak of around 54 years in the mid-1980s, by 1992 the average life expectancy of a Zambian was only 45.5 years. This is well below the average of 50.1 years for Sub-Saharan Africa, the poorest region in the Third World.

The rise in child mortality and the decline in life expectancy is closely linked with the economic decline and the growing poverty in which people live. The leading cause of death among children is malaria; other major child-killing diseases are respiratory infections, and diarrhoea. These preventable diseases are linked with the impoverished, unhealthy and unhygienic environments that people have to live in.

The maternal mortality rate is estimated at 500-880 deaths per 100,000 live births. These levels are high compared with other countries in Africa, and at least 50 times the rates in developed countries.

The main causes of maternal death are young age at first pregnancy (average is 17.9 years), short spacing between pregnancies, lack of knowledge of high risk pregnancies on the part of health staff and mothers, the high number of deliveries supervised by untrained personnel, poorly equipped health facilities, poor referral systems and the use of traditional herbs during labour.

Almost half the children and adults have manifestations of past or present malnutrition. According to the 1992 Zambia Demographic and Health Survey (ZDHS), about 40% of children under age five are stunted (low height for age) as a result of chronic undernutrition over a prolonged period; 25% are underweight for their age, and 5% are wasted (low weight for age).

Overall levels of malnutrition have remained high over the past twenty years, with no signs of improvement. By the early 1990s the rates of under-nutrition and stunting among under-fives in Zambia were approximately twice the levels in Botswana, Lesotho and Zimbabwe.

As Zambia's economic situation deteriorated over the 1980s, its education system underwent a drastic decline. This was both quantitative and qualitative, and resulted in reduced access to education and lower educational attainment. About 50% of all children of primary school age are not in school. The situation was more acute in rural areas, with rural children accounting for 66% of all out of school children. The national gross enrolment for primary education fell from 96% in 1985 to 88% in 1990 and to 77% in 1992.

The limitations in the quantity and quality of education have contributed to the persistence of high levels of illiteracy. In 1990, 33% of people over the age of 15 years were illiterate, especially in rural areas and among women.

## The roots of poverty

The immediate causes for poverty in Zambia are explained as the erosion of the poor's livelihoods, due to lack of jobs in the towns and the weakened situation of subsistence farming in rural areas. Other

immediate causes focus on the lack of basic services to protect people's health and to provide education and a social safety net. Structural adjustment has had an immediate, harsh impact on people's living conditions and the related collapse of mechanisms for caring, especially children.

## Long-term factors

Poverty is also the outcome of a series of long-term factors:

- structural economic imbalances have undermined Zambia's economy for 20 years.
- the oppressive culture of dependency on the State has suppressed civil society and prevented communities and NGOs from attacking the country's problems before they became severe.
- within the central government bureaucracy and the local authorities much of the institutional capacity has been depleted. Basic services are in disarray and Government has been unable to come to grips with Zambia's enduring economic catastrophe.
- women in Zambia have suffered from legal, cultural, social and economic discrimination
- Zambia has invested in a lot of inappropriate technology over the years.

## Fundamental problems

At the most fundamental level, the report explains poverty as a result of the interplay between the national resource base, external economic shocks in the 1970s, and above all, inappropriate past national development policies (structural adjustment).

Urban bias and poor performance in agriculture were linked to the existence of considerable, exploitable mineral wealth.

The government followed misplaced strategy of industrialisation and failed to appreciate the opportunities offered in many parts of the country by the abundance of good farmland.

External economic shocks – such as the fall of the copper price in 1974 and successive international oil price increases – caused considerable hardship.

But the more fundamental problem was that national policies failed to evolve the kind of response that was needed. Instead, Zambia's rulers resisted addressing the underlying structural weaknesses until the country's resources had been run down and its capacity for adjustment had been considerably weakened. ★



# Poverty in Botswana

The most recent Botswana poverty assessment defined poverty as "an inability to meet basic needs", denoting a minimal standard of living which encompassed a variety of components, both physical and social. The broadness of the working definition appeared in practice to resemble a definition of human poverty, since it encompassed both income- and capability-poverty. However, poverty indicators produced were mainly income-poverty ones.

The manifestations of poverty in Botswana included: a lack of adequate shelter and clothing, high mortality and morbidity, malnutrition, dependency, lack of child care, child vulnerability, an inability to participate meaningfully in the life of society, lack of economic and social mobility, and rural-urban migration.

Detailed analysis of Botswana's Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) results 1985/86 and 1993/4 was used alongside a national poverty datum line (PDL) to determine whether households were living in poverty.

The proportion of Botswanans living in income poverty fell sharply — between 1985/6 and 1993/4 the proportion of poor and very poor persons within the national population declined from 59% to 47%, while the proportion of poor and very poor households declined from

49% to 38%. Income and capability poverty was found to be higher and more severe in rural areas, and to a lesser extent in urban villages. As in many other countries, female-headed households were poorer than male-headed households

The immediate causes of poverty were identified as a combination of failures on three levels:

- Failure of economic opportunities: a lack of jobs and opportunities for income generating activities leading to high unemployment; low wages for those in work, or low incomes from self-employment. These factors led to low primary incomes.
- Failure of social provision by the state: inadequate coverage, poor targeting, or a low level of social safety nets; inadequate provision of health care, education, etc.
- Individual and family roles: an unequal distribution of income within the household; a dependency syndrome, whereby individuals expect government to provide everything and show a lack of initiative in helping themselves; large family size, which increases the burden of dependency upon household income without contributing additional income.

The study also identified a number of underlying causes of poverty:

- highly adverse climatic and soil conditions
- unequal distribution of access to and control over assets
- high population growth
- low population density
- remoteness of many communities

The authors also identified aspects of social organisation, beliefs and practices which are potential barriers to anti-poverty strategies. These include fatalistic cultural beliefs, gender relations, and discriminatory attitudes towards particular groups in society, such as the Basarwa.

The Botswana poverty assessment linked income-poverty indicators with capability poverty indicators. As discussed elsewhere in this special report, income poverty lines are invariably arbitrary. The report also neglected important indicators of human poverty, such as health and education, and the relationship between these indicators and income-poverty.

Like the World Bank report on poverty in South Africa, the Botswana report failed to analyse land distribution and ownership patterns, and other critical factors in the national dynamic generating poverty and inequality within the Botswanan social formation were entirely absent. Botswana's growth path (one of the success stories in Sub-Saharan Africa) and macro-economic policy was not adequately analysed in relation to long-term eradication of human poverty in the country. ★

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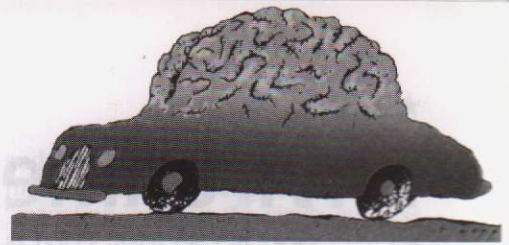
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# Power and the people



There is growing resistance to energy privatisation in India. Joint ventures with western multinationals mean higher prices, and heavy environmental costs.

**On August 17th**, project officials arrived at the Kannur power project area at Irinavu with equipment for soil testing and geological surveys. The villagers gathered around the lorry and demanded that they not unload the equipment.

Each day the numbers grew until on August 19 the ISPPL men were compelled to leave.

The people of Kerala are rising up to fight the Kannur power project by the Chief Minister's nephew K.P.P. Nambiar and Enron, an American-based multinational corporation. Enron has undertaken projects in Gujarat, West Bengal, and the extremely controversial Dabhol project which has been met with mass protests and agitation.

Ironically the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPM) in Maharashtra has been opposed to the Dabhol project and they have campaigned actively against Enron whereas in Kerala, where the CPM is in power they seem to be welcoming Enron with open arms.

Land is already being acquired for the US\$400m. project in Kerala. 176 acres will be required. The land that has been selected is mainly agricultural land with some houses, and the products of the land are the sole means of support for many people in the area.

A further 5,000 acres will be required for the privatisation of the port, again in collaboration with Enron.

Local fishers, and India's environmentalists, decry the water pollution and the effluents which threaten the fish stocks. This, in turn, jeopardises the livelihoods of the fisher folk and compromises the aquatic ecosystems in the area.

Two political parties, *Yuva Jana Vedi* and *Samajwadi Jana Parishad*, openly oppose the project.

Enron says the project will provide energy to the power starved state. But Enron has a history of providing extremely expensive electricity.

The Dabhol Power Project in Maharashtra is a poignant example. The project cost and power tariffs were much higher than other power projects in India. In Maharashtra state, Enron's power purchase agreement was initially kept secret

from the public. They paid out US\$20m. as "Educational Gifts" – considered bribes by many people, and there was no environmental assessment carried out.

The power this project is going to provide comes at too high a cost, in rupees and in loss of livelihood and ecological damage. And, of course, the long-term cost of allowing the entrance of a multinational corporation into the area.

The Enron project is not an isolated event but one of the first manifestations of the ongoing process of privatisation of the power sector in India.

The anti-Enron agitation symbolises the struggle against multinationals, global capitalism, fraud, corruption, betrayals of the common customer, and to protect the rights over resources like land, water and forest for equitable and sustainable development.

Over-priced power is not a viable and acceptable solution to Kerala's power shortage. [Ag/JD] ★

## Port privatisation, protests, and P&O

**The National Alliance of Peoples' Movements recently sent this letter to the Chairman of multinational investors P&O.**

**Dear Lord Sterling of Plaistow,**

Your multinational company P&O has become a familiar name to the thousands of fishworkers, farmers (mainly tribals) and the dock workers of Maharashtra state. They have realised the seriously devastating impact on their lives and livelihood as a result of your multi-million rupee joint venture with the local government.

The environmental impacts of ad-hoc, ill-planned, anti-democratic, coastal management plans have always been fought against by fishworkers' organisations. Some 700-800,000 fishworkers have been successful in stalling the fishing by foreign vessels that would have depleted fish stocks and displaced them from their source of livelihood.

Meanwhile, dock workers of the Hind Majdoor Sabha trade union have been agitating against the invasions of "The New Economic Policy" leading to unprecedented unemployment.

And now, fishworkers and dock workers have joined hands and allied with agriculturists and horticulturists to fight the construction of a mega-port at Wadhawan.

The people are determined to fight tooth and nail in the face of a gigantic plan to privatise 48 ports in Maharashtra.

The environmental impacts have been assessed by independent experts. Land and mangroves will be affected, and this will in turn be detrimental to fish breeding.

Natural processes of pollution treatment and water purification will also be affected.

The overall space for fish and fishing will be reduced, affecting 200,000 families from Maharashtra and Gujarat directly. There will also be indirect suffering for 2,000,000 people who are dependent on the industry.

P&O, we know, is prepared to go ahead and invest its money. Your agreement on equity with the state government has been pushed through, without any knowledge or involvement of the local people.

P&O has not even followed the constitution of India or the environmental laws and regulations. You may even be kept in the dark by our own sovereign government with regard to the strong opposition by the people to this project.

We, the People's organisations, allied through a National Alliance of People's Movements spread in 15 states across the country, therefore warn your company against any further steps towards the Wadhwan port development.

We support the alternative policy and development plans prepared by the people's organisation for coastal resource management that are people centred, focus of self-reliance, and are equitable and sustainable.

We strongly support the struggle against privatisation, and globalisation of fisheries that would also displace the dock workers from their jobs, as intended in all other sectors. We, therefore, suggest that P&O should keep off Wadhwan! ★

**The National Alliance of Peoples' Movements**



# Environmental racism

Since 1996, the Japanese chemical company Shintech has been trying to locate three factories and an incinerator next to homes and schools in the small African-American community of Convent in southern Louisiana. **Charlie Cray** and **Monique Harden** of **Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly** unroll the PVC story.

**Residents** and other Louisiana activists are fighting the proposed complex, which would manufacture 1.1 billion pounds of PVC plastic (better known as "vinyl") each year. They argue that Louisiana authorities would violate federal civil rights laws if they licensed the Shintech plant in a predominantly African-American community where pollution is already making people sick. The outcome of this civil rights battle will set important legal precedents.

There is no reason to believe that Shintech will bring economic prosperity to the county, St. James Parish. The community already has a variety of high-tech toxic industries, yet 40% of its residents live below the poverty line.<sup>1</sup>

According to a representative of the Louisiana Chemical Association, 99% of industrial plant systems are now computer controlled so chemical plants are highly automated and the few plant operators who have jobs must have computer skills, as well as a good working knowledge of physics and chemistry.

Like most counties in Louisiana, St. James Parish have few residents with the skills necessary to work in the petrochemical industry. There are only 17 African Americans in St. James Parish who qualify as engineering technicians.<sup>2</sup>

Shintech promises 165 permanent jobs and \$500,000 for job training in St. James Parish. However, neither Shintech or local officials have taken any steps to guarantee that residents of St. James Parish or even Louisiana will be hired.

Although it is typical for governments to require a percentage of local hires in exchange for tax breaks, Louisiana officials have agreed to give Shintech \$130 million in tax breaks without setting any terms that directly benefit Louisiana citizens. For every permanent job offered by Shintech, Louisiana taxpayers will subsidize the corporation

with nearly \$800,000 in tax breaks.<sup>3</sup>

As the world's largest user of chlorine, the PVC industry creates unique dangers that other plastics industries avoid. By its own admission Shintech would release nearly 600,000 pounds of toxic chemicals into the air per year (out of an annual total of nearly three million pounds of air pollutants). It would pour nearly eight million gallons of toxic waste water into the Mississippi River each day.<sup>4</sup>

One of the principal pollutants from Shintech would be vinyl chloride. According to the Environment Protection Agency (EPA), "vinyl chloride emissions from PVC... cause or contribute to air pollution that may reasonably be anticipated to result in an increase in mortality or an increase in serious irreversible, or incapacitating reversible illness. Vinyl chloride is a known human carcinogen which causes a rare cancer of the liver."<sup>5</sup> Shintech's Convent plant would be one of the largest PVC production operations in the world.

A recent front-page series in the *Houston Chronicle* detailed how the vinyl industry has manipulated vinyl chloride studies to avoid liability for worker exposure and to hide extensive and severe chemical spills into local communities. The *Chronicle* reported that a Shintech facility in Texas accounted for nearly half of all "fugitive" air emissions of vinyl chloride monomer in Texas from 1987-96.<sup>6</sup>

Vinyl chloride production is also inherently a source of dioxins, a highly toxic substance that can cause cancer and other illnesses in humans even at very low exposure levels.<sup>7</sup> Dioxins are a global health threat because they persist in the environment and can travel long distances. At the levels to which the general population is exposed, dioxins have been linked to immune system sup-

pression, reproductive disorders, a variety of cancers, and endometriosis.

In 1994 the British firm ICI admitted that they had known since 1989 that dioxins are an unavoidable consequence of making PVC.

Dioxins created by vinyl chloride production are released by on-site incinerators, flares, boilers, waste water treatment systems and even in trace quantities in vinyl resins.<sup>9</sup>

Around the world, scientists have identified high levels of dioxin near PVC production facilities. In 1996, scientists investigating dioxin in the sediment of the Rhine River in Europe found that overall dioxin levels have declined in recent years except for the specific types traceable to vinyl chloride production.<sup>10</sup> In Lake Charles, Louisiana, high levels of dioxin-like chemicals (e.g. hexachlorobenzene) have been documented in the Calcasieu Estuary outside of the PPG and Vista Chemical PVC production plants.<sup>11</sup> Vinyl production in a chemical complex outside Venice, Italy has polluted the Venice lagoon with dioxin.<sup>12</sup>

Japanese communities are reporting some of the highest dioxin levels in the world from the incineration of wastes containing PVC materials.<sup>13</sup> It is ironic that while Japanese government officials are proposing restrictions on the manufacture of PVC products to avoid increased dioxin levels, Shintech, a Japanese-owned corporation, is battling to build a PVC production complex in Louisiana.

U.S. communities near vinyl production plants have already been hurt. In Louisiana, two poor African-American communities, Morrisonville (once next to Dow Chemical in Plaquemine Parish) and Reveilletown (once next to Georgia Gulf also in Plaquemine Parish) were bought out and razed by the vinyl

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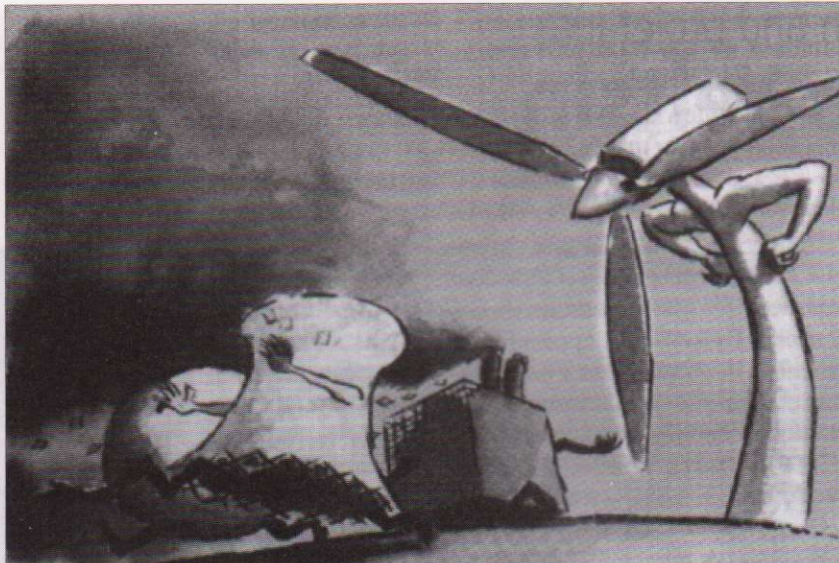
## Disney Haiti Justice Campaign

Pocahontas pyjamas cost \$12 in New York. The Haitian women who make them get 5-7 cents. No wonder workers at Disney subcontractors are trying to organize. We want Disney to stop doing business with subcontractors who refuse their workers' demands for • A wage of at least \$5 per day (double current rates) • genuine collective bargaining. • Improved working conditions, such as clean drinking water. • An end to indiscriminate layoffs, and firings for union organizing.

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production companies because of ground water contamination, toxic air releases, and health problems suffered by residents.<sup>14</sup>

At the African-American community of Mossville, Ethylene dichloride (EDC), a suspected human carcinogen used in the production of PVC, has leaked from the Vista Chemical and PPG facilities into the ground water.<sup>15</sup>

"The worst may be yet to come," according to the *Houston Chronicle*. "The 200-foot zone of the Chicot Aquifer, which supplies some private water wells, is tainted with EDC... The concern is that the compound will seep into the 500-foot zone, which provides city drinking water for more than 100,000 people."<sup>16</sup>

Even if Shintech could make PVC with less than 500,000 pounds of toxic air emissions per year, the corporation would be making a product whose use and disposal create severe environmental and health problems. Recognising this, Nike recently announced that it will remove PVC entirely from its products.<sup>17</sup> PVC products create dioxins when

burned, leach toxic additives during use and are the least recyclable of all major plastics.<sup>18</sup>

Because of these and other reasons a number of organisations have called for a PVC phase-out, including the American Public Health Association<sup>19</sup> and the International Association of Fire Fighters.<sup>20</sup> The Association of Post-consumer Plastic Recyclers has declared PVC a contaminant to plastics recycling.<sup>21</sup>

Numerous businesses have either eliminated or begun working towards a PVC phase-out in their products and facilities, including Nike, Volvo, Saab, Braun, Ikea, the Body Shop, JM and Svenska Bostder (two of Sweden's leading construction companies).<sup>22</sup> Major construction projects such as the Sydney 2000 Olympics village are being designed to minimise the use of PVC "by selecting alternative materials where they are available, are fit for the purpose and are cost competitive."<sup>23</sup>

Even the PVC industry itself cannot be eager to see Shintech come on line. A number of PVC companies (e.g. Geon

and Oxychem) have merged, which industry analysts suggest is due to "mounting losses in the vinyls business as prices dived [sic] in 1998. Even the most cost-efficient US producers are suffering as the Asian crisis slashes Asian import demand and operating rates plummet..."

"Low growth rates in the mature European economies mean that the industry's problems cannot be hidden..."<sup>24</sup> Some major companies are bailing out. Shell announced in April that it was seeking a buyer for its vinyl interests, and companies such as Dow are hedging their bets by producing new-generation polyolefins which analysts say will replace PVC in various markets, including packaging, auto interiors, wiring, flooring and other flexible applications.

In sum, the production of PVC cannot in any way be considered "desirable" development in Louisiana or anywhere else. The battle against Shintech represents not only one of the biggest environmental civil rights struggles in the nation's history, but also a watershed moment that will impact national materials and chemical policies for decades to come. Either those who want to profit from the expansion of industrial chlorine chemistry will succeed, or the U.S. environmental movement will successfully draw the line in Convent by joining Louisiana's communities on the front line of the struggle, shouting "Enough is enough!" ★

#### Notes

This article was first published as "PVC & Dioxin: Enough is Enough", *Rachel's Environment and Health Weekly* #616, 17 September 1998. The subject was previously treated in REHW #615.

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#### Notes

1. For a more detailed discussion of the chemical industry and Cancer Alley see "From Plantations to Plants: Report of the Emergency National Commission on Environmental and Economic Justice in St. James Parish, Louisiana" (draft) August 15, 1998. Soon to be available from the United Church of Christ Commission for Racial Justice, 700 Prospect Ave., Cleveland, OH 44115. Phone (216) 736-2168.  
2. See "The Myth of Shintech Jobs: Selling False Hopes to Local Residents," prepared by the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, 1998.  
3. Louisiana Department of Economic Development, March 24, 1997.  
4. Public notice, air permit application, Shintech Corporation, Dec. 1997, and Shintech Application [to EPA] to Discharge Process Wastewater (undated).  
5. FEDERAL REGISTER Vol. 63, No. 83 (April 30, 1998), pgs. 23785-23786.  
6. See Jim Morris, "In Strictest Confidence: The chemical industry's secrets," *Houston Chronicle*. Part One: "Toxic Secrecy," June 28, 1998, pgs. 1A, 24A-27A; Part Two: "High-Level Crime," June 29, 1998, pgs. 1A, 8A, 9A; and Part Three: "Bane on the Bayou," July 26, 1998, pgs. 1A, 16A.  
7. For example, see F. Kizbullin and others, "Evaluation of polychlorinated dibenzodioxins and dibenzofurans emission from vinylchloride-monomer production," *Organohalogen Compounds* Vol. 36 (1998), pgs. 225-227. This paper shows an emission factor of 12.71 ug TEQ per tonne of VCM produced.

8. *Report to the Chief Inspector HMIP Authorisation AK6039 Improvement Conditions Part 8, Table 8.1 Item 2. Formation of Dioxins in Oxychlorination*, The Heath, Runcorn, England: ICI, Chemicals & Polymers Ltd., Safety & Environment Department, April 27, '94.  
9. See Pat Costner and others, *PVC: A Primary Contributor to the U.S. Dioxin Burden; Comments submitted to the U.S. EPA Dioxin Reassessment*, (Washington, D.C. Greenpeace U.S.A., February 1995).  
10. Erik H.G. Evers and others, "Levels, temporal trends and risk of dioxins and related compounds in the Dutch aquatic environment," *Organohalogen Compounds* Vol. 28 (1996), pgs. 117-122.  
11. Mark S. Curry and others [of Industrial Economics, Inc.], *Contamination Extent Report and Preliminary Injury Evaluation for the Calcasieu Estuary*, prepared for the Damage Assessment Center for National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Silver Spring, MD, June 16, 1997.  
12. E. Benfenati, and others, "Mass spectrometric analysis of organic compounds in surface sediments from the Venice lagoon," a paper presented to the International Symposium on Chromatography and Mass Spectrometry in Environmental analysis, St. Petersburg [Fla.], October 3-7, 1994.  
13. "Toxic Waste in Japan. The burning issue," *The Economist*, July 25, 1998, pg. 60.  
14. Jon Bowermaster, "A Town Called Morrisonville" *Audubon* July/August 1993, pgs. 42-51.  
15. Michael D. Campbell [of Campbell and Associates, Houston, Texas], "Report of Expert Opinions on

CONDEA Vista Company's Lake Charles Chemical Complex, Westlake, Louisiana, in the matter of Vista Chemical Company and Conoco Inc. v. Geraghty & Miller Inc.," August 26, 1997.

16. Jim Morris, "Bane on the Bayou," *Houston Chronicle* July 26, 1998, pgs. 1A, 16A.

17. Nike PVC Phase-Out POV/Talking Points and Q and A, undated (1998).

18. See R.W. Beck, "1995 National Post-Consumer Plastics Recycling Rate Study," September 1996. (see REHW #603)

19. American Public Health Association, resolution #9607, November 1996. See REHW #363.

20. Richard Duffy, International Association of Fire Fighters, Department of Occupational Health and Safety, April 14, 1998 letter to Concord School Board.

21. Steve Toloken, "Recyclers Tag PVC as Contaminant," *Plastics News*, April 20, 1998 p 4.

22. For a list of PVC bans see *Chlorine & PVC Restrictions and PVC-Free Policies*, compiled by Greenpeace International. Available at [www.greenpeace.org/toxics/frame4cp.html](http://www.greenpeace.org/toxics/frame4cp.html). Select Policy, then PVC restrictions.

23. David Richmond, Director General, Sydney 2000 Olympic Co-Ordination Authority, letter to Dr. Nicole Williams, Chief Executive of the Plastics and Chemicals Industries Association, May 15, 1998.

To learn about alternatives to PVC, go to: [www.greenpeaceusa.org/campaigns/toxics/pvc\\_dist.htm](http://www.greenpeaceusa.org/campaigns/toxics/pvc_dist.htm).

24. "Safety in numbers," *European Chemical News*, July 20-26, 1998, page 18-19.



# Revolution, counterrevolution and proletariat From Lenin to Yeltsin

Despite the three quarters of a century that separate the October Revolution from the collapse of the Soviet system and the present regime of capitalist restoration, the two revolutions<sup>1</sup> are part of the same socio-historical époque: the soviets' seizure of power in 1917 inaugurated a social revolution; the fall of the bureaucratic regime and the restoration that has followed represent the final chapter of the counterrevolution began under Stalin in the 1920s.

In both cases, the immediately determining factor was the correlation of forces between working class and bourgeoisie. From this point of view, a comparison of the two events presents a striking paradox. On the one hand, a very small working class in an undeveloped, peasant country was able to assume the leadership of society and to leave its determining imprint on the further course of social development. On the other hand, a huge working class in an industrialised, urbanised country was incapable of influencing the course of social change, watching helplessly as hostile social forces reshaped the system in their own image.

The intervening seventy-five years were a period of co-existence and struggle of revolution and counter-revolution, a period whose complexity does not lend itself to any simple formulation.

David Mandel

The Russian working class of 1917 was a relatively small minority of the population, surrounded by a sea of peasantry with whom it had not entirely broken its ties. It was a recently formed class — most of its members had grown up in the countryside in peasant families. Its general level of formal education was low. Yet, it assumed the leadership of the revolutionary democratic movement and led it to victory.

Of course, the October Revolution was more than one revolution. Among other things, it was a peasant revolution and a series of national-liberation revolutions. But it achieved victory because it was predominantly a workers' revolution. The abolition of private property, the planned economy, full employment, the relatively large and growing social wage and basic economic security did not all appear at once, but they had their



origins in the workers' revolution.

True, the working class lost political power soon after seizing it. But that was expected by the revolutionaries when they took power in October. They were convinced that they would not be able to hold onto it without the support of the victorious revolutionary proletariat of the developed countries.

## Bureaucratisation...

What they did not envisage was that the loss of power by the Russian workers might be followed by something other than a bourgeois restoration. (They were ultimately right, but they did not think the restoration could take 75 years to happen.) But it was — it led to the dictatorship of the party-state bureaucracy, whose interests were fundamentally opposed to those of the workers.

Trotsky called the bureaucratic dictatorship a political counter-revolution within the social revolution.<sup>2</sup> This counterrevolution had a major distorting effect on the social revolution, but it did not lead to the restoration of capitalist relations. Accordingly, Trotsky called for a political revolution to overthrow the bureaucratic dictatorship and put the USSR back on a socialist path of development. He felt that capitalist restoration would be a tremendous blow to the working class, setting Russia back decades both culturally and economically. Today it is clear that he was right.

Various interrelated factors contributed to the unexpected longevity of a system that, from an historical point of view, ultimately did prove to be only transitional. But a central factor was the strength of the initial working-class impulse that made the revolution and the resulting social weakness of the bureaucratic dictatorship that eventually emerged. Without property on which firmly to base its power and without any real legitimacy (the facade of a soviet democracy was assiduously maintained), the Soviet bureaucracy existed in permanent mortal fear of the working class. It could not survive without its totalitarian repressive apparatus — Gorbachev's liberalisation, which was the immediate cause of the regime's collapse, amply proved that.

At the same time, fear of the workers prevented the bureaucracy from achieving the security and stability it wanted and which would have required its transformation into a new propertied class, a bourgeoisie.

## ...and capitalist restoration

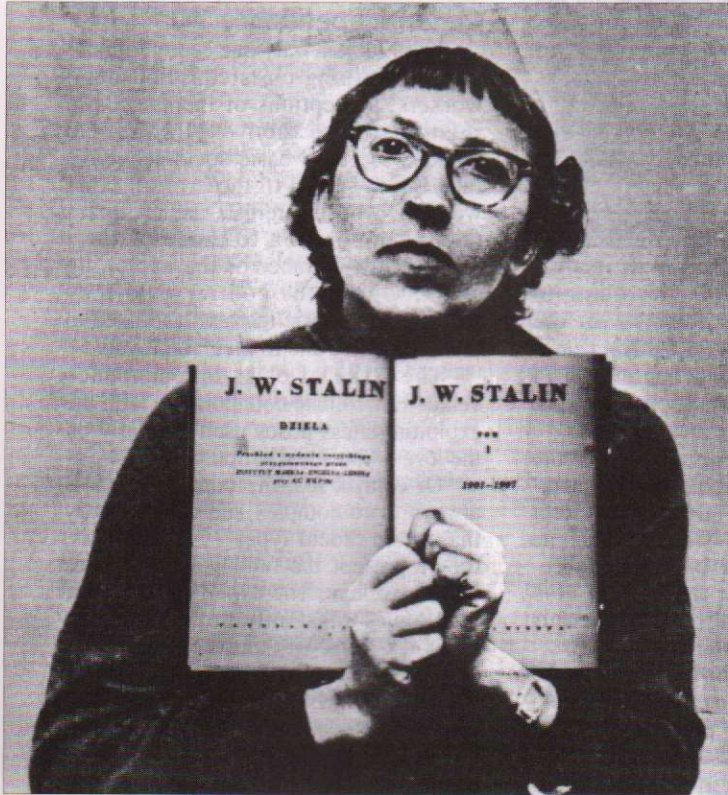
Around 1989, after his attempts at reform had fatally undermined the system, Gorbachev, in fact, did opt for restoration. But his fear of the popular reaction prevented him from proceeding in a consistent or decisive manner. (Around this time, a team from the Central Committee apparatus visited the Kirov Factory (and probably other large



plants) to gauge the workers' probable reaction to privatization.<sup>3)</sup>

Gorbachev and his Prime Minister Ryzhkov were quite open about these fears when they replied to criticism from the radical restorationist forces.<sup>4</sup> The Polish experience and the rising and inc-

Of course, there was more than wishful thinking to explain their optimism. The decades were passing and, if there were few overt signs of a maturing political revolution, there were also no obvious signs of the coming restoration.



Leftist analysts of the Soviet Union, myself included, pointed to favourable objective factors, such as the growing size of the working class, the level of urbanisation and education, the rising living standards, etc., that seemed to make inevitable the rebirth of civil society that had been destroyed by the bureaucratic dictatorship.

True, the Soviet working class was relatively quiescent, but in Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland powerful anti-bureaucratic movements arose in which the workers were, or

eventually became, the leading force. These movements fought for democracy and self-management under a socialist, not capitalist, banner. They all failed, but that was largely a consequence of direct or indirect Soviet intervention. In any case, for Western socialists it was just hard to imagine that workers, having overthrown their bureaucratic oppressors, would let capitalist bosses replace them.

In this article, I offer some elements of comparison of the workers' situations in the period of socialist revolution and in the contemporary period of restoration in order to shed some light on the paradoxical fact of working class hegemony in 1917 and its disconcerting weakness today.

The comparison will deal mainly with factors affecting working-class consciousness, the "subjective" side of things, since, the "objective" situation, on the face of it, was much more favourable to the workers at the time of the collapse than in 1917.

To the factors mentioned above, one can add the relative homogeneity of the Soviet working class, all working for the same employer (the state), who determined their basic material and work conditions, which were relatively egalitarian, as well as the weakness of the domestic capitalist forces: during or after

the failed coup of August 1991, had the workers wanted to take power, there was no armed force prepared to stop them.

Of course, the closer one gets to concrete reality, the more the distinction between "objective" and "subjective" appears artificial. But it has its heuristic uses. It should also be clear that the various factors discussed below are intimately interrelated and in practice inseparable.

## International context

Trotsky linked the fate of socialism in Russia with its victory in the rest of the world. If no victorious socialist revolution occurred in the developed capitalist world, then "a bourgeois counterrevolution rather than an insurrection of the workers against the bureaucracy will be on the order of the day.

[But] If, in spite of the united sabotage of reformists and "Communist" leaders, the proletariat of Western Europe finds the road to power, a new chapter will open in the history of the Soviet Union. The first victory of a revolution in Europe would pass like an electric shock through the Soviet masses, straighten them up, raise their spirit of independence, awaken the traditions of 1905 and 1917... Only in that way can the first workers' state be saved for the socialist future."<sup>5</sup>

The crisis of the bureaucratic regime at the end of the 1980s occurred in a period of major setback and weakness of the socialist and union movements across the world. Not only are there no successful socialist models (the "Communist bloc" countries were themselves stagnating bureaucratic dictatorships and/or in the process of restoring capitalism) or advancing socialist struggles for Soviet workers to emulate, but there were not even any victorious defensive battles that could inspire them, as the bourgeoisie successfully hacked away at the post-war "welfare state."

In these circumstances, the argument of the pro-capitalist forces that "the whole world has embraced the market", that capitalism alone was "normal", carried a lot of weight among workers.

Moreover, these forces were backed up by the ideological, political and financial support of the international bourgeoisie. The international labour movement, in contrast, was practically absent from the equation, except as a mainly negative factor. The small amount of aid it offered was aimed at helping Russian unions to adapt to capitalism, not fight for an alternative.

Even worse, the AFL-CIO, which had by far the strongest presence in Russia, consciously directed its "aid" at splitting the labour movement in order to develop and reinforce an actively pro-capitalist labour current.

The international situation also played a central role in the October

reasingly politicised labour unrest in the USSR showed that he really did have something to fear.

But once the regime fell (it collapsed much more than it was overthrown), the working class almost immediately ceased to have any tangible influence on the course of social change. At most, it has had a small, indirect impact on the particular means chosen and on the pace of reforms, but not on their direction. Although the Yeltsin regime's repressive capacity does not even begin to compare with that of the old regime, it, nevertheless, does not fear the workers.

Capitalist restoration, and the relative ease (from a political point of view) with which it is proceeding, took the left outside of Russia by surprise, including those who subscribed to Trotsky's analysis of the USSR. They expected a political revolution which would put the USSR back on a socialist path of development. Instead, the political revolution led to capitalist restoration.

Trotsky himself had been realistic enough to allow for this scenario, despite his general revolutionary optimism. Writing in 1936, he argued that restoration would be inevitable without socialist revolution in other developed countries. But most of his followers forgot this part of his analysis.



## ★ Russia

Revolution. It occurred in a historical period of mounting labour strength, marked by the formation of mass unions and workers' parties in the industrialised countries. While the outbreak of war and the betrayal by most of the socialist leadership was a setback, it was not a decisive defeat. The war itself eventually became a powerful radicalising factor, contributing to the unprecedented post-war labour upsurge that swept Europe and did not completely exhaust itself until the defeat of the German October of 1923.

The October Revolution was a part of this revolutionary period, even while being its first act. Workers all over Europe came to perceive the World War as a sign of the crisis of the old bourgeois order. Socialism for an increasing number of them, far from being a discredited utopia, as it appeared to many Soviet workers at the end of the 1980s, was a real, necessary alternative.

In Russia, which had the weakest bourgeoisie among the major powers, capitalist spokespersons were reduced to

with the infant Soviet state, that had to build up an army from nothing, whose industrial based had collapsed, and which was sealed off from the outside world by an economic and diplomatic blockade.

As the historian W. Chamberlin put it: "There was one absolutely convincing reason why the Allied powers could not fulfil the hopes of the White Russians and intervene with large numbers of troops: no reliable troops were available. It was the general opinion of leading statesmen and soldiers alike that the attempt to send large numbers of soldiers to Russia would most probably end in mutiny."

Mutinies there were. But the unreliability of the armies was itself a symptom of the period. According to Chamberlin: "The statesmen [at the peace talks] in Paris were sitting on a thin crust of solid ground, beneath which volcanic forces of social upheaval were seething."<sup>6</sup>

International labour support for the Russian Revolution took mostly an indirect form — class struggle that kept their ruling class too occupied at home and insecure to intervene more forcefully in Russia. But there were also many instances of direct, conscious support for the revolution.

At the same time, the expectation that substantive international aid would soon be forthcoming played an important role in sustaining the morale of the revolutionary forces in Russia. Spirits soared at each piece of news of major labour unrest abroad.

Conversely, the realisation, reinforced by the international labour defeats at the end of 1923, that the revolutionary wave in Europe had been beaten back everywhere except in Russia, had an important demoralising effect on Soviet workers that played no small role in the victory of the political counterrevolution.

### "Old system" consciousness

The relationship between the exploiting and exploited classes is the central factor shaping the consciousness of the oppressed class, even if its particular content at any given moment is determined by concrete historical experience and socio-political conditions.

The Soviet Union was a *sui generis*, transitional system, a hybrid with elements of both capitalism and socialism, while itself being neither. It was a totalitarian dictatorship of the party-state bureaucracy based upon a nationalised, planned (or administered) economy, whose official ideology was a castrated version of socialism spiced with nationalism.

Under Brezhnev it even acquired the shameful, semi-official label of "really existing socialism". Pre-revolutionary Russia, on the other hand, was an absolute monarchy resting upon a capitalist economy with strong vestiges of feuda-

lism. Workers in both systems were wage-labourers, with their core element employed in large-scale, mechanised factory production. Nevertheless, these were two very different social systems and, accordingly, the worker consciousness that they generated also differed in significant ways.

### Class independence

I will look at only one central dimension of working-class consciousness: workers' perceptions of themselves in relationship to their exploiters. Do workers see their basic socio-economic interests as linked to those of all other workers, whose interests are in fundamental opposition to those of their employer, a member of the exploiting class? Or, on the contrary, do they perceive their basic interests as linked to their enterprise and to their employer?

The issue of class independence versus subordinate collaboration with the exploiting class poses itself similarly on the level of political action.

Of course, real-life consciousness is always more complex and contradictory than these "ideal types". Nevertheless, they represent the fundamental choices before workers. The exploiters and their ideologues constantly promote among workers one or another form of dependent class collaboration. Revolutionary socialists, on the other hand, promote the ideological and organisational independence of labour from the exploiters, while not ruling out temporary, tactical co-operation from an independent organisational and ideological base.

One of the most striking traits of the Russian labour movement in the years leading up to the revolution (this became especially marked in the 1912-14 labour upsurge) was the strength of its attachment to a policy of "class independence" *vis-à-vis* the bourgeoisie, on both the enterprise and national-political levels. It was this issue, more than any other, that divided the Bolsheviks and the Mensheviks. It also explains why the Bolsheviks became the predominant political force in the Russian labour movement from at least 1912 onward (with a brief pause after the February Revolution).

The Mensheviks called for an alliance with the liberal wing of the bourgeoisie and, accordingly, for workers to moderate their demands on the employers, who would otherwise be scared into the arms of Tsarism.

The Bolsheviks, on the other hand, rejected any political alliance with the liberals, seeing them as a fundamentally opposed to democratic revolution. They encouraged and led workers in collective actions whose demands were indistinguishably directed against the employers and the state. Workers who did not support the Bolsheviks always supported one of the other socialist parties, never a bourgeois party.<sup>6</sup>

### PROLETARIUSZE WSZYSTKICH KRAJÓW ŁĄCZCIE SIĘ!



defending their system with the argument that Russian conditions were not yet ripe for socialism (implicitly conceding its viability and inevitability). All over industrial Europe, it was the bourgeoisie, not the workers, whose decisive action was paralysed by the perception of a lack of alternative.

Had the October Revolution not been part of this international revolutionary upsurge, it would have gone down in history as a second Paris Commune. The revolution almost immediately found itself locked in mortal conflict with all the major capitalist powers. These rich and powerful states had been able to put millions of men under arms and to throw them into the imperialist butchery. But they could not win a military contest



One of the objective factors that favoured this consciousness was precisely the "feudal vestiges". Russian society still bore many traits of an estate-based system. For example, elections to the State *Duma* were based upon curia, defined by a mixture of estate and property criteria (and overwhelmingly favouring the propertied classes). This favoured the workers' perception of themselves as fundamentally separate from the propertied classes ("census society").

Another factor was the political and ideological weakness of the Russian bourgeoisie, which can ultimately be traced to its economic weakness and dependence on the state. This class on the whole did not feel itself able to make concessions to the working class, especially after the experience of the 1905 revolution that convinced the bourgeoisie that the labour movement was bent on social revolution, posing a mortal threat to its very existence.

The Russian bourgeoisie was a reactionary, pro-Tsarist class; its liberal elements (some even briefly gave financial support the Bolsheviks) were a very small minority with little overall influence. In the circumstances of close collaboration between management and the Tsarist police in weeding out activists and repressing workers' collective actions, economic or political, there was little room for illusions among workers about shared interests with the bourgeoisie.

Pre-revolutionary Russia was a socially and politically polarised society. The intelligentsia, which historically has acted as a bridge between the classes (ultimately serving the ruling class), was virtually absent from the labour movement after the 1905 Revolution.

### "Them and us" in the USSR

Soviet society presented a much more complex and contradictory picture. On the one hand, the bureaucracy's monopoly of power, the overall repressive framework of social relations, did foster among workers a sense of "us against them".

This coexisted with a strong element of corporatism. That element became especially pronounced under Brezhnev. When Perestroika was going sour, some workers would refer to the Brezhnev period as their "golden age".

The bureaucracy itself was organised in a hierarchy of power and privilege, each bureaucrat under the thumb of his or her own bosses. This tended to blunt the "us and them" distinction, since workers could view themselves merely as the bottom rung of a continuous ladder.

Although the bureaucracy has often been referred to as a "caste", it was far from a closed group. Most of the last group of leaders of the Soviet Union, including Gorbachev and Yeltsin, were



not children of functionaries. Conscientious workers were typically urged to study to become engineers, and from there many began careers in the administrative hierarchy. Many directors began their professional lives as workers in the same plant. Conversely, children of bureaucrats rarely became bureaucrats. They mostly chose to become professionals in privileged sectors.

But more important were the clientelist, often corrupt, relations that flourished, especially under the Brezhnev regime. This period was characterised by the loosening of the central leadership's control over the bureaucracy, the de facto decentralisation of the political and economic administration. In these conditions, the dual role of the enterprise director, the minister, or the first secretary of a territorial committee of the party, became much more pronounced. They were representatives of the state in the production unit, the economic sector, or the territory they administered; but, at the same time, they were representatives, lobbyists, defenders of the employees of the enterprise or the sector, or of the inhabitants of the territory *vis-à-vis* the state. Under Brezhnev, it was the latter aspect that was the most pronounced, as the economy became increasingly "feudalised".

The importance of the social wage, largely administered by the enterprise (including housing, sick pay, subsidised leisure and vacations, health-care, pre-school childcare and more), as well as the growing practice of distribution of scarce consumer goods through the enterprises, also reinforced corporatist attitudes among workers, who were often called upon by management to "consider the situation of the enterprise", that is, to make concessions (especially on overtime and worked holidays) to help the enterprise meet plan targets.

There was a certain amount of threat behind these appeals: to refuse entailed risks. But the workers' generally positive response was also based on a perception of their interests as linked to those of the enterprise and to management.

Of course, for this system to work,

management, had to give something in return. Besides the social wage administered by the enterprise, this took the form of managerial flexibility toward workers in work schedules and the toleration of violations of discipline, as well as making sure the workers got their bonuses (a large part of the take-home wage), whether they were merited or not by the enterprise's real production results.

### Democratic revolution

These aspects of worker consciousness were an important element in the course of events in 1917 and in the period of Soviet collapse, which offer some striking parallels and contrasts. In the first case, the democratic revolution (overthrow of Tsarism) was soon followed by the workers' taking power in both the state and in the enterprises, a socialist revolution.

In the second case, the democratic revolution (the collapse of the bureaucratic regime) was quickly followed by the complete exclusion of workers from political and economic power in a rapid restoration of capitalism.

In February 1917, although the workers briefly followed the Mensheviks in giving administrative power to a liberal government, they nevertheless immediately formed their own, separate, class organisations, the soviets.

In their view, it was the soviets that determined policy for the liberal government to execute. In the enterprises, too, they set up independent class organisations, the factory committees, which did not hesitate to encroach on managerial power when workers were faced with the threat of mass layoffs or plant closure.

The factory committees arose entirely from below — they had not figured in the programme of any party, though the Bolsheviks soon embraced and led them.<sup>8</sup>

There was no significant tendency for workers in their separate enterprises to seize them collectively. Factory committee conferences consistently rejected anarchist proposals for the immediate seizure of the factories by their workers. These proposals were typically silent on the issue of state power.

In fact, the Petrograd Conference of Factory Committees was the first important workers' assembly to demand Soviet power, only three months after the February Revolution.

At that and ensuing conferences, the worker delegates recognised that the bourgeoisie was not interested in averting the economic crisis, that a popular government, free from bourgeois influence, was a necessary condition for averting economic collapse and mass unemployment. Workers' control could be effective only in the context of national economic regulation and planning, and that required a soviet government.

Before October, outright plant





seizures were rare and occurred only when workers were faced with imminent shutdown or when the administration's sabotage was blatant and persistent. Even so, seizures were accompanied by the demand for state sequestration.

After October, with the economic crisis rapidly deepening and backed by soviet power, workers were more apt to seize their plants, but the factory committee conference already demanded full nationalisation. This had not been part of the Bolshevik programme either. But the decree on generalised nationalisation was passed eight months after the revolution. The National Economic Council, the central state organ for economic administration, was staffed largely by member of the Central Council of Factory Committees.

The point of all this is that the workers in 1917 reacted to the crisis that followed the democratic revolution in an essentially class-independent, solidaristic way.

### Workers in the 1990s

This was very different from the reaction of workers when the bureaucratic regime fell in the midst of growing economic crisis. The latter-day workers never formed their own class organisations, political or economic.

In many regions workers did support candidates running on anti-bureaucratic platforms, but no one seriously thought to demand the exclusion of bureaucrats (or ex-bureaucrats) from elected posts. Many functionaries, especially from the lower levels, got elected. None of the various initiatives to create a worker-based party got anywhere. In practice, labour politics was and remains limited to forms of lobbying, much of it in subordinate collaboration with managers.

The differences in the very character of the two democratic revolutions is also striking. The February Revolution was entirely a movement from below. The masses never lost the initiative, and even after they handed the government over to the liberals, they insisted on retaining

“control” over it through their soviets, which alone commanded armed force.

The new Soviet labour movement also played an important role in the downfall of the bureaucratic regime, but it was not really an independent role, and the movement never embraced more than a minority of the working class.

It is difficult to evaluate the precise impact of the movement “from below” on the fall of the regime, but it seems clear that it owed much to a “revolution from above” by the forces of capitalist restoration (within and outside the bureaucracy), that were able to manipulate and co-opt the popular forces.

### Passivity

In the crucial moments of August 1991 (the failed “conservative” coup) and the December 1991 (the dismantling of the Soviet Union), the workers remained passive bystanders. Had the downfall of the bureaucratic regime taken the form of a popular revolution, the restoration would have been a much more problematic endeavour. Restorationist strategists were keenly aware of this and strove for an alliance with the pro-capitalist elements in the bureaucracy in order to avert the necessity of a popular mobilisation to bring down the old system.

“Workers’ committees” were formed during Perestroika in a number of plants, and a part of the coal miners’ and a few other groups eventually formed new unions that, at least initially, admitted only workers. But in an important sense, these were more corporatist than class organisations, since they were conceived as organisations exclusively of manual workers (in the miners’ case — only underground workers), excluding non-managerial white-collar workers together with the managerial personnel.

In any case, these efforts remained isolated, and corporatist unions (which still formally include managerial personnel) remain the norm in Russia.

### Self-management?

Under Perestroika, organisations arose in the plants and even a national movement appeared that were concerned with the issue of economic power and property. These labour-collective councils, or STKs, were formed originally on Gorbachev’s command and were given limited, ambiguous self-management powers.

These were typical Soviet-style corporatist organisations, since the “labour collective” included all employees, from the lowliest janitor to the general director. Not surprisingly, the latter almost always controlled the councils, in which workers generally showed little interest.<sup>9</sup>

The STK movement arose in 1990, after Gorbachev took his restorationist turn and decided to suppress any self-management tendencies he might earlier have encouraged.

This was never a mass movement. Most workers remained indifferent to it, while its leaders, on their part, made no serious attempt to mobilise them. Engineering and managerial personnel, including directors, were strongly over-represented at its congresses.

This movement, although it was fundamentally opposed to the old bureaucratic system, was itself based upon a corporatist ideology. Even its most radical elements accepted the idea that workers’ earnings should be dependent upon the market performance of their enterprise. And they demanded complete autonomy for their enterprises.

It was very striking that the movement offered no overall conception of the national economy beyond self-managed, collectively-owned (a minority supported leasing from the state) enterprises linked to each other only by market relations. In practice, this was capitalism, but it would start out with worker-owned enterprises.

This is not to say that the activists consciously wanted capitalism. Many thought of their movement as an alternative both to capitalism and to the old system. Others accepted the idea propounded by the pro-capitalist ideologues that the distinction between socialism and capitalism had outlived itself: there is only more or less market, more or less state regulation.

This movement proved easy prey for the restorationist forces. In Russia, the movement’s leaders lent their support to Yeltsin, who promised to make the STKs the basis of his government and passed a few laws making it easier for employees to become collective owners.

But when Yeltsin’s privatisation programme was finally published, it ruled out collective ownership of the shares of newly privatised plants. (Kravchuk played a similar turn in the Ukraine, though that country has been slower privatising.)

The movement’s activists consoled themselves with the fact that the programme at least made it easy for the “collective” to acquire a majority of the shares, if not all, as they had hoped. But since shares could not be held collectively and since the workers were incapable of organising themselves to pool their shares, the programme easily achieved its desired goal of totally excluding workers from any influence in enterprise administration.

### Collective struggle

Of course, the class consciousness of the pre-revolutionary Russian workers did not spring ready-made from the social relations of Tsarist Russia, even if the latter did offer them a favourable terrain. (It is worth noting, for example, that the soviets arose quite spontaneously in Ivanovo and St. Petersburg already in 1905.) It developed in the course of a relatively brief, but



extremely rich and intense period of class struggle. Despite the strong repression, this labour movement coexisted with the Tsarist regime for a quarter century. Without this experience of struggle, especially that of 1905 and 1912-14, it is hard to imagine 1917 taking the course it did.

To this one must add the role of the Bolshevik party, which was crucial to the outcome of 1917. But the party should not be seen as an totally independent factor. If there was a such a party, it was because there were favourable social conditions for it.

Its relationship to the worker masses and the labour movement was a dialectical one. Especially after 1905, this was an overwhelmingly working-class party, uniting the most conscious, revolutionary workers, themselves organically linked to the worker masses. This party was the result of an entire epoch of class struggle and accumulated experience.

In contrast to Tsarism, the bureaucratic regime, precisely because of its fragility, could not tolerate, even for a brief time, any independent labour organisation or movement. Soviet workers were unable to win themselves any autonomous space within the system until Gorbachev's liberalisation opened it for them. This liberalism proved almost immediately fatal to the regime. Not that Gorbachev wanted an independent labour movement but he was unwilling to use repression to put it down.

But Soviet workers were given too little time. They entered the period of overt political crisis of the regime with almost no experience of collective struggle or independent organisation beyond the shop level, and few even had that.

Spontaneous explosions had occurred from time to time on a larger scale before the Gorbachev period, but they were localised and quickly repressed, leaving almost no trace in the collective consciousness. As a result, Soviet workers, once they began to be active, had no experience to draw open, when only experience of independent collective struggle could have enabled them to overcome the corporatist legacy and to forge organic links of solidarity among themselves.

## The economic collapse

Economic collapse played a key role in both periods. The consequence of the imperialist and civil wars, the economic collapse that followed soon after the October Revolution, along with the civil war and the needs of state-building, was a key factor in the dispersal of the working, a process that did not even start to reverse itself until 1921. It was only in 1926 that industry recovered its pre-war levels.

The high rate of unemployment had a severe dampening effect on labour activism. As a result, soon after the

October Revolution, the working class ceased to be an independent historical subject. The workers played a critical role in the civil war victory, but soviet democracy soon gave way to the party dictatorship.

There were many conscious, dedicated workers in the party, which was very much a revolutionary movement dedicated to the workers' cause. But the working class as such, to the degree it still existed, had no direct means of influence over it. This set the scene for the eventual rise of the bureaucracy.

Russia's economic crisis today is less severe than that of the civil war, but then it is occurring in peacetime, and, as such, its depth and length are probably unprecedented in modern times for any major country.

But more to the point, it hit the labour movement when it was still in an embryonic stage of development, greatly slowing down, if not completely cutting short, its development.

Paradoxically, the rapid erosion of the old social bases of corporatism (the paternalistic state and enterprise management, job security, the social wage, etc.) has not only not weakened its hold on workers and their leaders, but, if anything, reinforced it.

Today corporatism goes under the official title of "social partnership". The persistence of dependent class collaboration is very much a consequence of the deep insecurity and the sense of impotence caused by the economic crisis.

One of the political motives behind the choice of restoration through "shock therapy" was, in fact, to quickly cut the social ground from under potential worker resistance.

The workers' demoralisation made possible Yeltsin's *coup d'état* of October 1993 and the establishment of what is for all practical purposes a dictatorship, albeit a "soft" one. (There has so far been no need for more repression.)

The coup was directed immediately against the parliament's opposition to Yeltsin's economic course, but it was also a preventive measure against potential worker resistance. (It was made know that Yeltsin had on his desk ready for signing a decree disbanding the main union federation, whose president initially supported the parliament against Yeltsin.) The coup proved very successful in snuffing out any latent militant tendencies among the union leadership.

## Conclusion

This comparative analysis offers some idea of what it will take for the Russian working class to again become a subject of history. The conclusions it leads to are not optimistic for the near future.

But it would be wrong to simply write off the Russian working class.



There has been a certain tendency to do that among Western socialists in the wake of the dashed hopes raised by Perestroika and by the appearance of an independent labour movement in the USSR.

The conditions that have contributed to the weakness of the Russian working class will change, and are already changing. One of those conditions is the strength of labour and socialist forces in the developed countries and also their direct support for their counterparts in Russia.

It is worth repeating that much of the immense tragedy of Russia's twentieth century history is linked to the weakness of socialist forces in the developed capitalist world. The peoples of the former Soviet Union have paid the heaviest price for the absence of socialism in the West.

At the same time, the bureaucratic dictatorship in the Soviet Union, directly or indirectly, played a key role in holding back the revolutionary potential of the Western working class, which today is itself paying an increasingly heavy price today for the absence of socialism. ★

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### Notes

1. I realise that I am using the term "revolution" rather loosely here to refer to the collapse of the Soviet system. Nevertheless, the bureaucratic dictatorship was replaced, however briefly, by a democracy of sorts, which also coincided with the beginning of capitalist restoration.
2. His analysis is systematically presented in *The Revolution Betrayed*, written in 1936.
3. Personal communication from A. Kalachev, a leader of the workers' committee at the plant at the time.
4. See, for example, Ryzhkov's presentation of the government's reform programme to the Supreme Soviet in May 1990, *Trud*, May 25, 1990. Even this watered-down programme was met with widespread hostility among the population, giving rise to strike threats and panic buying, and forcing the head of the trade-union federation, Yanaev, who had never shown any independence, to qualify his initial endorsement. (*Trud*, June 16, 1990). For more on this, see D. Seppo, "Les épines du marché," *Inprecor*, June 15-28, 1990, pp. 7-11.
5. L. Trotsky, *The Revolution Betrayed*, Pathfinder Press, N.Y., 1972, p. 290.
6. W.H. Chamberlin, *The Russian Revolution*, Gosset and Dunlap, N.Y., 1965, vol. II, p.153.
7. D. Mandel, *The Petrograd Workers and the Fall of the Old Régime*, Macmillan, London, 1983, pp. 18-21.
8. On the factory committees, see D. Mandel, *Factory Committees and Workers' Control in Petrograd in 1917*, International Institute for Research and Education, Amsterdam, 1993.
9. On the CTKs, see D. Mandel, "'Revolutionary Reform' in Soviet Factories," *Socialist Register 1989*, Merlin, London 1989, and "The Struggle for Power in the Soviet Economy," *Socialist Register 1991*, Merlin, London, 1991.



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