

international

VIEWPOINT

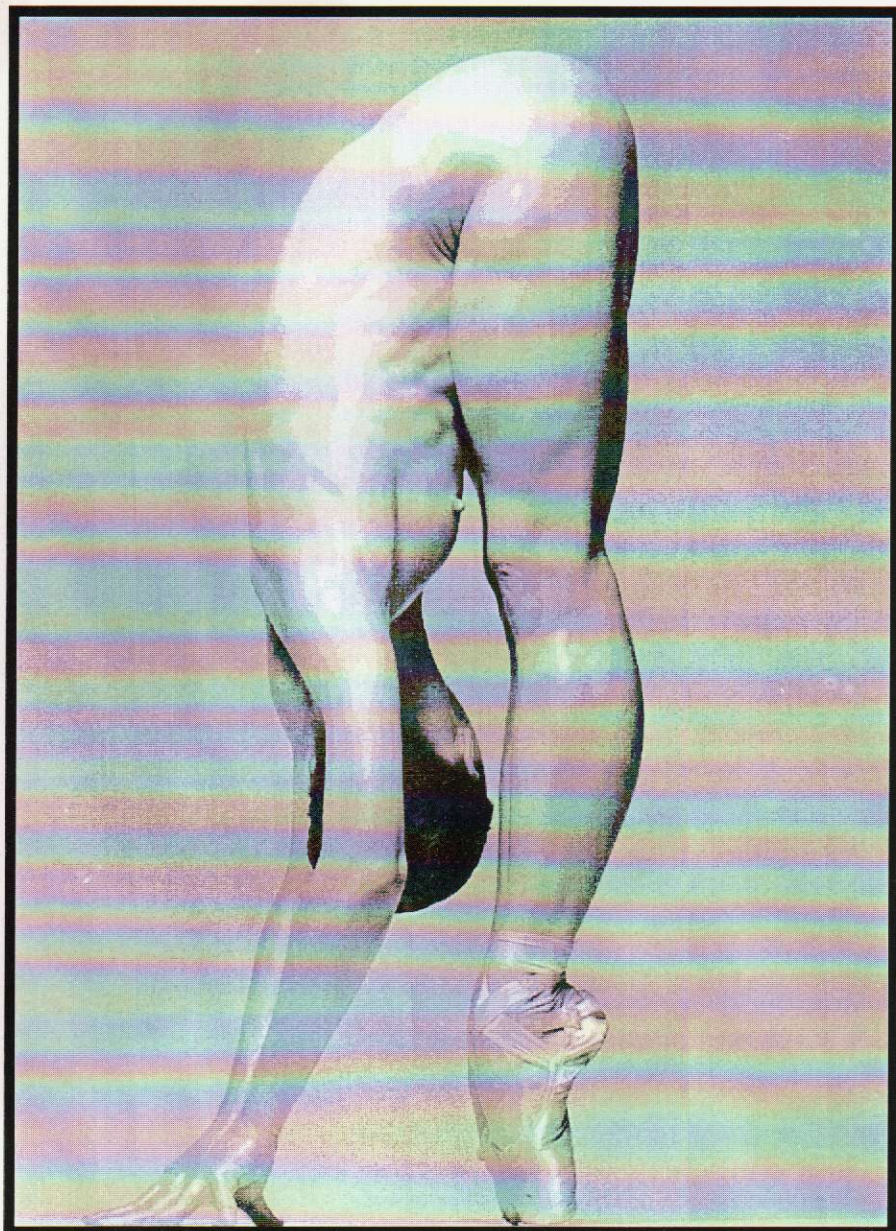
February 1999 • No. 308



• Europe
"Gay marriage!?"

• The PT in power
Brazil's balancing act

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Brazil heats up

On January 1st Fernando Henrique Cardoso was sworn in for his second term as president of Brazil. He soon faced a potentially explosive show-down with state governors elected by the various opposition parties.

Within days, the new Governor of Minas Gerais, the former president Itamar Franco, declared a 90 day moratorium on his state's debt to the federal government.

And the new governors of Rio Grande do Sul and Rio de Janeiro, Olivio Dutra of the Workers Party (PT) and Anthony Garotinho of the Democratic Labour Party (PDT), said they and other opposition governors would be discussing whether and how to follow suit.

Local and international markets reacted immediately to fears that the Minas moratorium would derail President Cardoso's plans to slash Brazil's public deficit, the main con-

dition for receiving an IMF co-ordinated \$US41 billion bailout package.

The link between political struggles in Brazil and the international capital markets could hardly be clearer. The Sao Paulo stock exchange plunged nearly 400 points. The sharp increase in New York share prices in previous days was stopped dead in its tracks. The spectre of a Brazilian crisis also sent other markets from Tokyo to London into reverse.

The stakes for the Workers Party (PT) could hardly be higher. Particularly for the party's left wing which leads the key state government in Rio Grande do Sul. [IB] ★

The PT after the polls

In the October 1998 elections, the PT increased its relative weight in the Brazilian left and on the political scene.

The election results provide a revealing diagnosis of the state of the PT, its qualities and defects, virtues and vices, as well as the contradictory tendencies at work within the party and in its relations with society.

Jose Corrêa Leite

The PT remains the main channel of political expression for popular discontent with neoliberalism and the government of Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

For the first time, the PT won the government of a key state. Rio Grande do Sul is the fourth most important state in Brazil, and historically it has been a focus for decisive movements of change.

The PT now has a real chance to show that it can use the conquest of state governments to push forward vital social and political changes. The victory in the south is promising because it is the result of a consistent commitment to popular struggles, to the development of new and higher forms of democracy, and to the defence of a clear socialist perspective.

But there has also been a strengthening of tendencies towards adapting the PT to the prevailing order. Processes of institutionalisation, bureaucratisation, and electoralism have been reinforced.

In spite of the good showing by Marta Suplicy, the candidate for Governor of Sao Paulo state, the PT in Sao Paulo seems to crystallise the vices which could turn the party into a series of "electoral machines" tied to parliamentary posts, operating pragmatically in the service of parochial interests.

In the state of Minas Gerais, the majority of the PT has decided to take part in the new administration of Itamar Franco, the former Brazilian president who has now fallen out with his former protégé, Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Their decision subordinates the party in that state to a dissident bourgeois faction, leaving it no project of its own.

In Rio de Janeiro, the PT is suffering the consequences of the heavy-handed intervention by the majority of the National Leadership.¹ Some PT members joining the state government, and others are in opposition to it.

These are the three most important states in Brazil. And in each of them there has been a marked weakening of the PT's political profile and of any clear and shared party identity.

In other places the PT had both positive experiences (as in Bahia), and nega-

tive ones (as in Paraná and Pernambuco), in terms of the strengthening of a socialist project.

Taken as a whole, the election results show that the sharp choices which the PT already faced, have if anything grown sharper. However the balance of forces within the party, which these elections consolidated, suggests that this battle between radically different options will not be resolved in the near future.

The serious crisis through which the country is passing, now synchronised with a world-wide crisis of the capitalist economy, is increasingly at the centre of politics. As Miguel Rossetto, the new Vice-Governor of Rio Grande do Sul, argued in these pages last month, the PT's future will be shaped by the position it adopts in relation to this crisis.

The victory in Rio Grande do Sul

Winning the state government in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul was the PT's biggest success in the 1998 elections. By mounting a combative, mass, left-wing campaign, the popular, democratic alternative was able to defeat the neoliberal project of the local elites.

Eduardo Mancuso

The results of the first round were already a political defeat for the representatives of neoliberalism, and a big victory for the PT. The total number of votes for the PT candidate for Governor, Olivio Dutra (2.295 million) and the candidate of the PDT, Senator Emilia Fernandes (309 thousand), was higher than that for the incumbent Governor, Antonio Britto (2.319 million).

In Rio Grande, the PT presidential candidate Lula da Silva collected more than 400,000 more votes than incumbent Fernando Henrique Cardoso.

In the elections for the State Assembly, the Britto slate, called "Rio Grande Vencedor (victorious)", but dubbed by PT supporters "Rio Grande Vendedor (sell-out)", managed to elect 35 state deputies, whilst the People's Front got 13 (12 from the PT and 1 from the relatively small Brazilian Socialist Party, PSB). The PDT won 7 seats. Of the 31 seats allocated to the state in the Federal Assembly in Brasilia, the People's

* This article first appeared in *Em Tempo*, the magazine of the Socialist Democracy current within the PT. Socialist Democracy is associated with the Fourth International, which sponsors *International Viewpoint*.

Notes

1. At the beginning of last year's election campaign, the majority of the PT in Rio de Janeiro voted to stand their own PT candidate for state governor. Senior figures in the party's national leadership felt this cut across their attempts to reach a comprehensive electoral pact with the PDT (formerly the Brazilian Labour Party) of the long-standing populist leader Leonel Brizola, who has always seen Rio de Janeiro as "his" territory.

Despite protests from many sections of the party, the national leadership of the PT overturned the Rio decision and imposed on the local party a policy of support from the first round for the PDT candidate in Rio, Anthony Garotinho. Garotinho eventually won the governorship.

The left had argued that standing separate candidates in the first round to argue for the two parties' distinct programmes would not prevent both parties supporting the best placed candidate in the second round. This is exactly what happened in Rio Grande do Sul, with the PDT campaigning for Olivio Dutra of the PT in the second round.

Front won 9 (8 for the PT and 1 for the PSB), whilst the PDT won 4.

Fifty times more money

Going to a second round was not part of Britto's plans. The outgoing governor's entire campaign was geared up to a victory in the first round. With an alliance of eleven parties behind him – the biggest Rio Grande do Sul has ever seen – Britto had four times more time on radio and TV than Olivio. It's believed that his campaign budget in the first round was fifty times greater than that of the People's Front.

It was a professional campaign in every sense, shaped by countless surveys, vast numbers of people paid to wave Britto flags, and an outrageous media manipulation of opinion polls, thumping home the message that the outgoing governor would certainly win in the first round.

Britto's election propaganda was handed over to the marketing firm Duda Mendonça. They had a free hand in the first round.

For the People's Front, on the other hand, campaign communications were co-ordinated by party leaders and executed (brilliantly) by a team from the *Casa de Cinema* (an independent film & TV production centre), on the basis of decisions taken together by the creative professionals and the campaign's political co-ordinators. It was clear to everyone that this was not about selling a product, but about presenting to the population ideas for change and an alternative programme for

contents

cover story

- 2 **Brazil: The PT after the polls**
• Jose Corrêa Leite
- 3 **The victory in Rio Grande do Sul** • Eduardo Mancuso

middle east

- 5 **Palestine/Israel: What about Wye?** • Roland Rance

europa

- 6 **Ireland: Dublin's stormclouds**
• Paul Flannigan
- 6 **Britain: Safety at work?**
- 7 **EuroMarch summer school**

americas

- 8 **USA: special dossier on the Mumia Abu-Jamal campaign**
• compiled by Steve Bloom
- 12 **The USA's "lawless war crimes"** • Noam Chomsky
- 13 **The 51st state**
• Ramsey Clark

asia

- 14 **Liberating theology**
• Jean Dupont
- 17 **Japan's economic misery**
• Dave Packer
- 18 **Indonesia: the struggle for justice in Aceh**
• Teresa Birks

Dossier: "gay marriage?"

- 20 **Introduction**
- 21 **France: Who's afraid of the Solidarity Pact?**
• Christophe Marcq
- 24 **Belgium: What about the straights?** • Carmen Saffo
- 25 **Netherlands: After partnership, marriage?**
• Peter Drucker
- 26 **Portugal: A new movement**
• Sergio Vitorino
- 28 **USA: Bill Clinton's "defense" of marriage**

history

- 29 **The Fourth International: 60 years of struggle**
• Livio Maitan

obituaries

- 32 **Vinod Mishra, May Wickramasuriya**

reviews

- 34 **"How it all began"**
by Nikolai Bukarin
(reviewed by Joe Auciello)

★ Brazil

Rio Grande do Sul.

The People's Front campaign succeeded in holding the Britto administration responsible for the increase in unemployment in the state, for the chaos in the health service, for the agricultural crisis, and for the sell-off of public assets.

Olívio Dutra systematically denounced the failure of Governor Antonio Britto to keep his word, after he had so publicly committed himself in the 1994 elections not to privatize the CRT and CEEE (the local telephone and power utilities).

Class terrorism

The Britto campaign resorted extensively to slander and insult against the PT and Olívio Dutra in particular, with a torrent of foul and unattributed leaflets circulating throughout the state, which the electoral authorities failed to apprehend.

In addition to this there was a campaign of what might be called "social terrorism", carried out in some desperation but very thoroughly by the state's main employers in all sectors of the economy.

They threatened their workers with closures, mass redundancies and the suspension of state contracts if Olívio beat Britto. This propaganda reached veritable paroxysms in the second round. Nothing of its kind had ever been seen in our state, neither in breadth nor in intensity. This was real "class hysteria".

As a result, contrary to what the local media would have us believe, these elections in Rio Grande do Sul did not "honour the best traditions of the south", but rather the worst. The economic elites prepared a climate of terror amongst their employees and officials at the prospect of a victory for Olívio.

Yet none of this prevented the People's Front from winning. Olívio's charisma, the energy of the activists, the PT's positive image in the state capital, Porto Alegre (after years running the town hall), combined with the natural opposition tendencies of the population of the state. We defeated not only Britto and Cardoso, but the historic block of the ruling classes in Rio Grande do Sul.

Victory in the debate

In the second round, once he'd got over the shock of his defeat in the first, Britto decided to concentrate

his strategy on the public debates, encouraging the media to stage a whole series of these, unlike the first round where he had systematically avoided open debate. He was counting on his experience as journalist and the "clash of ideas" to give him victory.

The debates came and Olívio's performance was firm: denunciation of the situation of the outgoing administration and its total subservience to the federal government, the privileges accorded to the big at the expense of the small, the state government's irresponsible attitude towards agriculture, unemployment and health, the proliferation of tolls on local roads introduced by the neoliberal government (leading to campaign stickers saying "Olívio is the way, Britto is the toll-road"), the shameless sell-off of public assets and the many promises which the candidate of the elites had so flagrantly broken.

The two presidential candidates of the left, Lula and Brizola, appeared throughout Olívio Dutra's campaign, and the PDT's participation in the second round campaign was decisive for the People's Front victory. Olívio got 50.78% of second round votes, and Britto got 49.22%.

The challenge of government

Since assuming office on 1 January, Olívio Dutra and Miguel Rosetto face the challenge of governing the fifth largest state in Brazil. Rio Grande has grave financial problems and a federal debt the negotiated terms of which make any kind of investment impossible. The PT does not have a majority in the State Assembly, and must deal with an open adversary in the presidential palace in Brasilia. But then, who said it would be easy?

To get to the Governor's Palace, Dutra, former mayor of the state capital Puerto Alegre, had to overcome many obstacles.

First there was a bitter internal dispute in March over the primaries, in which Tarso Genro, a well-known figure on the right of the PT failed to get nominated, and subsequently refused, along with many of his supporters, to lend any support to Olívio Dutra's campaign.

Then there was the initial failure of the alliance with the PDT, and the need to confront the most powerful political alliance the bourgeoisie had ever built in the state. Not to men-

tion the lack of financial resources, which was only overcome through the sale by and amongst the members of fake moustaches (to resemble Olívio's own bushy moustache) and our traditional red flags.

Democracy and participation

The People's Front campaign never tired of denouncing the Britto administration as a government of the few and for the rich. We managed to combine a stance of radical opposition with clear, alternative proposals for change, and a commitment to the exploited and oppressed majority with the energy and passion of our members.

What we proposed was a new model of development, combined with popular participation and democracy. According to Olívio, "the idea that we needed a form of development that was ecologically sustainable, economically feasible and socially fair, was what won in both the first and second rounds of the elections for the state government".

For Olívio "power means the possibility of a radical exercise of democracy, broadening the community's access to decision-making and making the voters subjects in the process, even the act of governing, along the lines of what has been happening for ten years in Porto Alegre with the highly successful experience of the Participative Budget".

At 23.30 hrs on election night, Governor Antonio Britto conceded defeat. At that moment, across the Largo da Epitáfio, the city square where days earlier 100,000 people had gathered for the final campaign rally, tens of thousands of PT supporters, flags in hand beneath the driving rain, "washed their souls" in a celebration of this historic victory, the conquest of a democratic and popular government in Rio Grande.

Now it is time to roll up our sleeves and build a broad mass movement capable of confronting the policies of President Fernando Henrique Cardoso and the ruling classes.

We must find ways to expose and put into reverse the financial strangulation imposed by the central state. To reverse the previous administration's outrageous renegotiation of the terms of the state debt [see last month's *International Viewpoint*]. To say nothing of the national straightjacket created by the latest fiscal package agreed with the IMF).

We need a mass movement that can develop policies and defend the popular and democratic government of Rio Grande do Sul. ★

The author is Secretary for Communications, Porto Alegre Workers Party (PT). This article first appeared in the Brazilian magazine *Em Tempo*.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR RESEARCH AND EDUCATION

Populism in Latin America

Adolfo Gilly, Helena Hirata, Carlos M. Vilas and the PRT (Argentina) [40 pages]

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What about Wye?

The Wye peace accord between Israel and the Palestine Authority, signed with so much publicity only a few weeks ago, has collapsed. So has the Israeli government.

Roland Rance asks how this will change the miserable situation of the Palestinians under Israeli occupation and in the Palestine Authority.

The Wye Accord was actually little more than a timetable for implementation of commitments which Israel had made long before.

Even so, Israeli PM Netanyahu objected right up to the last minute, and virtually had to be forced by Clinton to sign the document.

But Netanyahu's resistance should not be misunderstood; like most of the Israeli cabinet, he now accepts the Oslo agreements, which he opposed when ex-PM Rabin signed them five years ago.

This is not because he has become convinced of the need for Palestinian rights, or a Palestinian state, but because, as a cynical and realistic politician, he recognises that the Oslo process, and the recruitment of Arafat and his cronies as Israel's agents in the repression of the Palestinians, best guarantees the continuation of the occupation and its benefits for Israel.

Bantustans

This cynicism can also be seen in the recent appointment of Ariel Sharon, the Butcher of Beirut, as Israel's Foreign Minister, in an attempt to reassure the messianic right that the Greater Israel project is in safe hands. True to form, Sharon's immediate response to the Wye Accord was to call on Israeli settlers to grab every available hilltop, and establish settlements.

In the following days, hundreds of acres of Palestinian land were seized by settlers. Further roads are being built, linking these settlements and by-passing Palestinian villages and towns. The patchwork of Palestinian *bantustans* in the West Bank and Gaza Strip is being even further divided and isolated.

According to Tikva Honig-Parnass, of the Alternative Information Centre in Jerusalem, "The Palestinians will certainly be given a state – but they will not have independence".

Among the new elements in the Wye Accord was the establishment of joint US-Israeli-Palestinian arbitration commissions. Arafat agreed – even demanded – that the US be represented on these commissions by the CIA.

In effect, whenever the PA disagrees with the Israeli government on the interpretation of the agreement, the CIA will have the final say...

Humiliation without reward

The agreement called on the PA to prevent 'incitement'. This has been interpreted by Arafat as a green light for censorship. The increasing restrictions on the press have led to a journalists strike and scores of arrests. Several television stations were closed down for reporting Palestinian opposition to the US-British air strikes against Iraq.

A further humiliation for Arafat was the demand that the PLO repeal articles of their charter expressing opposition to Zionism. In fact, this was done several years ago, although the validity of the meeting was challenged by the Palestinian left.

This time, Arafat was unable even to convene a quorate meeting. In methods apparently learned from the 'New Labour' style of decision-making, the applause for Arafat's speech was declared to constitute approval for the necessary constitutional reform.

Meanwhile, Arafat's opponents gathered in a little-reported meeting in Damascus to reaffirm support for the original PLO charter.

This represents probably the final demise of the PLO as a credible organisation. Though as yet nothing has been established to replace it.

In one of the few Israeli commitments, Netanyahu promised to begin the release of Palestinian prisoners from Israeli gaols. Arafat did not bother to specify which prisoners. His ineffectiveness was exposed when the Israelis released 250 petty criminals, sex offenders and drug dealers.

Netanyahu's balancing act

Despite all these clear benefits for Israel, Netanyahu was still unable to convince a majority within his coalition to support the agreement. He has been hanging on to power through the tacit support of the Labour opposition.

Most Labour politicians recognise this agreement, and the earlier Oslo accord, as a continuation of Labour's historic policy, first expressed in the 1968 Alon Plan, for maximising territory under Israeli rule, while reducing the number of Palestinian subjects. Among Alon's closest political allies at the time were Rabin and Sharon.

But Netanyahu's balancing act has now come to an end, and he has called

fresh elections for May. He will be challenged from the right by Binyamin Begin, son of the former PM, who opposes any concessions to the Palestinians.

Within his Likud party, Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert is threatening to challenge Netanyahu. Former Justice Minister Dan Meridor plans to stand as a Likud moderate.

A new centre party is being set up, but is already squabbling over its candidate for Prime Minister. Labour leader (and former Chief-of-Staff) Ehud Barak – who has stated that Israel will remain in the settlements 'till the end of time' – could also face a challenge within his own party.

Israel's electoral system, in which the Knesset and the Prime Minister are elected separately, exacerbates the country's divisive and sectarian politics.

Although the religious parties are unlikely to put up a candidate for PM, they expect to increase their representation in the Knesset. This would enable them to raise the price for support of any government, both in terms of theocratic legislation and in financial support for their institutions.

Other groups seeking increased representation will be Russian immigrants, who now form about 20 per cent of the Jewish population, and the largely Middle Eastern slum dwellers, whose champion David Levi resigned as Foreign Minister earlier this year.

A return to Labour?

Even if the Labour Party were to win the elections, little would change.

With a slight change in style, and less personal antipathy, Barak would be able to cheat the Palestinians more easily and successfully than Netanyahu. The policy would remain the same, and Palestinians who believe that Barak is the lesser evil will be greatly disappointed.

Netanyahu (recently described by Britain's *The Guardian* as 'The Houdini of Israeli politics') remains in power with plenty of room for manoeuvre.

During the 1996 elections, Labour Prime Minister Shimon Peres launched a war against Lebanon in an attempt to boost his credentials as a strong leader. Israeli planes deliberately bombed refugees sheltering at the UN base at Qana, killing more than 100 people. Even this did not gain him a victory at the ballot box.

We can be sure that Netanyahu will make the Palestinians pay whatever price he feels necessary in order to win in May. But even this may not save him. ★

Dublin's stormclouds

Ireland's middle class has never had it so good. The town centres are populated with dozens of new boutiques, restaurants and wine bars especially tailored to their tastes.

Paul Flannigan reports

Since 1987 the percentage of national income going to profits has risen by 10%. More than 50 new luxury hotels have opened in Dublin since 1993.

Consumer spending has risen from less than £14 billion in 1988 to over £27 billion in 1997. The number of new car registrations has gone up from 68,000 in 1992 to 150,000 in 1998.

The Irish Central Bank is forecasting 9% growth in 1998 and 7% in 1999. But, in a generally very optimistic annual report, it identifies one threat to healthy profits – “possible wage inflation.” Unemployment is down to 7%, there are skill shortages in key sectors, increasing unfilled vacancies, and a legal minimum wage may soon be introduced. Rising rents and a certain “feel good factor” could combine to raise workers' expectations and spark a wage-push inflation.

The report noted that the 2-3% pay restraint rule agreed between government and the unions under the “Partnership 2000” arrangement is already being breached. The average pay rise in manufacturing is now 6%, and 14% in the booming building sector.

Increasing militancy

We are beginning to see the first signs of a new wave of working class militancy.

- In November train drivers brought the network to a standstill, a threat of strike action by busmen forced the company to concede a £1,350 bonus plus a 7% pay rise.
- 98% of Dublin's fire fighters voted for strike action if the Corporation went ahead with a productivity plan.
- Disputes are daily breaking out in the hospitals, mainly against the vicious programme of cuts.
- The leadership of the civil service union (CPSU) has been forced by rank and file pressure to convene a national conference to reconsider the union's commitment to Partnership 2000

The most intense bout of militancy has occurred within the building industry.



Gerry Adams has been deepening Sinn Fein's links with the southern Irish party Fianna Fail, currently in power in Dublin. The party is bankrolled by some of the island's most exploitative capitalists. As southern workers radicalise, Sinn Fein may regret its choice of partners. [JD]

Ireland has the fastest growing building sector in the European Union. £7 billion was invested in 1997. The industry has trebled in size since 1988, it now employs 100,000. Despite this year's pay rises for skilled workers, the terms and conditions faced by the majority of building workers have actually worsened

over the period of the boom.

In 1998 alone, 18 workers were killed on the sites, and scores more seriously injured. When a worker dies as a result of a safety lapse, the maximum that can be awarded against a contractor is £1,000.

According to a union representative “It's cheaper for a developer not to put up a proper safety structure and just keep paying £500 or a £1,000 every time someone gets killed, and that's what has been happening.”

In 1997 a high court judge called the biggest developer of luxury departments in the country, Zoe Developments, “a disgrace to the construction industry.”

Two building workers were recently sent to prison after a protest against the crudely exploitative contracting-out scheme. This scheme, recently developed by the main building employers, cuts costs by employing workers only indirectly – by small contractors or telephone agents.

Usually the worker starts as an employee of a major contractor, but within a few weeks he is told that if he wants to keep working he should re-register with a sub-contractor or even as self-employed.

Union officials estimate that by re-employing workers as individuals the main employers have cut their wage bills by about 12%. They also avoid paying any PRSI (national insurance), contributions to the industry pension scheme, or any holiday or sick pay.

The two bricklayers were imprisoned on October 21 for picketing the site of O'Connor Construction on the site of the old British embassy after the firm had obtained an court injunction.

The men are part of the rank and file group Building Workers Against the Black Economy, set up in late 199.

The picketing began in late August

Britain Health and (for some) safety

Britain's Health and Safety Commission has reported an 18% increase in the number of warnings issued. Shaun Cohen reports that the number of prosecutions initiated by the HSE increased 11% between 1997 and 1998, of which 77% resulted in a conviction. The average fine rose 25% to £3,886 (US\$6,225).

The report doesn't say how many of the 29,320 major work place accidents were investigated. The lower the rate of investigation the greater the level of corporate immunity.

In 1996/97 the rate of investigation into major workplace injuries was less than 10%. Only 7 of the 67 blindings, 281 of the 1,006 amputations and 135 of the 622 burns were investigated.

There are no figures about the number of companies and directors being prosecuted. But data from the West Midlands Health & Safety Advice Centre shows that between 1990 and 1992 only 5% of major injuries resulted in prosecutions.

In 1996-97 only 15% of the 679 deaths led to prosecutions under health and safety legislation. Somewhat disappointing, since even the HSE blames management failure for 70% of workplace deaths.

Of the 1,654 prosecutions initiated by the HSE, only six senior officers were charged. Although during the same period it prosecuted 24 workers. ★

Source: Health and Safety Commission Annual Report, November 1998, as reviewed in Socialist Outlook

after O'Connor's began sub-contracting work to a 'subbie', E. Moran Ltd.

For the men's court appearance, hundreds of building workers downed tools at 25 sites across Dublin and converged on the court waving placards like "Free the workers - jail the bankers".

Simultaneous solidarity protests by building workers occurred in Limerick, Waterford, Cork and Kilkenny. All the solidarity action was illegal and went against the advice of the Union leadership, which condemned both the original action and the solidarity activity.

When the men were imprisoned (for contempt of court), hundreds of workers brought traffic on Dublin's O'Connell street to a halt. Later that evening there were clashes with the police outside Mountjoy prison. The two men have served their sentence, but the struggle to end the exploitation on the sites is set to become more intense.

Workers in Dublin are currently picketing three Sisk sites against the victimisation of two shop stewards. A small rank and file group is effectively arguing for action beyond the control of the union bureaucracy.

New period

It seems that a new period of deepening class conflict is developing in southern Ireland. A comfy future with the type of social partnership arrangements favoured by the bureaucracy is looking unlikely.

The ideology of the prosperous Celtic Tiger has raised material expectations. Thousands of workers are fed up seeing the bosses getting rich and arrogant on the back of their continual pay restraint and tougher working conditions.

The state is boasting of its biggest-ever current account financial surplus,

(over £1bn). And at the same time it is cutting back on public spending on health and public services.

Euro preparations mean cuts

A recent IMF directors' report warned the Irish government not to start dipping into its budget surplus, since the state treasury will need large fiscal reserves to enable it to manoeuvre within the new Euro single currency regime.

Already a major row has broken out at Galway Hospital over the state's refusal to spend any of its surplus to prevent the closure of two vital wards.

Most staff at the hospital attended an angry protest meeting to fight the cuts. Nurses are already on a work to rule and threatening a national stoppage.

More and more potential for explosive class conflict is building up within southern Irish society. Increasing numbers of working class people feel alienated by the gross social inequalities and moral hypocrisies. Workers are pleased that the economy is booming but also realise that they are not getting a deserved share of the new wealth. ★

Source: Socialist Outlook

EuroMarches '99 - Cologne, Germany

The European Marches (organiser of the mass demonstration in Amsterdam in '97) is calling another major protest (50,000 or more) in Cologne in June to coincide with the Summit of European Union Heads of Government.

Marchers will set out from every region of Germany and from other European cities including Prague, Luxembourg, and Paris, to converge on Cologne for the demo. There will be a (1,000 strong) march from Brussels to Cologne.

Across Europe unemployment, job insecurity, social exclusion and poverty are growing. The demands will be:

- A guaranteed job for all, and a decent standard of living.
- For an immediate massive reduction of working hours, coordinated on a European level, without loss of wages or purchasing power.
- Opposition to compulsory part-

time work, child labour, and social dumping.

- Opposition to the enrichment of the minority and the impoverishment of the majority.
- The redistribution of wealth.
- Opposition to all forms of exclusion and discrimination, including those based on gender or race. Yes to the full right of asylum for the persecuted.
- Defend the welfare state. Yes to social rights in all areas (housing, education, health etc.) with the necessary funding.

The European Marches are appealing to the peoples of Europe, to associations, trade unions and social forces, to make June 5th 1999 a massive day of mobilisation.

Final plans were made at an open conference in Cologne on January 23-24th. National committees will launch the campaign in the coming weeks. [SO] ★

Unemployment: European summer school in Greece

The Greek committee of the European Marches against Unemployment, Marginalisation and Job Precarity organised the movement's first "International Summer School" in the northern resort of Chalkidiki in September 1998.

The 130 Greek participants included trade unionists, representatives of political parties and leaders and activists in the country's various social movements. The 40 foreign participants included activists from Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia, and across the Balkans, as well as from Western Europe.

The opening press conference testified to the new dynamic created by the unemployed movement: it was attended by representatives of the left-wing of PASOK (the ruling, socialist party) and the

more radical Greek Communist Party. The presidents of two left parties, Synaspismos and DHKKI, attended in person.

The press conference provided an upbeat contrast with another of the day's events - French Prime Minister L. Jospin's press conference with his Greek counterpart K. Simitis.

Compensating for their inexperience with determination and enthusiasm, the organisers facilitated a wide range of debates - on organising the unemployed across Europe, the crisis in Eastern Europe, and the building of closer links between unemployment activists in the various countries of the network.

Flushed with the success of this event, and the growing interest of Greek activists for the EuroMarch initiative, the Greek committee is

now trying to organise a train which will sweep through the Balkan countries, bringing a wide range of radical voices to Cologne for the counter-summit to the EU and G7 heads of state meetings.

This is an ambitious project - not just in terms of cost, but given the diplomatic tensions and disrupted transport links that still plague the Balkans.

Of course, the Committee's main activity is organising unemployed workers inside Greece. By linking up with the Athens Local Union, which regroups all of the trade union and political left in the capital, the Committee is currently building the core groups which, in the coming months, should create, for the first time, a real Greek movement of and for the unemployed. [GM] ★

Pennsylvania Supreme Court Upholds Verdict

Massive Protests Needed to Win a New Trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal

by Steve Bloom

The October 29 ruling by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, turning down Mumia Abu-Jamal's appeal for a new trial, is one more proof that the U.S. criminal court system has very little interest in justice.

Justice, at the very least, demands a new trial in this case. The seven judges of Pennsylvania's highest court, however, have clearly demonstrated that they are simply one more cog in a government machine of death which is determined to take Mumia's life—not because he is guilty of any crime, but because he is Black and militantly opposed to the oppression of poor and working people, especially people of color.

The court's opinion was unanimous. It was, notably, even joined by one Justice—Ronald Castille—who worked in the Philadelphia District Attorney's office before he was elected to his present position. And while he was a prosecutor Castille signed the papers filed against Mumia's original appeal.

Despite this clear conflict of interest Castille refused to recuse (remove) himself from the case. Mumia's attorneys also noted that, in his bid for election to the court in 1993, Castille was endorsed by the Philadelphia Fraternal Order of Police (FOP)—which has campaigned in favor of Mumia's execution.

As Castille explained, "the FOP, which endorsed me during earlier electoral processes, also endorsed Mr. Chief Justice John P. Flaherty, Mr. Justice Ralph Cappy, Mr. Justice Russell M. Nigro, and Madame Justice Sandra Schultz Newman. If the FOP's endorsement constituted a basis for recusal, practically the entire court would be required to decline participation in this appeal."

That remark tells the whole story. If Mumia Abu-Jamal is going to get any justice it is, clearly, going to have to be won in the streets. We cannot rely on the courts.

The background

Mumia was convicted in 1982 for killing a Philadelphia police officer, Daniel Faulkner. The scenario that surrounded his trial is chillingly familiar to anyone who has studied the workings of the death penalty since it was reintroduced into the United States in 1976.

Mumia is Black. He was incompetently "defended" by a court-appointed attorney. The police intimidated witnesses, manufactured evidence that would



incriminate Mumia, and suppressed evidence that would exonerate him. And the jury was manipulated to exclude Blacks.

A recent study of ten years of the death penalty in Pennsylvania found that in capital cases Black jurors were five times more likely than white jurors to be excused. In Mumia's trial, however, the figure was: 16.5 times more likely.

In addition Mumia had one more strike against him as far as the courts and police were concerned. He is a former Black Panther and an award-winning journalist who consistently (and effectively) attempted to expose police abuse

and corruption in Philadelphia.

The trial was assigned to hanging judge Albert Sabo, who held the U.S. record for death sentences handed down. Sabo was once denounced by five *assistant District Attorneys*, who issued a statement explaining that it was impossible for any defendant to get a fair trial in Judge Sabo's court.

Sabo also heard the initial phase of Mumia's latest appeal, during which he upheld every motion made by the prosecution while denying every one made by the defense. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court, however, insisted that it could find no basis to conclude from this rather distinctive pattern (or from anything else that happened during the original trial or the appeal process) that there was any bias on the part of the judge.

Judges in Wonderland

Mumia's case differs from that of most death-row inmates in one important respect. Over the years a substantial movement has developed to prevent his execution and to win a new trial.

His legal appeal has been taken on by a top team of attorneys headed by

A Statement From Death Row

Once again, Pennsylvania's highest court has shown us the best justice that the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP) can buy. Ignoring right reason, their own precedent, and fundamental justice, they have returned to the stranglehold of death.

In their echoes of the tortured logic of Judge Albert Sabo, they have reflected a striking fidelity to the DA's office. If it is fair to have a tribunal who are in part admittedly paid by the FOP—and at least one justice who can double as DA one day and a judge the next in the same case—then fairness is just as empty a word as "justice." To paraphrase Judge Sabo, it is "just an emotional feeling."

In recent months the Pennsylvania Supreme Court has upheld death sentences in cases where an impartial reading of transcripts or pleadings would make an honest affirmation all but impossible. They have ignored all evidence of innocence, overlooked clear instances of jury taint, and cast a dead eye on

defense attorneys' ineffectiveness. What they have done in my case is par for the course. This is a political decision, paid for by the FOP on the eve of the election. It is a Mischief Night gift from a court that has a talent for the macabre.

I am sorry that this court did not rule on the right side of history. But I am not surprised. Every time our nation has come to a fork in the road with regard to race, it has chosen to take the path of compromise and betrayal. On 29 October 1998, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court committed a collective crime: it damned due process, strangled the fair trial, and raped justice.

Even after this legal legerdemain [sleight of hand] I remain innocent. A court cannot make an innocent man guilty. Any ruling founded on injustice is not justice. The righteous fight for life, liberty, and for justice can only continue. ★

Mumia Abu-Jamal,
SCI-Greene, Waynesburg, PA
October 31st, 1998

Leonard Weinglass. As a result of the work done in preparation for this appeal, the absurd miscarriage of justice that passed for a trial in 1982 is now well documented. The facts are easily accessible to anyone who cares to delve into the matter—in print, through the Internet, on video, etc.—and all of this sordid history was spelled out in the legal papers placed before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court.

A portion of this record is documented in the text of the *New York Times* advert reproduced in the box on page 11. But this only begins to scratch the surface of problems with the original trial. For example, there were three government “eye-witnesses” who supported one or another aspect of the case against Mumia. But their testimony is suspect.

Another witness who was called by the defense at the trial, Veronica Jones, now says explicitly that she lied in court because the police had threatened her if she refused to do so. This should cast some doubt on the credibility of the others who testified. But it is not the only reason to be sceptical.

In an unrelated recent case a woman by the name of Pamela Jenkins appeared as the star government witness in a trial against six police officers from Philadelphia’s 39th District who were convicted on charges of gross misconduct. In a statement signed for Mumia’s attorneys Jenkins explained that one of the convicted officers, Tom Ryan, had tried to compel her to give false testimony against Mumia in the original trial.

She further said that during this same period Cynthia White—the only one to testify in court that she actually saw Mumia fire his gun at Officer Faulkner—had told her that “she [Cynthia] was afraid of the police and that the police were trying to get her to say something about the shooting.” Apparently they succeeded.

Despite all of this, the judges of the Pennsylvania Supreme court found against Mumia’s appeal on every single point of fact and of law. They concluded—as Sabo did—that all of the testimony in the original trial remains credible, and that all of the witnesses who have since come forward to say that they were coerced by the police are not telling the truth.

The judges chose to accept at face value the tale of two officers who failed to say anything about Mumia’s alleged hospital-bed “confession”—one of whom even wrote in his notebook that Mumia said nothing at all the night of his arrest—and then suddenly “remembered” this vital evidence two months later.

They disregard the note in the medical examiner’s report (never introduced at the trial because the defense was never informed that it existed) which indicates the fatal bullet could not have come from Mumia’s gun. There is forensic evidence

which proves that the bullet which wounded Mumia could not have been fired from the positions Faulkner and Mumia were in according to the state’s own account of events, and that Mumia could not have been as close to Faulkner as is alleged when he is supposed to have fired the first shot.

None of this was brought out before the jury because the defense was provided no money by the court to hire a forensic expert of its own.

Indeed we find ourselves in a legal Wonderland: Verdict first, evidence later—as far as the honorable judges of the Pennsylvania Supreme Court are concerned. For anyone else there should, at the very least, be a question of reasonable doubt.

Federal appeals

Mumia’s next step will be an appeal to the Federal courts. But this is now much more difficult for death-row prisoners. In 1996, during the anti-

You can help!

Two major actions have been called to mobilize support from those who want to help win a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal:

- Conferences in Philadelphia, New York, Chicago San Francisco, and other cities in January and February.
- Mass demonstrations in Philadelphia and San Francisco on April 24 (Mumia’s birthday).

For further information contact International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu Jamal, P.O. Box 19709, Philadelphia, PA 19143; Phone: 215-476-8812, Fax: 215-476-7511; Email: mumia@aol.com; website: www.mumia.org.

Send protest messages to:

- Governor Tom Ridge, Main Capitol Building, Rm 225, Harrisburg, PA 17120
- Chief Justice P. Flaherty, Supreme Court of PA, Six Gateway Center, Suite 6161, 11 Stanwix St., Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Demand a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal and that no execution take place until after a new trial is held.

- Send a message to Attorney General Janet Reno, 950 Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Rm 440, Washington, DC 20530. Protest the violations of Mumia’s civil rights during the legal proceedings in his case and demand an independent federal civil rights investigation.
- Send donations for Mumia’s legal defense to: “Black United Fund/Mumia Abu-Jamal.” In the memo field write “legal defense” and mail to: Black United Fund, 2227 N. Broad St., Philadelphia, PA 19132-4502.

terrorist hysteria that followed the Oklahoma City bombing, Congress passed the “Effective Death Penalty Act.”

Before that law federal judges undertook an independent review of the facts of any death-penalty case which came before them. but according to the new law the federal courts *must* accept the facts of Mumia’s case—and any other death-penalty case—as determined by the state courts.

So all of the Wonderland interpretations of Judge Sabo, now upheld by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, will, if this law is applied, be taken as *established fact* when the appeal comes before the federal courts. This puts an enormous—possibly even impossible—burden of proof on the defense to justify federal intervention.

There is, in addition, a bizarre legal formulation in the new law which requires the federal courts to accept determinations of law by the state courts even if these interpretations violate the federal constitution—so long as they are not found to be “unreasonably wrong.”

Almost any legal ruling can conceivably be accepted under such a formula, a fact which—according to the National Association of Defense Lawyers—“creates arbitrary and virtually insurmountable obstacles for prisoners.”

Of course, legal grounds for appeal remain—including the question of whether the “Effective Death Penalty Act” itself, with its restrictions on federal appeals, is constitutional. But the legal effort will certainly be an uphill struggle at this point.

A broad-based movement

The unanimity of the verdict by the Pennsylvania court, even more than the fact of that verdict, should be taken as an indication that this case is going to be won or lost primarily on a political battlefield, not on a legal one. The ruling powers would seem to have made a clear decision that they want to drive ahead with Mumia’s execution no matter what the facts may be. And federal court intervention, as we have seen, cannot be relied upon.

For social activists this case should take on a status similar to that of some landmark historical struggles carried out to stop the executions of people like Joe Hill (Utah 1915), Sacco and Vanzetti (Massachusetts 1927), and Julius and Ethel Rosenberg (federal, 1953).

It is somewhat chilling to remember that in each of these cases, despite massive world-wide campaigns of protest, the government went ahead and carried out its legal murder anyway.

Today the movement to save the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal is far weaker than in any of these previous situations. That should give us a sense of what we are up against. If we are going to save the life of Mumia Abu-Jamal then there is substantial work to be done.

And yet the facts of this case are so blatant, the case for reasonable doubt so clear, that it gives our side a definite advantage if we are capable of utilizing those facts effectively. The task is to get out the truth to the broadest possible audience—far broader than the relatively small circles of committed radicals and revolutionaries who have so far been the most visible in rallying to Mumia's defense. We have to reach out to unions, church groups, college and high-school students, and others in the "mainstream" of American life.

Immediately after the Pennsylvania court's decision emergency protests were held. During the first week of November demonstrations in cities across the country turned out hundreds of activists in several major cities, and smaller numbers elsewhere.

On 7 November 1998 regional mobilizations took place—with 1,000 participants in Philadelphia and 2,500 in San Francisco, along with smaller actions in other places. So there is a good base of

supporters already involved who can begin to do the needed work.

The forces coordinating the national defense effort have now called for major conferences in Philadelphia, Chicago, and California at the end of January and beginning of February, plus mobilizations for Mumia's birthday, April 24, in Philadelphia and San Francisco (see box on page 9). It will be important to take advantage of the opportunity these activities provide to substantially broaden the appeal of the movement.

But if we are going to succeed in reaching out beyond the already-committed core of activists we need to acknowledge that much of the "revolutionary" rhetoric which many have brought to actions around Mumia constitutes a self-created obstacle, one which makes it *harder* to talk to that broader audience.

It is essential to now focus quite consciously on trying to convince every person with even a modest commitment to justice and human rights in this country, most of whom do not consider

themselves revolutionaries, that they have a personal stake in whether Mumia lives or dies, and therefore in whether he gets a new trial.

This kind of approach by the movement to save Mumia's life would be, in the end, the most revolutionary—because it could create the biggest potential problem for the U.S. ruling class.

If the State of Pennsylvania decides to drive ahead with this execution we will be in a position to expose the naked reality of class, and white supremacist, rule in the U.S.A. to hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions, who now have illusions in a system which (they have so often been told) guarantees "justice for all."

It is this potential, and only this potential for massive numbers to discover the real truth about racist justice in capitalist America which has any chance of forcing the State of Pennsylvania to hesitate in its legal murder campaign. All of our organizing strategies should be planned accordingly. ★

A message from Death Row innocents

There are 75 documented cases in which death sentences have been overturned since 1976 when the death penalty was reinstated. Many of them came with days, even hours, of actually being executed before they were exonerated.

During that same period almost 500 people have had their lives taken away. There is no statistic to tell us how many of that number were actually innocent.

The letter below was circulated during the November 1998 "National Conference on Wrongful Convictions & the Death Penalty." It is signed by 15 individuals who have faced this harrowing ordeal.

"There are innocent men and women on death row in this country. We know, for we were numbered among them. Many of us endured for years in the narrow and isolated confines of a barren cell designed to murder our spirits, as the State struggled to win final legal sanction to steal our lives.

Such is the case with Mumia Abu-Jamal, an award-winning journalist, an outspoken opponent of racism and police brutality, a militant champion of justice for Black people, a man who for decades has been the voice of the dispossessed and the disenfranchised and an innocent man on death row in Pennsylvania.

We know Mumia's struggle, because no-one knows better than

we of the lengths to which the criminal "justice" system will go in its relentless quest to take a life.

Many of us are intimately familiar with the daily degradation of Mumia's seventeen years on death row: locked in his cell for 23 hours each day, forbidden to embrace or even see his family members, prohibited from being filmed or audio taped by reporters, slapped into punitive detention for writing and publishing his views, and refused the right to confidentially communicate with his attorneys.

We were sustained in our struggle for justice, as Mumia is, by the tireless support of our families, friends, and people of principle who organized to liberate us from the machine that tried to slay us. And above all else we were sustained, as Mumia is, by the only real certainty we were allowed on death row — the knowledge that we were innocent.

The State sought to poison us, electrocute us or hang us with the machine-like indifference it reserves for people it has determined to be worthless and therefore disposable — in this country, overwhelmingly poor people and people of color. If our murders could be used to enhance a political career or a partisan policy debate, then so much the better.

But the State seeks to murder Mumia with a ruthless and relentless fervor that has publicly defied any pretext of fairness or decency. Let us be clear: the State's campaign to murder Mumia is designed above all else to silence a Black man who dares to speak truth to power. As Mumia himself has said, the State does not seek just his death, it seeks his silence.

It is for these reasons that we call on all people of conscience to speak out, to organize against this travesty of justice, and to demand Mumia's freedom. To allow Pennsylvania to murder Mumia is to allow the State to succeed in slaughtering another innocent and in silencing a voice for the voiceless.

We know that the State will not concede its wrongdoing without a struggle. We know that the authorities who have sought to murder this man will not submit to justice unless we, the people, organize to fight the State's abuse of power. Join us. Stand with Mumia Abu-Jamal, our brother and our friend, and demand that the State of Pennsylvania set him free. ★

List Of Signatories: Kirk Bloodworth: Maryland, Convicted 1984, Released 1993 • Joseph Burrows: Illinois, Convicted 1989, Released 1994 • Perry Cobb: Illinois, Convicted 1979, Released 1987 • Muneer Deeb: Texas, Convicted 1985, Released 1993 • Gary Gauger: Illinois, Convicted 1993, Released 1996 • Verneal Jimerson: Illinois, Convicted 1985, Released 1996 • Troy Lee Jones: California, Convicted 1982, Released 1996 • David Keaton: Florida, Convicted 1971, Released 1973 • Ronald Keine: New Mexico, Convicted 1974, Released 1976 • Carl Lawson: Illinois, Convicted 1990, Released 1996 • Wilbert Lee: Florida, Convicted 1963, Released 1975 • Bradley P. Scott: Florida, Convicted 1988, Released 1991 • Delbert Tibbs: Florida, Convicted 1974, Released 1977 • Darby (Williams) Tillis: Illinois, Convicted 1979, Released 1987 • Dennis Williams: Illinois, Convicted 1979, Released 1996

International support is crucial to save Mumia's life...



Mumia's case is probably better known outside the United States than at home.

President Nelson Mandela of South Africa, a former President of West Germany, and Belgium's Foreign Minister have spoken out for a new trial, along with 74 members of the Danish Parliament and 38 members of the Japanese Diet.

The European Parliament has passed a formal resolutions calling for a review of Mumia's conviction.

And on November 25, 1997, after a personal visit with Mumia, Pierre

Sane, Secretary General of Amnesty International, stated his fear that "Mumia Abu Jamal's original trial may have been contaminated by the deep-rooted racism that appears to taint the application of the death penalty in Pennsylvania."

This is a tribute to the massive international solidarity campaign. ★

Facts About the Case

[Taken from the text of a full-page advertisement published in *The New York Times* on 16 October 1998, two weeks before the Pennsylvania Supreme Court verdict. It was signed by scores of prominent individuals and organizations.]

"Award winning journalist and former Black Panther Mumia Abu-Jamal was convicted in 1982 of killing a Philadelphia police officer, and was sentenced to death. Recent court hearings have raised very serious questions about his trial and the evidence used against him.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court is now set to rule on the 26 issues raised in his appeal for a new trial. Throughout this process there has been an orchestrated campaign to obscure the facts and expedite his execution, including a recent full-page advertisement in the *New York Times*.

- Judge Albert Sabo has sentenced more people to death than any other sitting judge in the United States. Six former Philadelphia prosecutors have sworn in court documents that no accused could receive a fair trial in Sabo's court.

- The Jury was impaneled only after eleven qualified African-Americans were removed by peremptory challenges from the prosecution, a practice that was recently revealed as having been taught to prosecutors in a special training video tape.

- The Defense Attorney testified that he didn't interview a single witness in preparation for the 1982 trial and he informed the court in advance that he was not prepared. Jamal was also denied the right to act as

his own attorney.

- The Defense Investigator quit the case before the trial began because the meager court allocated funds were exhausted. Neither a ballistics expert or pathologist could be hired because of insufficient funds.

- The Prosecutor used the fact that 12 years earlier Jamal had been a member of the Black Panther Party as an argument for imposing the death penalty, a practice later condemned as unconstitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court in another case.

- The Racial Bias of Philadelphia's courts now has 120 people on death row—107 of them non-white.

The question of "evidence"

- The Prosecution claimed that Jamal loudly confessed at the hospital where he was taken after being shot by the slain officer and beaten by police.

But the Jury never heard from police officer Gary Wakshul who was guarding Jamal at the hospital and reported "the Negro male made no comments." When called as a defense witness, the prosecution contended that he was on vacation and unavailable. The judge refused a continuance so he could be brought in, when in fact he was home and available.

Today we know that no police officers claimed to have heard this "confession" until two months after it allegedly occurred, and after Jamal had filed police brutality charges. The attending physician also denies that Jamal said anything.

- The Prosecution claimed that ballistics evidence proved that Jamal was the shooter.

But the Jury never heard the written Findings of the Medical Examiner which contradicted other prosecution testimony by stating "shot w/ 44 cal" (Jamal's gun was .38 caliber). Jamal's court appointed attorney said he didn't see that portion of the report, so he never raised it.

Today we know that the police never tested Jamal's gun to see if it had been recently fired, never tested Jamal's hands to see if he had fired a gun, have never shown Jamal's gun to be the fatal weapon, and have lost a bullet fragment removed by the medical examiner.

- The Prosecution claimed that eye-witnesses identified Jamal as the shooter.

But the Jury never heard from a key eye-witness, William Singletary, who saw the whole incident and has testified that Jamal was not the shooter.

Singletary, a local businessman, was harassed by police when he reported this, and he subsequently fled the city.

Today we know that the key witnesses Veronica Jones, Cynthia White, and Robert Chobert testified falsely in 1982, and we know why.

- Jones, who now testifies in support of Jamal, was threatened with the loss of her children if she did not support the police story.

- Chobert, a white cab driver, first told the arriving police that the shooter ran away.

- White backed the whole police story, but none of the other witnesses can remember seeing her at the immediate scene.

- Both Chobert and White received very special treatment, including exemptions from criminal prosecutions.

- By contrast, when Veronica Jones testified in Jamal's support, she was arrested in the courtroom. ★

The USA's "lawless" war crimes

The US and its increasingly pathetic British lieutenant want the world—and in particular the people of the Middle East region—to understand that "What We Say Goes,"

That was how President Bush defined his "New World Order" while the missiles were raining on Baghdad in February 1991.

The message is clear and simple: we are violent and lawless states, and if you don't like it, get out of our way.

Noam Chomsky

This is a message of no small significance. Simply have a look at the projections of geologists concerning the expanding role of Middle East oil in global energy production in the coming decades.

I suspect that the message is understood in the places to which it is addressed.

A very conservative assessment is that the US/UK attacks are "aggression," to borrow the apt term of the Vatican and others. They are as clear an example of a war crime as one could construct.

In the past, acts of aggression, international terrorism, and violence have sometimes been cloaked in at least a pretense of legalism — increasingly ludicrous over the years, to be sure.

In this case there was not even a pretense. Rather, the US and its client simply informed the world that they are criminal states, and that the structure of binding international law and conventions that has been laboriously constructed over many years is now terminated.

It is still available, of course, as a weapon against designated enemies, but apart from that it is without significance or value. True, that has been always been operative reality, but it has rarely been declared with such clarity and dramatic force.

As for the moral level, if the word can even be used, it is hard to improve on the pronouncements of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright. Two years ago, when asked on national TV about her reaction to reports that the sanctions she administers have killed half a million Iraqi children in five years, she

responded that it is "a very hard choice," but "we think the price is worth it." We know well enough on what page of history those sentiments belong.

Today, suggesting a reversal of Washington's policy since 1991 of seeking a military dictatorship to replace Saddam Hussein's in name at least, she explains that "we have come to the determination that the Iraqi people would benefit if they had a government that really represented them." We need not tarry on the plausibility of this sudden conversion. The fact that the words can be articulated tells us more than enough.

It costs the US/UK nothing to keep a stranglehold on Iraq and to torture its people — while strengthening Saddam's rule, as all concede. There is a temporary oil glut, and from the point of view of the oil majors (mainly US/UK and clients), it's just as well to keep Iraqi oil off the market for the moment; the low price is harmful to profits.

That aside, competitors (France and Russia) are likely to have the inside track when Iraq, which has the world's second largest known energy reserves, is brought back into the international system, as it will be when its resources are needed. So it might not be a bad idea to bomb the refineries too, while dismantling further what remains of Iraqi society.

The region is highly volatile and turbulent. Alliances can quickly shift. Though the fact is carefully suppressed, we would do well to bear in mind that the US/UK were highly protective of their admired friend and trading partner Saddam Hussein right through the period of his worst crimes (gassing of Kurds, etc.), and returned to support for him right after the Gulf War, in March 1991, as he turned to crushing a Shi'ite rebellion in the South that might have overthrown his regime.

The "madman" theory

Alliances are likely to shift again. But fundamental interests remain stable, and the two warrior states are making it as clear as they can that they are dangerous, and others should beware.

It might also be recalled that a recent high-level planning study, released early this year but scarcely reported, resurrected Nixon's "madman theory," advising that the US should present itself as "irrational and vindictive," flourishing its nuclear arsenal and portraying itself as "out of control." That should frighten the world properly, and ensure submissive-ness, it is hoped.

The most ominous aspect of all of

this is, perhaps, that the openly declared contempt for the law of nations and professed norms of civilized behavior proceeds without eliciting even a twitter of principled comment among the educated classes. Their position, with impressive uniformity, is that the criminal stance of the US and its client are so obviously valid as to be beyond discussion, even beyond thought.

If such matters as international law or the opinions and wishes of the population of the region intrude at all, which is very rare, they are dismissed as a "technicality," with no bearing on the decisions of the global ruler.

Not only are the warrior states officially declaring (not for the first time, to be sure) that the foundations of international order are an absurd irrelevance, but they are doing so with the virtually unanimous endorsement of the educated classes. The world should take notice, and it surely does, outside of narrow sectors of privilege and power.

The manner and timing of the attack were also surely intended to be a gesture of supreme contempt for the United Nations, and a declaration of the irrelevance of international law or other obligations; that too has been understood.

The bombing was initiated as the Security Council met in emergency session to deal with the crisis in Iraq, and even its permanent members were not notified.

The timing is interesting in other ways. It began at 5PM Eastern Standard Time, when the three major TV channels open their news programs. This script is familiar. The first war crime orchestrated for prime time TV was the bombing of Libya in 1986, scheduled precisely for 7PM EST — which is when the major TV news programs aired then.

Personally, I doubt that all of this has much to do with the impeachment farce. From Clinton's point of view, the coincidence mainly serves to undermine his credibility further, though Democrats are plainly hoping to construct an issue for later campaigns, establishing the basis for much passionate rhetoric about how these evil Republicans attacked our Commander-in-Chief while our brave sons and daughters were putting their lives on the line fighting for their country, and so on. The posture is familiar not only here, but also in the long and ugly record of warrior states generally. ★

Source: Mid-East Realities email list. To subscribe, contact <INFOMER@MiddleEast.Org>

The 51st State

To:

Sir John Weston,
British Ambassador to the United Nations,
885 2nd Avenue New York, NY 10017, USA
November 11, 1998

Dear Ambassador Weston,

President Clinton has chosen the anniversary of the armistice ending World War I to further threaten Iraq with another violent assault. He charges that failure to act "would permanently damage the credibility of the U.N. Security Council to act as a force for promoting international peace." It is a phrase reminiscent of Plato's unnamed Athenian Stranger who favored "seeking peace by making war." He taunts the U.N. to act, asserting "Failure to respond [will] embolden Saddam to act recklessly." It is a threat by a weakened President thinking only of his personal political standing. U.S. contempt for U.N. authority is shown by its defiance of the recent General Assembly vote of 157 nations versus 2 nations protesting the U.S. criminal blockade of Cuba, its refusal to pay dues to the U.N. year after year and its selective defiance, and support for violations by other nations of General Assembly, Security Council and International Court of Justice resolutions and decisions.

The Security Council should immediately admonish the U.S. that it must not again attack Iraq. The Security Council is already responsible for military attacks on Iraq, albeit at the insistence of the U.S., including 110,000 aerial sorties unleashing 88,500 tons of bombs across Iraq by U.S. aircraft in January and February 1991 which destroyed 80% of Iraq's military capacity according to the Pentagon. Iraq has been further decimated by the most severe Security Council sanctions in history since August 6 (Hiroshima Day) 1990. More than a million and a half people have died in Iraq as a direct result of those sanctions, as U.N. agencies have reported. The great majority of the victims were infants, children, elderly and chronically ill persons. This is unquestionably a violation of the Genocide Convention.*

U.N. inspection teams over a period of seven years claim to have destroyed 90% of the remaining Iraqi missile capacity and designated military material. Iraq is not capable of a serious threat against anyone. The notion that Iraq is a threat to the region is a false fantasy created by the U.S. to justify its vast military presence in the region, to dominate the oil resources and to contain Islam. Iraq is no threat to its neighbors as every Security Council member knows. It is barely able to survive. Turkey regularly attacks the Kurdish people and others living on northern Iraqi soil at will with U.S. support and U.N. acquiescence. There are many nations on earth that pose far greater threats of minor violence and to world peace than Iraq. As the recently published "Israel and the Bomb", Columbia University Press, again demonstrates, Israel developed and has manufactured some hundreds of nuclear bombs in violation of Security Council resolutions and international law.

Random assaults on Iraq at the whim of the United

States since 1991 include scores of Tomahawk cruise missile and rocket assaults. The U.S. has used the cradle of civilization as a shooting gallery, striking such dangerous targets as the Al-Rashid Hotel in Baghdad, killing two employees, the home of Layla al Attar, the famous artist and museum director, killing her and others, and a United Nations helicopter killing all its occupants.

A new U.S. strike will target vital support systems for the population of Iraq, just as its 1991 assault targeted the infrastructure; water supply, electric power, transportation, communications, food storage, processing and distribution, fertilizer and insecticide manufacture. It is a crueler form of corporal punishment imposed on the entire population than public lashings and executions favored by former colonial powers.

The destruction of the El Shifa pharmaceutical plant in Khartoum, Sudan on August 20, 1998 illustrates the U.S. strategy. The plant produced 50% of the pharmaceutical available in the Sudan. The cost of EL Shifa products was 20% of the international market prices. It produced 90% of the antibiotics used for malaria which is the leading cause of death there. Major international pharmaceutical companies do not produce drugs for malaria, or engage in research to address the spread of new virulent types of malaria which are reaching epidemic levels in part of Africa and Asia.

A single U.S. missile attack destroyed the single most important health facility in the Sudan and will cause thousands of deaths. Everyone in the Sudan, including the entire diplomatic corps, knew of the El Shifa plant and its importance to the health of the people.

U.N. inspections in Iraq over a period of seven years have been manipulated by unproven U.S. claims time and time again. Strategically placed agents of the U.S. and British intelligence agencies in U.N. inspectors' positions have had the single purpose of continuing the sanctions by making false claims that Iraq is developing nuclear, chemical and biological weapons with missiles and can complete the task in weeks, or months without inspection.

The United States spends more on arms annually, \$275 billion presently, than the rest of the Security Council combined. U.S. arms expenditures are approximately 25 times the gross national product of Iraq. The U.S. has in its stockpiles more nuclear bombs, chemical and biological weapons, more aircraft, rockets and delivery systems in number and sophistication than the rest of the world combined. Included are twenty commissioned Trident II nuclear submarines any one of which could destroy Europe. It is the U.S. that ought to be inspected. The U.S. is today, far more than when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., observed it in 1967, "the greatest purveyor of violence on earth."

It is imperative to world peace, the survival of the U.N. as an organization of independent nations and to simple justice that the Security Council immediately inform the U.S. that it must not again attack Iraq, or any other country.

Sincerely,
Ramsey Clark
[Former US Attorney General]

* Genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (b) Causing serious bodily, or mental harm to members of the group; (c) Deliberately inflicting on a group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; Art. II, Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

Source: Nizkor International Human Rights Team.
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Liberating theology

Progressive Christians are a fundamental component of progressive forces in the Philippines. Our staff writer Jean Dupont spoke to Filipino Marxists who have been rethinking their approach to "Church people"

The catholic church is dominated by reactionary and reformist forces. But there is no region of the country (or world) where the church hierarchy has completely suppressed the Christian tradition of participation in movements for social transformation.

Early Christianity was a movement of the disinherited masses.¹ Its vision, mission and goal was the total transformation of individuals and society. A kind of utopian socialism. It suffered persecution and martyrdom.²

Its subsequent history has been marked by historical and theological revisionism. It became married to the socio-economic order, and its hierarchy strove to give dogmatic and ideological support to the dominate elite. This was true in slave-owning societies like the late Roman empire, right through to the conquest of the Philippines by Spanish, then US colonisers.

The paradox is that, throughout this "Babylonian captivity" of the church by the ruling classes, progressive and revolutionary elements kept the fire of revolution aflame. Some took the side of the oppressed from within the church, some left the established church in order to do so. Europe had Jan Hus and Tomas Munzer. The Philippines had Hermano Pule's lay Christian peasant movement. During the 1896 revolution against Spain, Aglipay and many other priests played a vital role.

Under the Marcos dictatorship, there was a massive progressive movement among lay Christians, nuns and priests. A movement which would have been even more massive and influential if the Mao-Stalinist Communist Party had not used its massive influence to tie the progressive Christian movement to its dead-end National Democratic line.

The Christian church is too impregnated with reaction to return en bloc to its original, revolutionary path. But the efforts and heritage of the revolutionary element within the church cannot be allowed to go to waste. It must be sustained and reinforced.

Religion is part of the cultural dynamism of society. Throughout its cultural-

ideological resources – theology, spirituality, liturgy, signs and symbols, political influence, missionary work and charity, religion plays a role in shaping the hearts and minds of people. It can be an opium of the people, or a catalyst pushing people towards revolutionary involvement. It has both domesticating/

This line of thinking links Christian faith with active involvement in human realities, including the socio-political and economic dimensions.

Church people who subscribe to this theology find motivation in their Christian faith to work for the eradication of unjust social structures, and for the



mystifying aspects and liberation/transformational aspects.

This gives the clergy, and church workers, a "captive audience." In addition, churches are institutions of influence within their specific communities. Where the local leaders are progressive, the churches can be a source of inspiration and a support mechanism for the popular and revolutionary movements.

Liberation theology

Liberation theology is based on the concept of the People of God who, like the ancient people of Israel, are seeking to liberate themselves from the modern Pharaoh (emperor) – from the oppressive and exploitative structures of bourgeois society, which structures prevent them from attaining total human development.

The South American theologian Gustavo Gutierrez elaborated the basic ideas of liberation theology. He wrote at a time when national liberation movements were vigorously mounted against the US-supported dictatorial regimes in the more backward countries of the region.

Liberation theology entails solidarity with the poor, deprived and oppressed sectors of society on the part of Church people. It calls for serving the people and loving the neighbour.

radical transformation of society.

In several Latin American countries, liberation theology gradually became identified with revolutionary armed struggle and political activities. Activists cited documents of the Catholic Church which make revolutionary uprising a legitimate option under conditions "where there is manifest, long-standing tyranny which would do great damage to fundamental human rights and dangerous harm to the common good of the country..."³

Vatican opposition

The Vatican has taken a strong stand against the involvement of church people in active politics, particularly in national liberation movements. The Catholic hierarchy continues to downgrade and oppose liberation theology and any supposedly Marxist-inspired thinking.

Indeed, the hierarchy of the Christian churches have used their influence to discourage Marxist revolutionary activity, discriminating against atheists and communists. Bishops and church leaders have used the Christian religion to blunt the sharp edge of the class struggle of the proletariat.

Their hatred for liberation theology is not surprising. They recognise its potential for raising the consciousness and

The Church challenge

Modest guidelines for a Communist organisation wanting to intervene in the church sector...

Ideology

- A more systematic education campaign among church people. As in other sectors, the party must move away from its blinkered application of Mao Zedung Thought towards a more creative, pluralist Marxism. Instead of a fixation on the Chinese experience, all revolutionary paradigms and experiences should be examined and used pedagogically. And education work must receive the proper priority, rather than being constantly neglected in the name of short-term campaigns.

- An ongoing discussion of faith and ideology. These are distinct disciplines, not necessarily contradictory. The Maoists are wrong to see faith, theology, spirituality, the missionary vocation, liturgy and symbolism as ideological resources of the church. They are resources of faith, which is not just another kind of ideology. Both faith and ideology can be motivating factors for revolutionary political involvement.

The aim of such dialogues is not to convert one or the other, but to find complementarities, in order to further enhance revolutionary work.

- This means that the party must adopt a relational/interdisciplinary approach to education and social analysis. Various fields of knowledge must be combined. Disciplines of knowledge provide, at best, tentative conclusions, which must be used comparatively and synthetically.

- The party must encourage ideological, theological intellectual fermentation among comrades, and facilitate the development of an organic grouping of activist intellectuals to take this work forward.

Politics

- The party should encourage, facilitate and initiate various forms of sectoral organisations within the church. Progressive Christian movements can build broad coalitions on a range of popular issues and concerns.

- These sectoral organisations should embark on creative forms of struggle, maximising the "arsenal" of church practices, liturgy, signs and symbols.

- Progressive Christian movements should be a machinery for the open and honest propagation and

promotion of the proletarian socialist agenda in the church.

- Within the institutions, it may sometimes be important to struggle for influence or domination of leadership bodies in those institutions which have elections and lobbying for strategic positions in programmes.

But capturing leadership is of little use if those elected become bureaucratised, or find themselves unsure and unguided. This utilitarian approach to "capturing" positions in the church institutions was a major failing of the approach of those influenced by the Communist Party of the Philippines.

As in other areas of life, the Stalinist-Maoist concept of proletarian leadership through the Party was typified by infiltration, capturing leadership positions in broader movements. This rests on the fundamental – wrong – assumption that no institution can serve the people unless it is tightly controlled by the party leadership.

The party wasted its efforts, deploying large numbers of comrades and cadre to win positions in the church, but without a strategy for using those positions won.

And in any case, positions in leadership bodies do not guarantee that the movement can be controlled. It is more important to have an influence at the grass roots, and to put pressure on the leadership from there.

The institutional struggle will be less important in the coming period. Instead, party members in the church sector should concentrate on education, organising and mobilising. More cadre and comrades in proletarian communities should take part in this work.

Rather than church institutions and leadership bodies, the party should deploy its cadre towards parishes and local churches which are directly part of communities where revolutionary work may be initiated.

Where institutional struggle is absolutely necessary, such as when the base of the church demand the removal of a particularly reactionary leadership, then the party can throw its weight into the struggle. But it is not necessary to pit cadre against these incumbents. There is a

much wider pool of people with both the leadership skills and the basic pro-people orientations.

- It is, however, important to maintain control or influence over strategic programmes in areas like education, poverty relief and welfare. A minimum goal in education work is to maximise the populist, rather than conservative wing of the church. A maximum goal would be to build the proletarian and socialist currents within the church people. Poverty and welfare programmes should be freed from corruption, and contribute to the empowerment of the proletarian masses.

- It is also important to create new institutions and leadership bodies to open up opportunities and serve the interests of the proletarian masses.

Global links

Like the proletariat, the Christian churches transcend borders. Catholics have the Vatican, mainline Protestants have the World Council of Churches, and the smaller groups have their own global networks.

This translates into a vast network exerting moral and material influence over countries and related international political and policy-making institutions like the United Nations.

Revolutionary socialists need to exert a creative pressure on the church milieu, and harness these vast resources.

But international solidarity links should not be confined to the search for much-needed funds. More important is the contribution such links should make to socialist education and organising in other countries, to help revive and strengthen the international socialist movement. The begging-bowl mentality is as dangerous as nationalism in this regard.

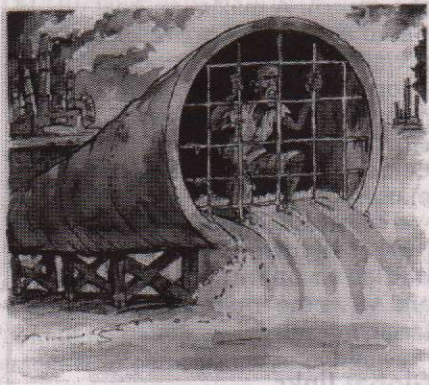
And a word of warning...

The party may find it useful to institute a Marxist-Christian dialogue on ideology and faith. But revolutionary parties should avoid arguments on the question of religious belief, or faith in God, some kind of energy, power, or higher force.

Faith is a very personal matter, and any artificial strife merely serves the bourgeoisie in splitting proletarian solidarity, and diverting the party's attention from the more pressing and urgent problems in economic and political life. [JD] ★

These recommendations are a basis for discussion among Filipino revolutionary Marxists, and do not represent an "official" editorial position or recommendation.

politicising church people. Certainly in the Philippines, many church people and foreign clergymen who have embraced liberation theology have proved open to Marxist literature and ideas. Many have moved towards or embraced a Marxist-Leninist outlook, even joining Communist groups.



Basic Christian Communities

The church programme of building basic ecclesiastic or church communities draws its inspiration from the life of early Christian communities in Jerusalem. According to the bible, these lived in "close fellowship, sharing their belongings with one another, distributing the money among all, according to what each one needed... praising God, and enjoying the good will of all the people."⁴

The subversive essence of this movement comes from its call for the base population to share in what Christians call the three fold function of Jesus Christ: priest, prophet and King, and to be actively involved in the various ministries of the church. This includes working for justice and the defence of human rights, and participation in social transformation. This is seen as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel [the Christian message] and of the Church's mission.

Parishes and local churches generally represent a cross-section of the classes in society. But church-related community-based organisations, particularly the base communities, almost always consist of the proletariat or semi-proletariat.

In the early years, many of those building these base communities used progressive methods of community organising. Some even applied Gramsci's writings, as a way of studying and transforming Philippine society. During the martial law period, this programme found acceptance and funding among church-based foreign agencies, who widely encouraged and financed its implementation in local parishes across the Philippines.

Recently, however, even conservatives are interested in the base communities approach. The recent IInd Plenary

Council of Philippine Catholic Bishops called for a national programme of base community building.

In the minds of the conservative bishops, this programme is a two-edged sword. They hope that it will lessen the influence and impact of radical activists within the church communities. They also hope that the new officialisation of the strategy will enable them to regain, or at least consolidate their fast-evaporating control over the grassroots of the church.

Their panic is not just the result of Marxist agitation. Christian fundamentalists from the evangelical Protestant wing of Christianity, often supported by rich groups in the USA, are also making inroads in Asia's largest Catholic "flock".

Theology of human rights

Christian involvement in the human rights movement is based on the concept of man as being created in according to God's image, and therefore having innate dignity. Anything which degrades man and his dignity, particularly state-initiated action, must be vigorously condemned and opposed. Conversely, anything which contributes to social justice and social progress, or which advances human rights, must be advocated and promoted.

Given the importance of Christian beliefs for many Filipinos, the engagement of church people in the human rights movement continues to have enormous potential for generating support for the national democratic struggle, and its democratic agenda.

Of course, the theology of human rights has its weaknesses. The bourgeois ruling class can use a rhetoric of human rights to negate the justness of revolutionary struggle, particularly if such a struggle erupts into violence or civil war. In the bourgeois conception, human rights transcend classes, and can be claimed even by the exploiters. Under the guise of equality of the individual, bourgeois democracy proclaims the equality of the exploiter and the exploited, with the state and the market as supposedly neutral mechanisms linking these equal partners.

Of course, the real meaning of the demand for equality is a demand for the abolition of classes. No genuine human rights can be possible, as long as the capitalist system and the global imperialist order exist. One cannot speak of a humane Christian society if the majority toiling masses do not enjoy equality in wealth and resources, and if social classes with antagonistic interests are allowed to exist.

Fundamentalist Christians propagate a version of humanism and human rights that transcend classes. At the same time, they gloss over the evils of the capitalist system. This kind of thinking only favours the exploiting and property-owning classes.

Life before death

Conservative theologians and priests teach those who toil and live in want all their lives to be submissive and patient here on earth. They should take comfort in the hope of a heavenly reward. Meanwhile, those who live by the labour of others are taught to practice charity. This offers them a very cheap way of saving their consciences, and justifying their entire existence as exploiters.

In preaching Christian humanism and Christian peace, some priests effectively hide the reality of antagonistic class relations.

Of course, the bourgeoisie would like to propagate a picture of universal industrial peace and harmony. But genuine humanism can only result from the abolition of capital and from the abolition of classes.

This is the perspective of working class revolution. The proletarian party challenges Church people to be truthful and faithful to reality. To oblige everyone to recognise human dignity and personal worth regardless of class, without touching capital, and the whole capitalist order, which is the root of inequality and degradation of certain classes in society, is irrelevant and ridiculous. Worse, it is destructive of humanity itself.

It is the task of the proletarian party to safeguard the independent class interests of the working class, to lend a proletarian imprint on the human rights movement, and to stress the socialist goals which, alone, can ensure democratic rights for all of humanity.

But once the party has made clear its position, it should forge alliances and solidarity with church people, individuals and groups, local and international, who advocate equal dignity, democratic rights and political freedoms for all.

Theology of ecology

According to the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, "The Earth is the Lord's, and so is everything on the Earth. Do not destroy the Earth nor the life on it." This injunction deserves to be added to the ten more well-known Christian and Jewish commandments.

According to the above citation from the Bible, every Christian is called on to become an ecologist, one who takes care of and heals the earth. The Christian is motivated by faith to advocate struggle against ozone depletion and destruction of forests, the poisoning of the oceans, rivers, soil and air, and the various forms of pollution of the environment.

The theology of liberation can be a weapon against capital. The capitalist system has caused the greater part of the pollution and destruction of our environment. It should be brought to account for the wanton destruction of our natural resources.

The ecological movement may serve to curb the greed and ruthlessness of the monopoly capitalists who are the princi-

pal culprits in the destruction of ecology. Big multinationals would rather turn a blind eye to environmental protection, which, if implemented, would only cut into their huge profits.

In Africa, some theologians and environmental activists are paying greater attention to "cultural ecology" – those traditional beliefs and practices which encourage people to respect nature and maintain their resources at a sustainable level. Although Christian and Muslim missionaries tended to discredit these ideas, they have continued to co-exist in popular consciousness alongside elements of monotheistic belief.

Theology of wholeness

The Protestant pastor Oscar Suarez has tried to reconcile Christian faith with Marxist ideology. He argues that faith is about coming to terms with the sacred dimension of humanity. This sacred dimension reveals our ultimate concern for justice. In seeking justice, one is

introduced to ideology, which is concerned with scientifically measurable and historically tangible political, economic and social development. To adhere to faith and ideology is to promote total human development.⁵

We must argue for and insist on wholeness, rather than be satisfied with mere fragments. "Not by bread alone!" This development does not begin and end in the individual, as in capitalism, but becomes collective, as in socialism.

In this concept of theology, revolution is in itself the promotion of God's design for humanity – the integrity of creation, life abundant. The present theologies of liberation and struggle are incomplete because their concern is limited to the processes of transformation. Theology of wholeness is concerned not only with the process but with the end result, the vision and goal of such processes. A new heaven, and a new earth. The new Jerusalem that Christian socialists seek to establish.

Like socialist ideology, faith motivates people – often at a very primary level – to involve themselves socially. This may translate further, into revolutionary participation. The ultimate concern of the revolution is the salvation and development of humanity and creation. Christianity, according to Suarez, should present itself as an unashamedly humanist religion.

Proponents of the theology of wholeness seek to combat all forms of fundamentalist, mystical and obscurantist theologies. Some have gone further, and tried to present faith as something separate from religion, or at least separate from a particular God. ★

Notes

1. On the history of Early Christianity, F. Engels.
2. The Bible, Book of Acts, chapters 2 and 3.]
3. Development of Peoples, by Pope Paul VI.
4. The Bible, Acts of the Apostles 4:32-35
5. Theology of Wholeness, Series of lectures by Dr Oscar Suarez

Japan's economic misery

The second biggest economy in the world is in crisis, despite a burgeoning trade surplus, and a government determined to give money away.

Dave Packer

Britain's serious financial press is not fooled by the temporary recovery of share prices to their August levels and fresh talk about overcoming the crisis.

The Economist has been warning for months that much of the agony of Asia will spread to the rest of the world economy. It does not blame the problem on overproduction or excess capacity or supply, which it considers "mainly bank". As a champion of free market capitalism it riles against the idea "that capitalism has somehow fixed things so that the world's capacity to produce has overtaken its willingness to consume."

As a neo-liberal magazine, obsessed with the money supply, *The Economist's* editorials consider that the Japanese crisis is mainly due to "bank lending that is incompetent, reckless or downright corrupt." There is "a mountain of bad debt. It is already an ugly sight, and there is worse to come."

Japanese banks are certainly mired in a crisis of bad, unrecoverable loans, with increasing numbers of its borrowers defaulting. The government stated this much when it refused to reveal the result

of a government audit into the state of its biggest banks.

These banks are sitting on suspect loans of ¥87-140 trillion (\$US600-1000 billion). The bulk of the collateral is land – and as land prices are still spiralling downward, so is the amount the banks can reasonably hope to recover.

Land prices in Japan have fallen for the sixth year in a row. Already many of the country's nineteen largest banks are probably insolvent. Controversial rescue packages for the Long Term Credit Bank of Japan, and other big banks, pumping in huge amounts of new capital, are seen as ways to stave off wider economic collapse.

This has frightening social and political implications for the Japanese bourgeoisie. The Japanese social contract, with its "jobs for life" promise for key (male) workers still has a powerful ideological and material attraction. Allowing unemployment to rise to its "natural" level might unleash a very Japanese class struggle.

In August 1998 *The Economist* estimated that at least 15 of the 119 construction firms listed on the first section of the Tokyo Stock Exchange are effectively bankrupt. The value of their land holdings, bought at the height of the property bubble, had plummeted and loans guaranteed to subsidiaries and property developers have turned sour.

Big general contractors and huge employers, such as Fujita, Kumagai Gumi, Tokyu and Aoki, all have suspect

liabilities. Costly rescue packages, which eat into reserves and push up government borrowing are seen as the only way to hold the line.

A mature crisis

However, Japan's disastrous problems are not just due to an explosion of debt. This is only a symptom. The underlying crisis is to be found in the so-called real economy, in a crisis of over-accumulation.

Gretchen Morganson of the *New York Times* reported as early as June, 1998 that inventories in Japanese warehouses had risen to double the amount piled up in the recession of 1991-2, a recession from which Japan never really recovered.

In August 1998, Japan's Economic Planning Agency reported that seven of the country's ten regions were officially in a slump, and two others were stagnant. The agency surveyed 4,500 big Japanese companies, who reported that they plan to cut foreign direct investment by 57% this year to ¥1.2 trillion (\$8.3 billion). At its peak, in 1990, investment reached ¥4.2 trillion. All these figures are being continually revised downwards.

The end of the Japanese miracle can be dated as far back as 1985. In that year the USA responded to its disastrous trade deficit with Japan by imposing the Plaza Accord. This forced the Japanese government to raise the value of the Yen against the US dollar. By 1990, this had led to a 40% reflation of the Yen against

the American currency.

Not only did this fail to solve the American trade deficit, but it precipitated a rush of capital out of Japan into the South East Asian dollar zone – at least \$15 billion by 1990. This stimulated a flood of new speculative investment into the region, resulting in over-accumulation and a financial bubble, which eventually broke in the summer of 1997.

Stock markets collapsed, and there was a huge round of major currency devaluations, as the speculative capital flowed out. This pushed the Japanese economy deeper into recession and stagnation. Between 1992 and 1997 the economy staggered along with an average annual growth rate of only 1%. And then Asia crashed again. That crisis is still with us.

Pumping money in

Since 1993, in opposition to the dominant neo-Liberal thinking, Japanese governments have embarked on the biggest neo-Keynesian reflationary, pump-priming programme in the history of capitalism. There have been seven huge government spending packages. The latest package, announced in late 1998, promises \$112 billion of new money, bringing the total cost to an estimated \$760 billion!

Large amounts of cash have gone to construction companies to re-equip the country's infrastructure (described by sceptics as a "roads to nowhere" plan).

The government undermined some of the earlier packages by attempting to claw back part of the huge cost by raising taxes to reduce its budget deficit.

Although these massive stimuli have kept employment levels up and avoided a full scale slump for the time being, they have not succeeded in jump-starting the economy, even when combined with near zero interest rates. The latest figures show a fall in production of 3%, and unemployment is still rising.

Global implications

In an increasingly globalised economy the effects of this crisis, in what is still the second largest economy in the world, is far-reaching.

As Japan retrenches, its huge foreign investments are halted or withdrawn, resulting in factory closures around the world. Worse is to come. As Japanese inventories increase, prices fall and inter-imperialist competition intensifies.

Although trade in the South East Asian markets is down by nearly a third, Japan's trade surplus with the rest of the world jumped in September by 45.6%! Japanese exports to the USA have continued to rise, up 3.9% in 1998, while overall US imports to Japan fell 9.3%.

In 1996 Japan took 44% of all US exports. Today, they are absorbing much less of America's production, because of the shrinking Japanese home market. The trade surplus will have serious knock-on

effects in the USA and Europe and could lead to calls for protectionism.

In November 1998 William Daley, US commerce secretary, told a meeting of US and European business leaders that Japan's growing trade surplus with non-Asian economies was "a major source of instability" which could create political unrest by causing workers to fear for their jobs.

US imports of hot-rolled steel from Japan had increased more than five times during 1998. But Daley's warning was directed against the European Union, which he said had to open its markets and take a greater share of Japanese imports "or run the risk of a protectionist backlash in the USA."

"We will not be the dumping ground for troubled economies," he warned. "Unless Europe does more, there could be a huge public outcry [in the USA], loud enough to rekindle the fires of protectionism."

Both Daley and European Union Commissioner Leon Brittan warned that they would rigorously implement anti-dumping policies against unfair trading practices from other countries.

No long-term solution

The Economist, more rigorous in its neo-liberal ideals, does not approve of such anti-dumping policies, or expensive rescue packages. The magazine is right when it says the bubble will burst and that neo-Keynesian pump-priming will fail to stop the inevitable, as the Japanese experiment is showing us.

But the idea of a free-market, deregulated, crisis-free capitalism, properly managed through controlling the money supply, is also a dream.

There is a growing crisis of over-production and falling prices. In Asia there is serious overcapacity of probably more than 30%, especially in computers, electrical consumer goods and motor vehicles. But not just in these worst hit sectors.

World capitalism is currently producing far more goods than can be absorbed by consumers with money to buy them. Only a massive destruction of productive capacity and even higher levels of mass unemployment over the next decade will create the basis for a new recovery.

Unless, of course, working people can put a stop to the whole madness. The first step would be to fight for a united front with the neo-Keynesians, arguing for a massive programme of state expenditure on public works to defend jobs and services. German Finance Minister Oskar Lafontaine has made interesting noises in this direction. He, and the social democrats who are in power in all European Union states except Spain and Ireland, should be put under pressure to start spending. ★

* This article was first published in the British monthly *Socialist Outlook*. It draws in part on earlier articles in the US publication *Socialist Action*.

Acehnese, Indonesian and western human rights activists came together in New York city on 12 December 1998.

Teresa Birks reports.

By placing the history of human rights violations and current developments in Aceh firmly within the Indonesian context, the conference organisers aimed to formulate strategies to bring those responsible for human rights abuses in Aceh to trial.

In his opening address, Acehnese human rights lawyer Jafar Siddiq Hamzah underlined the need for international, Indonesian and Acehnese communities alike to put aside religious and political differences, and come together to help resolve the situation in Aceh.

He called on the "international community" to help Aceh and to raise Aceh as an issue in the same way that they did with Bosnia. He also thanked Human Rights Watch Asia, Amnesty International and TAPOL for their continuing support for the people of Aceh.

The conference covered a number of very important issues in a relatively short period of time. Sayed Mudhahar Ahmad (Forum Peduli HAM Aceh) emphasised how the Indonesian regime had benefited from Acehnese natural resources, such as LNG. Meanwhile, many people in Aceh still lived in poverty. Total reform was needed in order to resolve the situation in Aceh and that the people of Aceh must be given the broadest autonomy in order to decide their own fate.

Military strategy of violence

Yarmen Dinamika, a journalist with the Acehnese newspaper *Serambi Indonesia*, gave the audience some specific and indeed horrific examples of the variety of gross human rights violations perpetrated in Aceh, from data collected by various NGOs, including Forum Peduli HAM.

He reminded the audience of the Indonesian government's attitude to the human rights abuses in Aceh by quoting General Wiranto, who has said that the perpetrators of human rights violations in Aceh would not be prosecuted because "they were only carrying out their duties." Is it the duty of the military, Yarmen asked, to rape women, hang babies and torture and murder?

Suraya It (Temple University) explained how Acehnese women's cultural, economic, educational and human rights have been eroded since 1945. This, she said, is why the people of Aceh have expressed their aspirations through the Islamic Movement and by demanding the foundation of an Islamic state. In Aceh, under Islam, Suraya claimed, women had always had an important role in society, for example as resistance

The struggle for justice in Aceh

leaders against the Dutch.

Acehnese Human Rights Lawyer Saifuddin Gani reminded the audience that human rights abuses in Aceh had not stopped since the announcement of withdrawal of the military operational status (DOM) in August 1998, and that there were still numbers of Indonesian special forces troops (Kopassus) active in the region.

He explained how military tactics in Aceh were similar to those in other regions, i.e. in trying to create the appearance of social unrest in order to justify the return of DOM and the use of military force.

Divide and rule

The presence at the conference of Fernando de Araujo, Secretary General of the East Timor group RENETIL, underlined the consciousness of both the East Timorese and the Acehnese of the similarity between military strategies in both regions – the systematic use of state violence, regardless of religious, political or ethnic affiliation.

Indonesian Human Rights Lawyer Alamsyah Hamdani expressed his concern that much of what is perceived as ethnic or religious conflict in Indonesia and East Timor is in fact one of the military's strategies for dividing public opinion within Indonesia, as well as justifying the use of violence.

He brought attention to the case of Ishak Daud, who was recently sentenced to 20 years for being a member of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM).

Alamsyah was most concerned that it appears that Ishak Daud was kidnapped by Malaysian secret police and handed over to the Indonesian authorities illegally.

Saraswati Sunindo (University of Washington, Seattle) looked at the status of women under 32 years of the New Order in Indonesia, which, she said, had failed to interject in the actualisation of violence and which has thus been 'normalised' and increasingly used as a tool of government.

John Roosa (University of Wisconsin, Madison) gave a detailed account of

the extent of the military presence and influence on Indonesia's cabinet and 'civilian' government.

From the campaigning perspective, Jana Mason (U.S. Committee for Refugees) suggested the issue of refugees, particularly in Malaysia, provided a means by which to raise international public awareness of the issue.

Sydney Jones (Executive Director Human Rights Watch, Asia Division) focused her paper on legal mechanisms which could be used within the U.S. to help bring those responsible for human rights violations into account, as well as by outlining the possibilities for the

establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Committee in Indonesia. She emphasised that in order to be successful, such a body would need to be established by a government which was proven to have a serious commitment to change. It was acknowledged by the audience that the present government does not yet qualify.

Kerry Brogan (International Secretariat of Amnesty International) said that, although initially encouraged by what Habibie's government had stated in terms of its programmes for reform, Amnesty International now realised that this commitment has not been honoured, and that human rights abuses are continuing. ★

*The author attended the conference on behalf of TAPOL. The British-based Indonesia human rights campaign was also represented at the conference by Liem Soei Liong.

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Aceh



No Longer Heroes

Anger towards the Indonesian military is especially high in three provinces



East Timor

Free Dita Sari!

Holland's Student Solidarity with Indonesia (SSI) and members of the socialist youth group REBEL kick-started their solidarity work with a postcard campaign demanding the release of Indonesian activist Dita Sari.

Dita is Indonesia's only known woman political prisoner. She is chairperson of the PPBI trade union PPBI, which is affiliated with the radical left People's Democratic Party (PRD).

In July 1996 she was arrested while leading a demonstration by 20,000 workers in Surabaya. In April 1997 she was sentenced to five years jail for "subversion".

Many political prisoners have been released since former President Suharto stepped down. But not the

East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmao, PRD chairperson Budiman Sujatmiko, Dita and others.

Because of growing international pressure, the authorities offered Dita an early release if she promised not to get involved in politics until the year 2002. Dita refused.

It is important to build up international pressure on the Indonesian authorities for immediate and unconditional release of Dita Sari and the other political prisoners. As a labour leader and a leading member of the radical left PRD, Holland's REBEL and others suggest that socialists abroad make Dita a focus point of their Indonesia solidarity work

For more information, contact <saprebel@dds.nl> or <asiat@peg.apc.org>

Introduction

Long live the bride(s)

In countries around the world, there are growing demands for the legal recognition of same-sex relationships. This dossier reports on progress in Western Europe.

The starting point is equal rights. "Straights" (heterosexuals) can acquire a range of rights by marrying. And, whatever we think of marriage as an institution, lesbians, gays and bisexuals should have access to those same rights.



Some progressives disagree: they say that marriage is reactionary, and should be opposed, ignored or abolished. Of course, this opposition to the institution of marriage was not very concrete – until lesbians and gays demanded the right to marry.

Progressives who oppose lesbian and gay access to marriage because of their dislike of marriage as such find themselves lined up alongside conservatives: people who believe that the superiority of straight relationships is so obvious that marriage must not be degraded by opening it to perverse, same-sex couples.

Some lesbians, gays and bisexuals would like to get married, others can't stand the idea. But it is in the interest of all people – whatever their sexuality – to work together either to change the institution of marriage, or to abolish it altogether. We should also demand better legal rights for couples – gay or straight – who do not want to marry.

There are still no fully developed alternative models. But whatever alternatives the movement puts forward, several principles are clear.

First, every option has to be equally accessible for same-sex and opposite-sex couples.

Second, any arrangement that is an alternative to marriage has to include fewer rights and responsibilities than marriage now does. It makes no sense to have alternatives unless their content is really different.

One neglected aspect of the partnership debate is the importance of increasing individuals' rights inde-

pendently of whether people are coupled or single.

Lesbian/gay/bisexual movements have no unified standpoint on this issue. In fact the discussion is scarcely happening at all. Even the women's movement seems no longer interested in challenging the many ways in which women's individual rights are made dependent on their relationships with men.

The whole neo-liberal offensive of the 1980s and '90s has pushed this struggle onto the back burner. Real individual rights require social support. But neo-liberal austerity policies have cut this to ribbons, privatising what should be social responsibilities and imposing them once more on the family.

Governments prefer to make husbands and wives, parents and children care for the sick, old, young, disabled or unemployed rather than shouldering their rightful burden.

In many countries, government inspectors can force their way into wel-

fare recipients' homes, in the malicious and mean hope of catching them in hidden relationships – which could be a reason to cut off their benefits.

Lesbian/gay/bisexual movements should certainly not demand reforms that would trap even more people in these humiliating forms of dependency.

Instead, they could perhaps play a vanguard role in changing this situation, encouraging women's groups and trade unions to challenge it as well...

The problem is that even the left has a very cautious and limited approach to the partnership issue. There is still much hesitation on the fundamental issues of gay adoption and child custody rights. Lesbian and gay parenting is still taboo, it seems.

The underlying problem is still an unwillingness to accept homosexual relationships as fully and entirely equal to heterosexual ones.

Why such resistance to equality, even on the left? Presumably because full equality for lesbians, gays and bisexuals would undermine the foundations of the alienating models in which our societies imprison people. It would threaten the perceived 'naturalness' of heterosexuality. It would challenge gender roles (men are like this, women like that). It would question parental authority and inherited status founded on procreation.

Some people are nervous about demanding fully equal recognition for same-sex relationships. But this should certainly be our goal. It opens a door through which we can glimpse new possibilities: new kinds of social and emotional relations beyond alienation and dependency, new patterns of ones, twos and mores that could flourish in diversity and freedom.

Revolutionaries in lesbian/gay/bisexual movements need to discuss these possibilities.

The current debate on civic partnerships is an opportunity for revolutionary lesbian/gay/bisexuals to work together with currents in the lesbian/gay/bisexual movements that go beyond the idea of 'equal rights.' We can resurrect the movement's original call for genuine liberation.

It is time once more for straights and gays to fight to break with constricting heterosexual norms,

France

Who's afraid of the Solidarity Pact?

The issue of registered partnerships has been inflaming French public opinion.

Christophe Marcq

The issue brings other debates in its wake: over the various types of family life which now characterise French society, over sexual identities and rights to parenthood. French legislators have repeatedly tried to exclude these fundamental issues from the debate, but they flow back into the discussion as quickly as they are flushed out of it.

Articles and opportunistic stands on "civil solidarity pacts" (known by their French acronym, PACS) have been multiplying in the press. Every possible argument and its opposite have been put forward. It seems that people can say anything, given how unused people are to fundamental discussions on moral issues in politics and the media.

There is much at stake for society with the recognition of same-sex couples or relationships. It is far from being a marginal discussion. It is time to think about the basic issues at stake calmly and in depth.

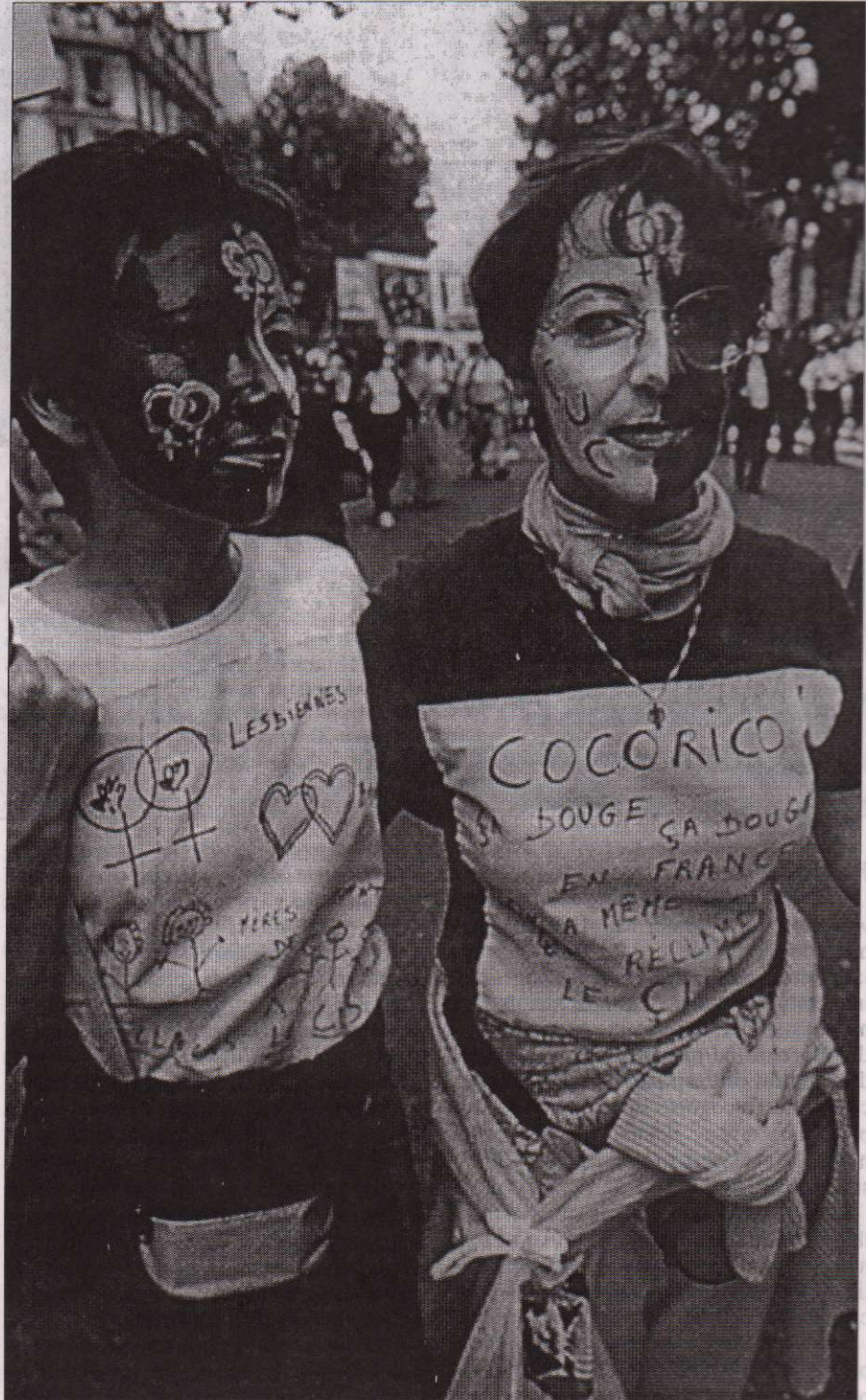
Why recognise same-sex relationships?

Creating a legal status for same-sex couples has been one of the recurrent slogans of the last few Lesbian and Gay Pride marches. The outside world's reaction to the "weird and wonderful world of lesbians and gays" has been full of doubt: Why do these people insist on being recognised, legalised and legislated about? Have these troublemakers of the moral order given up their subversive duty in order to throw themselves heart and soul into the sweet comfort of normality?

These insidious questions, besides hiding a certain stigmatisation of lesbians and gays, ignore the realities behind demands for legal recognition of same-sex relationships.

These realities are very concrete, and highlighted by fifteen years of struggle against AIDS. In a time of epidemics, legal non-recognition of same-sex couples leads to human tragedies and insane legal tangles. It undermines people's already fragile states of health and social positions.

Sometimes a partner returns to the apartment he or she had shared for years with a recently deceased friend to find their home locked and sealed: the family



that had long ago rejected its "depraved" child has rushed off from the funeral to claim the property. Too often when the partner who signed the lease for an apartment dies, the other is thrown out into the street.

As recently as 17 December 1997, a French Court rejected the appeal of a

man who asked to have a lease put in his name after his companion's death. The court motivated its rejection by explaining that "cohabitation can only result from a stable, continuous relationship that has the appearance of marriage, which therefore must be between a man and a woman".

"Gay Marriage?"



Homophobia

Many lesbian and gay couples, whether either partner has AIDS or not, have come to find the legal no-man's-land they are living in revolting and intolerable. Same-sex partners simply do not exist in the eyes of the law, and are therefore at the mercy of whoever they deal with. For example, some insurance companies recognise same-sex couples, but others refuse, shamelessly discriminating between unmarried gay and straight partners.

Apart from the feelings of injustice that such discrimination can give rise to, not recognising same-sex couples in a time of AIDS can be dangerous or even criminal.

In 1995 the first grassroots anti-AIDS organisation in France (AIDES) pointed out that "social discrimination undermines the effectiveness of prevention programmes, and the lack of any legal status for same-sex couples leads to legal vulnerability and insecurity for these couples without rights".

The need to create a legal status open to same-sex couples results from a whole set of very concrete problems. But the demand for recognition is also motivated by the reality of homophobia.

Discriminatory laws that keep lesbians and gays second-class citizens saddle them with a "shady" image. This can only reinforce homophobes' phantasms and popular prejudice. Discrimination helps justify rejection.

Lesbians and gays forcefully demand their rights, but also legitimation and recognition. This is a demand for dignity, but also for help in influencing their families, neighbours and public opinion.

Demanding full equality should not be confused with a desire to live "like everyone else" or to be squeezed into a single, normative mould. The model of the bourgeois straight couple – that two-headed oppressive monster – is not appealing to many people.

Choosing to live in a couple does not automatically mean wanting to fit into a single model. A two-person sexual relationship can involve very different modes of functioning: sexually open or closed, a common cocoon or autonomous, intense social lives.

The demand of equal rights for lesbians, gays, bisexuals and straights must be understood as meaning that two-person sexual relationships, whatever the partners' biological sex, should be considered not as identical but as equal. This

brings us to the heart of the problem. This is what the moral majority has a hard time swallowing.

But one thing is certain: for several years now lesbians and gays have refused to content themselves with the mere condescending tolerance that society deigns to grant them.

Seven years of struggle

In 1991 a collective was founded and drew up the first proposal for a legal status for unmarried couples. A bill was drafted and endorsed by several Socialist Party MPs, but was never introduced.

But one element of the project passed the National Assembly (lower house of parliament) in 1992: It became possible for someone to be added to his or her same-sex partner's health insurance.

In 1995, after three years of standstill, the pace began to pick up. That year's Lesbian and Gay Pride march was a historic success in Paris as well as the provinces. More than 60,000 people marched in the capital, a total that would only grow in each successive year.

Lesbians and gays were no longer in hiding. They were making noise and making demands. The militant lesbian/gay/bisexual movement was taking on a

new vigour. In daily, private and work life, everyday high-handedness became unbearable. "Little" examples of legal discrimination gave rise to major indignation.

Stubborn lesbians and gays demanded what they considered to be their rights and went to court: For example, a lesbian whose partner had been killed by a hit-and-run driver sued for damages and interest. On 25 July 1995 the court ruled in her favour. For the first time in France, the judicial system had recognised a same-sex couple. The case had major repercussions.

The debate on legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples intensified towards the end of the year, when left-wing mayors decided to grant certificates of life partnership or cohabitation to same-sex couples. But these certificates gave no legal entitlements. They made it possible to receive certain benefits only if a landlord, employer or insurance company accepted its validity. Arbitrariness remained the order of the day.

During the campaign for the 1997 parliamentary elections, creation of a status for unmarried couples was one of the Socialist Party's major promises.

On 9 October 1998 the PACS (civil solidarity pact) bill was introduced in the National Assembly. This bill was the last, 'ultra-lite' rehash of all the earlier bills.

Help, PACS is coming!

MPs from the Socialist/Green/Communist majority did not think it important to come vote for their campaign promise. Right-wing MPs were present in greater numbers and had no problem in voting down without discussion a proposal they considered unconstitutional.

Stormy, deplorable debates then followed. The ultra-Catholic ultra-right threw itself into the fray with enthusiasm, clinging to its nauseating 'values'. In its eyes France was on the way to becoming Sodom and Gomorra. The most homophobic fantasies were voiced. The French Catholic Church denounced PACS as a "dangerous, useless law". In its eyes marriage and the heterosexual family must remain the norm, with procreation as their essential goal.

As for the so-called "republican" (Gaullist and liberal) right, with the far-right National Front at its heels, it took advantage of the debate to reclaim turf by portraying itself as the intrepid guardian of "good old" French values (marriage and the family).

Backed by Gaullist President Jacques Chirac, it fought PACS tooth and nail with obstructive tactics: procedural fights (more than 1000 amendments), filibusters to slow down the debate, etc.

The right-wing opposition faced cowardly social democrats without either convictions nor political courage. During



Right wing deputies disrupt parliamentary discussion on the Civic Solidarity Pact.

the debates the Socialist government did not try to defend the principle of equality or the idea of recognising same-sex relationships.

It contented itself with desperately trying to reassure those to its right, crooning that it was only PACS, it wasn't marriage, it wasn't gay (because it is open to everyone), it didn't give any right to adoption, and so on and so on.

Finally after days and nights of debates in the National Assembly, a very amended version of PACS was approved.

In the months to come this law will go before the very conservative Senate. France has not heard the last of the right's squalling.

PACS is not marriage

PACS does not give full equality. Nonetheless this little law will make little improvements in many people's everyday lives.

Although some people call it "gay marriage", PACS has nothing to do with sacrosanct marriage: It does not confer certain marital rights, in particular parental rights. It is addressed to two people living together. The words "gay", "lesbian" and "same-sex" do not appear in it anywhere - in the name of a hypocritical, extremely French, republican universalism.

Even this watered-down law does include some advances. It establishes rules for inheritance, taxation, leases, work life and social insurance. Most of the rights granted only take effect after delays of 1 to 5 years. This is pure discrimination: codified suspicion against lesbian and gay people, as if they have to prove themselves.

PACS does not automatically lead to a residence permit for a French citizen's partner. Unlike marriage, it gives the foreign partner no right to apply for

French nationality. Love, it seems, can only be "made in France"!

So why has this little law, which is neither revolutionary nor subversive in itself, caused such fear in the world of politicians?

In fact, behind the hostility and reservations that have been expressed, lie a single phenomenon: fear of full recognition of same-sex sexual relationships.

The attitude of the law and of most politicians towards same-sex relationships is one of tolerance. Homosexuality is no longer a crime under the law that is subject to punishment. French politicians cannot stop reassuring lesbians and gays about their good will. Even the ultra-Catholic spokesperson Christine Boutin respects this ritual: "I am very fond of homosexuals. Every person is made in God's image and is entitled to respect and dignity. They are my brothers and sisters."

Many politicians are ready to make some arrangements for these nice lesbians and charming gays. But it is out of the question to recognise same-sex sexual relationships by giving them access to equal rights.

On the left, reservations about social recognition of same-sex relationships are more underhanded. They take the form of endless cant around the taboo of lesbian and gay parenting.

From tolerance to recognition

Behind reasoning based on poorly-digested psychoanalytic models lies the same old problem: resistance to full and equal recognition of same-sex relationships. A major part of society is simply not ready to accept same-sex relationships as fully equal to heterosexual ones.

Bourgeois psychoanalysts, more attached to the survival of institutions than the emancipation of individuals, will explain that we must not weaken the symbolic order. They seem to forget that one of the essential goals of psychoanalysis is to loosen the grip of alienating social circumstances on individuals' lives.

The heterosexual norm and conventional gender roles (masculinity and femininity) are seen in Western societies as foundations of a natural order. And what is natural cannot be changed: It is what God wanted. Since these models are not seen as social norms, they lose their historical character and thus become as unchangeable as they are supposedly universal.

Yet the failure to distinguish between biological sex and social gender is a purely Western, very limited way of thinking. In other cultures there are many examples of recognised unions between people of the same sex.

It is time to replace the heterosexual/homosexual dualism with a more diverse, less alienated, pluralist vision of sexualities. ★



Belgium What about the straights?

"Registered partnership" has been on Belgium's political agenda for four years. Without any result.

Carmen Saffo

Under the motto, 'If you never mention it, it doesn't exist', Belgium has avoided legislation that dealt explicitly with homosexual acts, either positively or negatively.¹ Civil marriage is not explicitly forbidden for same-sex couples.

The fact that it isn't banned does not mean that it is permitted, however. 'Customary law' is always cited in order to refuse same-sex couples the right to wed.

Belgium's constitutional arrangements make it hard to demand reform in this area. The lesbian/gay/bisexual movement's demands can only be won in Belgium at the federal level. But the movement is not organised at the federal level. There are separate movements in Flanders, the Dutch-speaking northern region, and in Wallonia, the French-speaking southern region.

The differences between the two movements are considerable. The Flemish lesbian/gay/bisexual movement is well rooted, with about 80 local groups democratically organised in a federation. On the Francophone side there are only about ten groups, which are still in the process of setting up a federation.

Flanders is clearly influenced by the progressive attitudes to gay issues in the

neighbouring Netherlands. In Wallonia, however, even the left and far left are dominated by a French-style universalistic approach to personal civic questions: 'Everyone is equal, so separate organisations to win equality are unnecessary.'

Europe's laboratory?

Belgium is a good laboratory in which to measure what can be gained with these two different approaches. Although Flanders is dominated by Catholic ideologies while Wallonia is traditionally social-democratic, Flemish society and politicians have come much further in accepting equal rights for lesbians, gays and bisexuals.

Unfortunately, the different situations in the country's two parts make it very difficult to translate the strength of the (Flemish) lesbian/gay/bisexual movement into good legislation.

Why is this so important? The fact is that there are many circumstances in society in which it makes a difference whether you're in a couple or not. There are consequences for taxes, child-rearing, social benefits, inheritance, dividing common property and a common home when a relationship breaks up, obtaining a residence permit for a foreign partner and a number of other issues.

The Flemish lesbian and gay movement has a clear standpoint: those who want to should be able to marry, as a matter of simple equality. Gay (or straight) couples who don't want to marry should have the possibility of signing a cohabitation agreement.

The dominant Flemish Christian People's Party (CVP) continues to resist the recognition of cohabitation as an alternative to straight marriage. They still want to impose their own norms on everyone, and they think that marriage is the only truly valid form for a relationship. Legal cohabitation, even for opposite-sex couples, would undermine marriage, they argue. No one would marry any more. Public morals would wither away.

The conservative proposal

The CVP has, however, conceded that same-sex couples are left out of existing arrangements and that they too have a right to legal recognition of their relationships. After all, the party doesn't want to be accused of discrimination.

A professor at the Catholic University of Leuven has elaborated a 'registered partnership' proposal which meets all of the CVP's requirements. It would be an arrangement open only to lesbian and gay couples, not to heterosexuals. All the regulations of marriage would also apply to these partnerships, except those related to parenthood and residence rights for foreign partners. Same-sex couples would thus have all the responsibilities of married people, but not all of the rights.

The Flemish lesbian/gay/bisexual movement calls this *apartheid*. It sees no justification for the exceptions that are made. It is not campaigning against the proposal but does not consider it a solution to the problem.

Not enough pressure

A registered partnership bill has been introduced in parliament by the Socialist Party and CVP.

Despite the very Catholic approach of this legislation, the Francophone Christian Democrats (PSC) refuse to accept it. Because the Francophone lesbian/gay/bisexual movement is weak, the PSC is under little pressure to change its position. Although the PSC has only 12 seats in the 150-seat parliament, the whole discussion has ended up deadlocked.

Opinion polls show that the majority of the Belgian population agrees that lesbians, gays and bisexuals should have equal rights for their relationships, except in matters concerning parenthood.

The discussion has been going on for four years. So why hasn't the law been changed? Quite simply because of the apathy of the straight majority. Straight people are not organised to fight for the right to legal recognition of cohabitation as an alternative to marriage.

It seems that, without allies, the lesbian/gay/bisexual movement cannot win a good law. Out of solidarity and/or self-interest, 'straights' need to mobilise. ★

Notes

1. The only law in Belgian history that ever spoke openly about homosexuality was Article 372bis, which set the age of consent for homosexual contacts at 18 (it was 16 for heterosexual contacts). Even that law was only in effect for 20 years.

Netherlands

After partnership, marriage?

Legal partner registration for cohabiting couples has not ended the debate over 'gay marriage' in the Netherlands, Peter Drucker reports.

The social democratic-liberal coalition government is planning to submit two new proposed laws to parliament. The net outcome of all this legislation is murky and contradictory.

Both same-sex and opposite-sex couples have been able to register their partnerships legally at Dutch city halls since January 1, 1998. Over 1,800 lesbian and gay couples have taken advantage of the new regulations. Some of them have adopted all the trappings of white veils and black tuxedos, in more or less orthodox combinations.

Curiously enough, this has embarrassed right-wing publisher Henk Krol, whose campaign through his newspaper *De Gay Krant* was credited with launching the campaign for partnership. Now Krol finds the actual ceremonies too camp and insufficiently 'normal'.

"Really" married

A more significant issue is that registered partners are in fact not 'really married'. The major difference between 'partner registration' and marriage under the 1997 law is that registration does not imply parental rights. This leaves lesbian and gay couples, who are allowed to register their partnerships but not to marry, as second-class citizens.

Dutch public opinion recognizes the unfairness of the situation. Polls show a consistent majority in favour of same-sex couples' right to marry and adopt. Parliamentary majorities have taken the same position in votes on a series of non-binding motions, the first of which passed even before the law on partner registration was adopted.

This puts the coalition cabinet, returned to office in spring 1998 elections, in an awkward position. The Labour Party and left-liberal D66 have leaned towards going along with the public and parliamentary majority, while the right-liberal VVD has been seriously divided on the issue.

There has been no Christian party in government since 1994, when 70 years of unbroken Christian participation in coalitions (except for the five years of German occupation) came to an end. This deprives the government of an alibi.

The cabinet dealt with the difficulty in time-honoured fashion by appointing a



commission, headed by the same Christian Democrat, Kortmann, who headed a commission on the same subject in the early '90s. The majority, including the chair, favoured opening marriage to same-sex couples, but without parental rights. A minority report favoured giving same-sex couples equal rights to marry and adopt.

The cabinet now plans to introduce two laws to parliament, probably during 1999. One law would allow same-sex couples to adopt children. Foreign adop-

tions are ruled out, on the grounds that otherwise foreign countries might refuse to allow adoption by any Dutch couples. But interestingly enough, the law would not limit adoption to couples who have registered their partnerships. In fact it holds open the possibility of adoption by single people, which runs contrary to previous Dutch policy (though the possibility of adoption by single people has been defended with some success in the courts).

It remains to be seen how the Chris-

"Gay Marriage?"

tian opposition parties, and particularly the ruling VVD, will react when the bill reaches parliament. Dutch traditions – strong party discipline on the one hand and ‘dualism’ (autonomy of parliamentary groups from their ministers) on the other – mean that parties can sometimes reject as a bloc compromises that are reached in the cabinet by their own members.

Biological parenthood

The cabinet's second proposal is to allow same-sex marriages, but without parental rights for partners who are not biological parents. This proposal would leave virtually unchanged the grotesque situation that a sperm donor who has never seen ‘his’ child or done anything for it remains its legal father, while the birth mother's lesbian partner who was present at its birth and helped care for it from day one has no parental rights.

True, another recent law allows the second parent to be granted partial parental rights as a ‘co-guardian’. The new adoption law would also make it possible for her to adopt – but the court will consult the sperm donor before agreeing to adoption, even if the donor has not ‘recognised’ the child and is thus not the legal father!

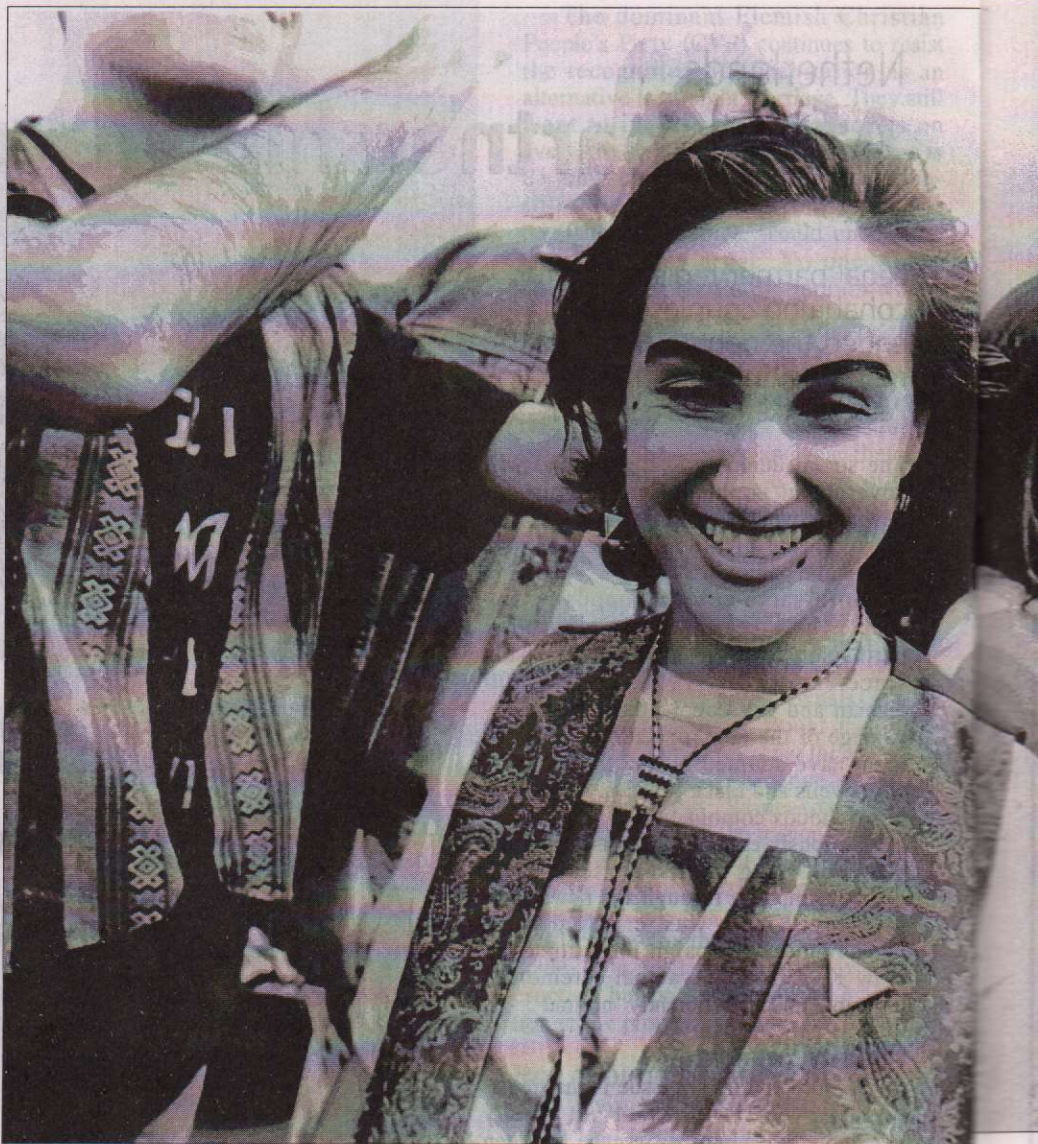
The cabinet proposal raises another peculiar issue. If the law passes, there will be no substantive legal difference between marriage for same-sex couples and registered partnership. Does this mean that registered partnership should be abolished for same-sex partners, only two or three years after it was introduced?

The cabinet says that registered partnership will continue to exist for at least five years. But then the whole institution of registered partnership might be allowed to ‘wither away’: new partner registrations might be ended, and currently registered partners would be allowed to marry. Registered partners would find themselves members of an anomalous, dwindling group. The choices would again be limited to marriage or nothing.

But what about the 800 opposite-sex couples who have registered their partnerships under the new law? Under the cabinet's latest proposal, there would still be a difference between marriage and registered partnership for opposite-sex couples: husbands and wives have automatic parental rights for children born during marriage, while registered partners do not.

"Building blocks"

These twists and turns are the result of two constraints. First, the major parties' insistence on a biological definition of parenthood is ultimately incompatible with true equality for same-sex couples. Second, registered partnership has been viewed mainly as a second-class imitation of marriage, rather than as



a first step towards introducing a genuine diversity of legal options for couples.

Forward to the past

For many years, the main current of the Dutch lesbian and gay movement called for a ‘building blocks’ model, in which the state would offer several different bundles of rights and responsibilities for couples (or larger groups): the rights and responsibilities of sharing a home, the rights and responsibilities of an economic partnership, the rights and responsibilities of raising children together, and so on. Couples would be free to use some of the ‘building blocks’ and reject others, rather than all couples being forced to fit into a single, rigid box.

Large parts of the lesbian and gay movement abandoned this “building blocks” approach in favour of Krol's pro-marriage campaign. But a return to the original strategy would seem to offer a positive way out of the current tangle. ★

* Thanks to Gea Zijlstra for checking the references to Dutch legislation.

After the failure of parliamentary initiatives by the Communist Party and the Socialist Party youth group, Portugal's recently-formed lesbian and gay movement is moving towards a more dynamic, campaigning strategy.

Sérgio Vitorino

In June 1997 the Communist Party and the Socialist Party youth group both made proposals to extend the civic rights of ‘de facto unions’.

The proposal put forward by the Communist Party (PCP) only covered heterosexual couples. But the proposal from the young socialists spoke of ‘people,’ rather than ‘men and women’ or ‘different sexes’. So, gay men and lesbians were included, but only by default.

In the clause about adoption however, the proposal is that only heterosexual couples would be able to adopt or get artificial insemination. The proposal would give cohabitants – even



Portugal

A new movement

(despite the name, a right wing party) to hold a referendum on the question.

In the end the measure was defeated because the Socialist Party failed to put its full weight into the referendum campaign in support of a woman's right to choose.

Similar backsliding on the question of 'de facto unions' means that the rights of lesbians and gay men will not be enshrined in law.

The left's divided engagement

The Communist Party put forward two arguments for not integrating lesbians and gay men into its proposal. A debate on partnership, they argued, should not be mixed up with the question of lesbian and gay rights because thousands of heterosexual Portuguese families needed these rights. If the question of homosexuality were included, the law would be defeated and a majority would suffer because of a minority.

The Communist Party also promised that they would later present a law exclusively about gay and lesbian partnerships. In fact, the party's modest proposal on heterosexual cohabitantes was defeated by Parliament.

The PCP accused the socialists of presenting a law about homosexuals at a time when the relationship of forces in the parliament was unfavourable. Portuguese society was not ready to discuss this, they argued, and therefore a debate on this issue would only whip up more homophobic feelings. They also argued that the references to 'family' in the Portuguese constitution referred only to heterosexual households.

Portuguese lesbians and gay men are used to the homophobic positions of the Communist Party's leaders so this was nothing new. But it still made the homosexual movement very angry. Not only was the PCP willing to sacrifice this 'minority', but it defended itself by promising to propose a special law just on homosexual partnerships. Legislation that – according to the PCP's own arguments – would never be approved because it was only about homosexuals.

In fact, it was clear that the PCP would never bring forward such a project and was being dishonest in saying so. Its voters are too conservative to support such legislation. But in any case, Portuguese gays and lesbians did not want a specific law when they could be included in a general law on 'de facto unions'.

The far left Socialist Revolutionary Party (PSR) was the first organization to put forward queer issues in Portuguese

heterosexual – fewer rights than married people. But it would at least create 'marriage-like' rights in questions of housing, social security and taxation. Maintenance rights could also be sought if a relationship broke down. There would be common responsibility for debts and other financial obligations.

Even these rather limited proposals provoked a violent reaction from the Roman Catholic Church, which still has a significant and profoundly reactionary influence in Portuguese society. The right wing parties immediately announced that they would vote against both propositions.

Like their French counterparts, the governing Socialist Party was totally divided. They worried that being seen to champion lesbian and gay rights would further damage the popularity of the government.

They had already put forward a proposal for the decriminalisation of abortion which had been rigorously opposed by the Church hierarchy.

That offensive split the socialist deputies. Although the abortion vote was won in parliament, the socialists then agreed with the Social Democrats

politics, at the beginning of the 1990s. At that time, there wasn't a single gay or lesbian organization, let alone a movement. The PSR is still the only political party that takes up lesbian and gay issues as part of its overall platform. This gives the party a very good position inside the movement. From the rest of the left, gays and lesbians expect nothing but silence. (After years of implementing neo-liberal policies, the Socialist Party lost the right even to be considered left.)

The right wing and the church have presented fundamentalist arguments. They falsely suggested that this was a debate about lesbian and gay marriage and raised the spectre of the destruction of the family in a profoundly homophobic way.

The church hierarchy started appearing on television and making statements to the press saying that – like homosexuals – the law was 'an aberration'. If it were to be passed, they claimed, it would mean the 'end of family values' and 'civilised society' as we know it.

In the end the Communists' project was defeated. The Socialist Youth with-



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We ask what alternative policies the left can put forward, and make a few modest suggestions of our own. ★

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"Gay Marriage?"

drew their proposal before the discussion began in parliament, when they realised that not even a majority of Socialist Party deputies would vote for it. So in the end no measures were passed that would take forward partnership rights even a little.

The failure of the lesbian and gay movement

But what was perhaps more worrying was the failure of the lesbian and gay movement to answer adequately the arguments put forward by their bigoted opponents.

There were two main reasons for this. The queer movement in Portugal only developed recently and is still extremely small. The level of organisation and political debate is chronically low.

There are only active organizations. One of them is very small and unrepresentative. The second, ILGA Portugal, is lacking in politics and democratic discussion. The group has existed for three years and has many militants. But although its base is very heterogeneous, it is very close to some sectors of the Socialist Party and is committed to a strategy of lobbying.

On this crucial issue it made only moderate criticism of the socialists and became a hostage of its political relationship with the government party. They failed to mobilize people to demonstrate for their rights even though this would have been possible and might have forced the government to make concessions.

At the same time, they always present themselves as a non-political organization, in the hope of recruiting as many people as possible. Because of their fear of politics, which they confuse with political parties, they were afraid of identifying the right wing parties as their adversaries, preferring to try to persuade them. They didn't even answer the church's provocation, because they were afraid of offending what is still a very Catholic society.

This strategy undercut the real possibility that existed to bring many people into activity on this issue. On the other hand it did have one positive side effect: the lobbying strategy lost its credibility among a whole layer of people.

Many gays and lesbians understood the necessity to go further and organise serious action. The movement has nothing to expect from the main political parties unless we force them to concede our demands by mobilising.

This episode is the best argument to undercut the reformist tendencies leading the queer movement and force them to act more seriously to demand radical change. It will create a better relationship of forces in future struggles among the different currents. The lack of democracy and imagination in the small gay and lesbian movement is being replaced by a new atmosphere of debate and action. ★

The author is a member of the PSR, Portuguese section of the Fourth International.



United States Bill Clinton's "defense" of marriage

The lesbian/gay/bisexual movement in the US is hardly strong enough to make legal recognition of same-sex relationships into a national issue. Same-sex sex is still illegal in 19 of the country's 50 states, and in the colony of Puerto Rico.

A small minority of the states (and a number of major cities) have passed anti-discrimination laws. But it will be many years before we see the approval of a federal anti-discrimination law.

The brutal murder of gay student Matthew Shepard in Wyoming last year revealed the depth of anti-gay hatred and violence that still exists in much of the US.

Who would expect in such circumstances that 'gay marriage' would be seriously debated?

But the country's enormous size and diversity can always make for surprises. The fact that each state has its own constitution and bill of rights also creates many possibilities.

In this case the surprise came from Hawaii, an island state in the Pacific thousands of kilometres from the US mainland. Whites are a minority (they overthrew the indigenous Polynesian monarchy a century ago) and the social climate is more tolerant than the US norm.

Two years ago, the state's supreme court ruled that barring same-sex couples from marrying was contrary to the state constitution. Efforts in the state legislature to overturn the court decision failed.

The ruling set off a wave of revulsion and panic in the US fundamentalist right. A clause in the federal constitution requires states to give 'full faith and credit' to all of each others' legal pronouncements.

Hawaii is already a popular vacation and honeymoon spot, and conservatives had nightmares about thousands of lesbian and gay couples flying to Hawaii to get married, and returning home with unassailable marital rights.

The reaction came quickly. A Defense of Marriage Act was rushed through the federal congress, declaring that marriage means male-female marriage and that no state law to the contrary need be recognised.

Despite its dubious constitutionality the law was passed by overwhelming majorities in both houses of congress, with the support of not only traditionally anti-gay Republicans but also supposedly pro-gay rights Democrats. Similar legislation was already in force in Puerto Rico.

In November 1998 a referendum in Hawaii reversed the state court's decision, and barred the possibility of same-sex marriage even in that state.

President Clinton's empty support for gay rights was made clear early in his first term when he accepted a compromise which gutted his pledge to allow lesbians and gays to serve in the military. No surprise, then, that he gave early support to the Defense of Marriage Act, and signed it without hesitation. [PD] ★

The Fourth International Sixty years of struggle

Livio Maitan looks back at 60 years of the world's largest regroupment of revolutionary Marxist groups.

The idea behind the Fourth International was formulated for the first time by Leon Trotsky in July 1933. It was one of the most dramatic periods in the history of the workers' movement. The German proletariat had been defeated by nazism, and 16 years after the Russian revolution, the Stalinist bureaucracy had crushed the remaining revolutionaries who, since the mid-20s, had opposed the bureaucratisation of the revolution.

There are similarities with the process of foundation of the earlier, Third International. During the First World War, the major workers' parties had failed miserably. Instead of organising a revolutionary, anti-capitalist struggle, they had capitulated the warmongers in their own countries.

In the face of this terrible failure, the leaders of the Russian revolution, and militants from the socialist left and other class-struggle currents, in Europe and further afield, resolved to create new parties, and a new International.

Three years later, this International (the "Comintern") also failed. Only a few member parties had won hegemonic positions in the workers movement, displacing the social democrats. And most of the Comintern parties adopted similar analysis, orientation and method as provoked or at least contributed to the major defeats of the workers movement in Germany and China.

Trotsky's project would be hard to put into practice. There were fascist dictatorships in Italy and Germany, and the workers' movement was on the defensive in other European countries. A revolution had begun in China, only to be defeated.

Nevertheless, just as at the end of the First World War, there was a clear need for new revolutionary parties and a new international. Not because of any intellectual, "Trotskyist" frustration, but because of the concrete experiences of masses of working people.

The revolutionary Marxists who followed Trotsky's call certainly did not underestimate the size of the defeats which had taken place. Nor did they share the ("third period") analysis of the larger, Stalinist parties, which predicted that the great depression of 1929-33 would grow into a generalised crisis of the capitalist system.

Nevertheless, they recognised that new explosions were accumulating. In 1936 they were proved right, with a sharp upturn in mass activity in France and Spain. Unfortunately, the Left Opposition groups were still too young and too small to attain any critical mass which could influence these events in a decisive way. The revolutionary crises in both countries receded. In France, the Popular Front exhausted itself. In Spain, General Franco won the civil war.

These events pushed Trotsky and his supporters to concretise their choice of July 1933. In September 1938 they proclaimed the new International. The founding congress reflected the meagre forces participating.

And the context quickly deteriorated – the Second World War erupted one year after our foundation. The war broke international contacts. In particular, it split the two main components of the International – the North American and West European wings. The Latin American, Chinese and Indochinese groups were also isolated.

In Europe, war and nazi repression deprived the movement of many leaders and cadres who had been somehow associated with the foundation of the International. In Greece and, to a lesser extent France, the threat of death came not only from the fascists, but also from the partisan groups and militants organised by the Stalinist parties.

The post-war challenge

At the end of the second world war, the immediate task was reconstructing and reconnecting nuclei of comrades, and rebuilding at least a minimum level of co-ordination and international leadership. Only after this, people argued, would it be possible to struggle for hegemony in the wider movement.

Historians are still debating this crucial period. Why, for example, was the working class unable to provoke an anti-capitalist dynamic in none of the west-European countries where the economic and political structures of the ruling classes had been profoundly shaken? Across western Europe, the workers and their organisations accepted and participated in the reconstruction of the pre-war system.

We could also ask why the Fourth International groups failed to win an influence at the mass level. After all, unlike the social democrats and the Stalinist-controlled Communist parties, the Fourth Internationalists had understood the depth of the crisis, and rejected the insti-

tutionalist-reformist road.

Of course, the level of crisis varied from country to country. More importantly, perhaps, the victorious, "democratic" allies had their own, imperialist priorities, and the massive military force to impose it. The mood of the soldiers would have made repressive interventions difficult, but the threat was omnipresent.

The working class and other popular layers of society were increasingly militant (in Italy, this mobilisation had begun as early as Spring 1943). But this did not, in itself, lead to a recomposition and reconstruction of the workers' movement as a whole. Dictatorship and war had destroyed and intimidated. The growth in anti-capitalist and socialist consciousness would prove slow.

The positive image of the Soviet Union also played a major role. Only a critical-minded minority were aware of the terrible damage done by the Stalinist regime. For many workers – not just those in the Communist Parties – the military victories of the USSR were proof that the country represented a real alternative to capitalism.

Nor did people realise that the re-introduction of democratic rights and liberties was actually part of a conservative restoration of the pre-war system, far short of the possibilities that could have been fought for and won.

"One step at a time," argued the big workers' parties. Re-establish parliamentary democracy first, and, tomorrow, we will push for the necessary social transformations. The Communist Parties' long term strategic commitment to reformism was mystified, and presented as a series of short-term tactical questions. The Social Democrats had less need to mystify, since their classic perspective of a gradual transition to socialism could easily be adapted to fit the new situation.

Of course, there was some positive shift. In Britain, a series of fairly radical reforms were implemented to alleviate the basic needs of the masses. Nothing that challenged the system, but real reforms nevertheless.

Swimming against the tide

The 1948 World Congress, and the meetings of the leadership of the organisation in the following years, concentrated on a redefinition of our conceptions and organisations.

One of the texts of that Congress updated our analysis of the bureaucratisation of Russia, the first Workers' State. At the same time, it pointed to the internal

contradictions which were weakening the bureaucratic system.

There were also texts on the rupture between Moscow and Belgrade (June 1948), analysing the dynamic of splinters in the world Stalinist system.

These definitions and redefinitions were all the more necessary because this was a period dominated by two tendencies: the apologetic approach of the Communist Parties and their fellow travellers, and the approach of others who rejected the autocratic Stalinist regime, but thought it was inevitable that the Stalinist system dominate large parts of the world for the foreseeable future.

In 1950-52 we also tried hard to update our conception of the construction of revolutionary parties. Our starting point was the observation that the traditional parties were still dominant in the labour movement, including in most of the countries where we existed.

This led us to adopt an "entrism" orientation. We suggested that revolutionaries integrate themselves into the social democratic and Stalinist parties, so as to be able to participate directly in the experiences of the most politicised layers of the population, and participate in the process of political differentiation under way, or potential.

Obviously, this approach did not apply to those countries where the social democratic and Stalinist parties did not exist, or were not hegemonic in the labour movement: such as the United States, much of Latin America, or Sri Lanka.

There was a sharp divergence of views in the international, concerning both the new orientation towards entrism and our judgement of the de-Stalinisation of the Soviet Union. This provoked major splits, particularly in the United States, Latin America and Sri Lanka.

The period from the mid-fifties to the end of the seventies was marked by the explosion of the crisis of Stalinism. The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was a watershed. There were anti-bureaucratic struggles in Poland, and an insurrection in Hungary in 1956. There was growing tension between China and the USSR.

There were a wide range of revolutionary struggles in the colonial or semi-colonial countries, notably Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam and the Dominican Republic. Meanwhile, the industrialised countries faced a crisis of society, symbolised by the social and protest movements of 1968 and the early 70s...

The three sectors of revolution

The 1963 "reunification" congress noted that, more than at any other period, there was a convergence of the dynamics in the three main sectors of the world revolution: the anti-colonial struggle in the "third world," the anti-bureaucratic struggles in the Stalinist countries, and an upturn in student and worker protests in



Mao Zedong and Nikolai Krushchev. Their oppressive regimes discredited Communism at home and abroad.

the developed capitalist countries. There were strong student movements in France, Mexico, Japan, Yugoslavia and, later, Spain and Portugal. A new, younger generation of working class militants was also entering into struggle.

For the first time since the second world war, there was a challenge to the bureaucracies which dominated the labour movement and other popular groups.

Even in the United States of America, where the student mobilisation was smaller and lasted a shorter time than in Europe, and was not complemented by a significant increase in working-class militancy, opposition to the Vietnam war spread so wide that it became a key factor persuading Washington to pull out of the war.

Anti-imperialist mobilisation

For the Fourth International the context was more favourable than ever before. As an international organisation, with several large and prestigious national sections, the Fourth International was able to appear as a reference point. There was unprecedented growth in many countries, particularly in France, Mexico and Japan.

In the United States, revolutionary Marxists played a very important role in the leadership of the anti-imperialist mobilisations. They were as influential, in their way, as the earlier generation of Marxists during the labour struggles of the 1930s.

The International was able to reinforce its leadership bodies, making them larger and more geographically representative. Leaders, and intellectuals associated with the International and its national sections, took part in widely-followed theoretical-political debates, linked to and developing the best traditions of the workers' movement and Marxist culture.

Things began to change in the second half of the 1970s. The complicated dynamics of this period were not initially understood, even by the protagonists.

Reversed tendencies

The world recession of 1974-75 was a key moment. In most countries, particularly those where workers had previously made the most advances, the socio-economic balance of forces began to deteriorate. Not just for the proletariat, but for all popular layers of society.

The dominant organisations of the workers did not propose any strategy for resisting this counter-attack from the employers and governments. The soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia ended the progressive dynamic in that part of the world too.

After a long period of sharp social conflict, dominant parties like Italy's Communist Party and Britain's Labour Party found themselves on the defensive, in more and more unfavourable conditions. They responded by watering-down the class content of their programmes, but continued to face electoral set-backs.

Far-left groups were wrong-footed by the new situation. They rapidly declined in strength and influence. Though few realised at the time, this decline has persisted ever since.

True, socialist parties won elections, in France (1981) and Spain (1982). But the tendency remained the same. There was little popular upsurge in response to these victories, and neither François Mitterand nor Felipe Gonzalez introduced fundamental reforms. It would be more accurate to say that both, in their own ways, nourished and encouraged the wave of retreat of the left and the popular movements.

The world situation was contradictory. The USA had still not digested its defeat in Vietnam. Revolutionary, democratic and anti-imperialist movements were still growing in the under-developed countries. This process culminated in 1979, with the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, and the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua.

But, as we know, the regression in Iran came quickly. Shortly afterwards, the Philippines faced a conservative *empasse*. The Sandinistas were caught in a trap by the imperialists, and struggled with their own contradictions.

All this had a very negative influence in most of the under-developed countries, particularly in Latin America. From now on, the decline in the fortunes of the left would not just be confined to the advanced capitalist countries.

Poland's political revolution

In 1981, General Jaruzelski's *coup d'état* blocked the growing strength of the Polish working class. The full, international consequences of this defeat would only be realised much later. We can now recognise, in 1981, the acceleration of the fundamentally regressive dynamic in the bureaucratic societies of Eastern Europe and the USSR. The route was open for the collapse of the Berlin wall, the dissolution of the Soviet Union,

and the rise, everywhere, of currents in favour of capitalist restoration.

This doesn't necessarily mean that Trotsky had been wrong to argue that the collapse of the bureaucratic regimes could lead to either the restoration of capitalism or the development of a new form of socialist democracy. The powerful mobilisations which had succeeded in Poland, the Hungarian insurrection in 1956, the Prague spring of 1968, all showed that, within the working class, among students, and in large sections of the population, there was a dynamic and a desire *not* for the restoration of capitalism, but in favour of the construction of a genuinely socialist society.

Even at the end of the 1980s, Eastern Germany and Czechoslovakia witnessed powerful movements with an egalitarian, revolutionary-democratic sensibility. There were similar dynamics in the Soviet Union, where sectors of the working class, particularly the minors, repeatedly mobilised in pursuit of their socio-economic and political demands.

The price of Stalinism

In final analysis, however, the regressive tendencies which had dominated the 1980s, with their series of defeats and retreats of the workers' movement, and the obscuring of traditional values which had accompanied it, proved to have too heavy an influence.

We have paid a heavy price for the ravages of the Stalinist domination of countries like Poland and Russia. The organisations and structures of the workers' movement were destroyed or stripped of their contents. All those who could have maintained a collective, working class and popular social tissue were squashed without pity.

In *The Revolution Betrayed* (1936), Trotsky hypothesised about the final crisis of the bureaucratic system only twenty years after the Bolsheviks had taken power. The book was completed as pre-revolutionary crises erupted in France and Spain. Proletarians in many countries still saw the USSR as an alternative society which, despite all its contradictions, was engaged in the process of industrialisation while the global capitalist economy was turned upside down by the great depression.

Half a century later, the context had radically changed. Nothing is ever completely impossible, but the intervening period had created a very strong negative dynamic.

The organisations of the Fourth International did not escape these strong negative pressures. This is not to ignore or under-estimate the organisation's own errors, its slowness to respond to the changing world. Nor the numerous perverse deformations which marked the development of Trotskyism – particularly the series of national and international splits in the small ranks of the movement. In 1979 the Latin American wing

of the movement split off, under the leadership of Nahuel Moreno. A few years later, there was a split with the American section, the Socialist Workers' Party.

It could have been possible, here or there, to make a qualitative leap forward, with different tactics, different policies, or different ways of work. But, in such a period of retreat, of decline in the workers' and anti-imperialist movement, it would have been almost impossible to build or rebuild revolutionary organisations which could have been any stronger or more influential than we hoped in 1968.

The same could be said about the International's response to the crisis in the bureaucratic Stalinist societies. It would have been possible to do more to help form more solid groups of revolutionaries there. The International could have done more to avoid the fragmentation and demoralisation of the groups in the Stalinist and post-Stalinist countries with which it was in contact.

Self-criticism is needed. But it seems in any case unlikely that a fundamentally different dynamic of recomposition and consciousness could have taken place at a mass level, whatever the Fourth International could have done instead or as well as what it did in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

A (temporary) contraction

All these elements of crisis for the workers' and socialist movements contributed to a decline in internationalist consciousness and action. Not surprisingly, the Fourth International itself also suffered from weariness, and a decline in influence in some regions of the world.

The organisation found it difficult to deal with new analytical problems quickly enough, and difficult to suggest new strategies and new models of construction of revolutionary organisations. To make matters worse, a contraction in material resources forced the organisation to reduce the size of its central secretariat.

Some leaders and members of left groups have interpreted all the above phenomena as proof of the irreversible decline of the workers' movement and socialist politics. The Italian Communist Party and Britain's Labour Party are only the most extreme examples.

Almost all Europe's social democratic parties have decided that the workers' movement no longer has a particular socio-political identity which they should represent.

Ex-Communist parties in the eastern and western parts of the continent have decided that the Marxist analysis of capitalism is obsolete, and that there is no serious possibility of building a collective or socialist alternative society.

Historic defeats

This pessimism or defeatism is completely wrong. The workers' movement can be relaunched. But only if it is rebuilt from the bottom up. This will require the widest rethinking, putting aside the accumulated prejudices of the first century of the movement.

The first subject of this rethinking should be the reasons for the collapse of the bureaucratic Stalinist societies.

Contemporary society should be studied in all its supranational and specific details. And the essential characteristics of the socialist society we struggle for should be redefined for the 21st century.

All this is necessary if we are to succeed in finding new foundations for the much-weakened anti-capitalist consciousness.

It is 60 years since the Fourth International was established. Its very survival, through marginalisation, war and crisis, without mass influence and without money, is surprising. Its ability to remain present in the workers' movement in so many countries, around the world, and its credibility for some sectors of the avant-garde are remarkable.

The survival and continued influence of the International are the result of its analytical and theoretical contribution to the interpretation of the key phenomena of the last 70 years. The International has built on and absorbing the theoretical work of Marxists theoreticians of earlier periods.

But more than that. Members of the International have played a greater or lesser role in so many historic struggles, from the struggle against Stalin in the 1920s and the conflictive development of the Chinese revolution in 1925-27. Not as observers and commentators, but as direct participants.

Even where the supporters of the International were only a handful, they threw themselves into the actually-existing labour and social movements, and struggled to understand the real internal dialectics of those movements. ★

This text forms the first part of the introduction to the special double issue of our French sister-magazine *Inprecor, l'Ve Internationale* 60 ans d'analyses et de combats, December 1998. Other extracts will be published in future issues of *International Viewpoint*.

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Obituaries

India

Vinod Mishra

The central leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) (Liberation), Vinod Mishra, suddenly passed away on December 18 in Lucknow (Uttar Pradesh). The funeral took place in Patna (Bihar) on December 22.

He will be remembered by the broader Left Movement for two important achievements, writes B. Skanthakumar.

First, he reorganised the healthiest elements of the Marxist-Leninist trend in India into the "Liberation" group, when both state repression (including the assassination of its leading cadre) and sectarianism could have destroyed it after the brief flowering of the Naxalbari movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

During his leadership of the CPI-ML (Liberation), he also reoriented it away from the blind application of Mao Zedong Thought (including the strategy of protracted peoples war) in India into mass, open and legal work while forging links with groups and movements outside of the Maoist tradition including oppressed minorities through a political organisation, the Indian Peoples Front, and other coalitions. While the Party retains underground armed units, these are now deployed for purely defensive purposes against landlord armies, the police and occasionally rival Maoist groups.

Vinod Mishra joined the revolutionary movement in West Bengal in 1968, abandoning his Engineering studies shortly before graduation. He was one of 'Midnight's Children', yearning for the fulfilment of the promise of independence in the year of his birth. In late 1970 he was detained under the Prevention of Violent Activities Act. He was released unconditionally in 1971 and did revolutionary work among the peasantry in Burdwan district of West Bengal. In 1975, he assumed the responsibility of leading the Party. He was elected General Secretary in the 2nd Party Congress held in 1976 and elaborated its political line at its 4th, 5th and 6th Congresses held in 1988, 1992 and 1997 respectively.

As an official communique from the CPI-ML notes, "It was Comrade Vinod Mishra who guided the Party from its underground existence when it was practically limited to pockets of struggle in the rural areas of Bihar and Bengal and brought the Party to the national mainstream politics. He championed unity of the Indian communist movement along the revolutionary Marxist orientation and was firmly against liquidation of the basic revolutionary standpoint of the

Party. It was under his miraculous leadership that the Party arose from the ashes and once again became a powerful voice within the Left movement."

In recent years, the CPI-ML has urged the formation of a Left Confederation with the mainstream Communist Party of India and Communist Party of India (Marxist). Unfortunately, the latter two continue to be entranced by bourgeois centrist personalities and parties. However the CPI-ML persists in asserting the importance of a left pole and raising the banner of class struggle.

Despite a certain romanticisation of China under Mao especially during the Cultural Revolution, limits to its critique of Stalinism, and the dubious basis of some of the party's recent electoral and caste alliances, the CPI-ML (Liberation) remains one of the most interesting actors on the global revolutionary left in the 1990s.

Mishra's death which follows soon after that of another of their veteran leaders, Nagbushan Patnaik, is a "great loss for both the CPI (ML) and the cause of revolutionary Marxism in India," writes Salah Jaber, on behalf of the Paris-based Secretariat of the Fourth International. "We hope and firmly believe that Comrade Vinod Mishra's legacy will live on in the remarkable group of leaders that he contributed to educate and that you will carry forward the struggle to which he devoted his entire life." ★

Sri Lanka

May Wickramasuriya

The senior secretary of the Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers Union (CMU) has died, after three years of ill health following a stroke. Five thousand people attended the funeral on 16 December.

May Wickramasuriya was the first woman elected to the Executive Committee of the Union, in 1953. After 1959 she worked full-time for the union, becoming its second-most important leader. She was also a long-time supporter of the Fourth International.

May entered the labour force during the second world war, when the British colonial government recruited a large number of women (particularly the Christian and English-educated) to meet their war-time needs.

"In 1956, when the British invaded the Suez, we organised a protest demonstration at very short notice. While at work [at an architectural firm] I would go to the ladies' toilet and draw posters for use by the pickets at lunch time.

"I was sometimes the only person at May Day demonstrations in the early days. People used to shout from the pavement "There's a woman!" – because

it was unusual to see a woman take part in our demonstrations."

Teaching herself labour law as she went along, Wickramasuriya represented many clerical, supervisory and allied categories of employers. She was the first woman to directly negotiate with the Employers Federation of Ceylon on behalf of the workers.

The "general socialist" ideas she had held since the time she read Pandit Nehru's autobiography were reinforced by her workplace contact with members of the Lanka Socialist Party (LSSP).

She first met her future husband, labour leader Bala Tampoe, when he came to give a basic Marxism class to the LSSP group.

He refused to admit her to the LSSP until she had followed political education classes. Happily, no such barrier prevented their marriage in 1966. [JD] ★



Transformation and regroupment

Reactions to the current socio-economic crisis all too often take the form of reactionary tendencies of an ethnic, nationalist, racial or religious character. Hence the urgent need to rebuild a world-wide movement of anti-capitalist struggle, taking account of the recomposition of the workers' movement which is underway as a result of the double failure of social democracy and Stalinism.

Regroupments of forces determined to learn the lessons of the historical abomination that was Stalinism and to continue, against the winds and the tides, to fight against capitalism are being realised in a number of countries.

In all the countries where such possibilities exist, the organisations of the Fourth International are ready to be part of the re-groupment process. We consider this as an important step towards the recomposition of the anti-capitalist left on a world scale. At the international level, the Fourth International is an active participant in re-groupment, bringing with it the advantages of a long tradition of combat against capitalism and Stalinism. ★

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Booknotes

Bukharin's "Prison Novel"

Nikolai Bukharin, *How It All Began*, translated from Russian by George Shriver. Introduction by Stephen F. Cohen. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 345 pp., \$US28.95. Reviewed by Joe Auciello

Awaiting a show trial and certain death in Lubyanka Prison, Nikolai Bukharin was interrogated and then programmed by the NKVD (People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs — the Soviet secret police) for thirteen months, broken down and force-fed the debasing lies he would be required to repeat before the world when he performed his assigned role as an "enemy of the people."

Yet, Bukharin resisted as best he could, using the limited means available to him. Though he confessed in general to the charges at his trial, he sparred with the prosecutor and denied the specific accusations of planning sabotage, plotting assassinations, conspiring with fascism, etc.

Throughout his months of imprisonment, Bukharin refuted lies and slander by speaking in his own words to posterity. At night in his cell, Bukharin, former editor of *Pravda* and *Izvestia*, former Politburo member, chief Party theoretician, and former head of the Communist International, wrote four manuscripts, including this unfinished autobiographical novel of childhood and youth newly published in English.

How It All Began tells the story of Nikolai Ivanovich Petrov and his family from the child's birth in Moscow in the late 1880s to approximately the time of the 1905 revolution. Petrov, nicknamed "Kolya," is the alter ego of the author, Nikolai Ivanovich Bukharin.

This barely fictional memoir is presented largely, though not exclusively, from Kolya's perspective. In some later chapters which add an historical framework, Kolya is not present. Generally, though, the novel is written from the point of view of the adult looking back on childhood; the reader witnesses not the re-creation of youth but the recollection of it.

Bukharin evokes a richly layered portrait of childhood that is at once subtle, varied, and deep. His stories of Kolya's boyhood experiences at play and in school, and his recounting of family life, are exceptionally sharp, vivid, and poetic. The novel is a tour de force of remembrance.

Bukharin draws a detailed portrait of Moscow at the close of the nineteenth century, showing its streets, neighborhoods, churches, schools, and its people, from the "lower depths" to the "white

collar" working class to the gentry.

Later, as family fortunes decline and the Petrovs are forced to relocate to the provinces, Kolya minutely, and without sentiment, describes the poor and prosperous peasants, the oppressed Jews, regional government officials, and, of course, the Russian countryside.

Not surprisingly, a thread of revolutionary politics winds through the story. From the words of an angry, impoverished peasant, Kolya learns that the world is not only divided between adults and children, as he had thought, but also between rich and poor.

It is the beginning of a political realization that will eventually lead him to Marxism.

A chapter at the end of the manuscript features a debate among student followers of the Social Revolutionary party and the Social Democrats, as the Marxists at that time were known. Bukharin forcefully and fairly presents the opinions of both sides and recreates the give-and-take atmosphere of ideological adversaries jousting in smoke-filled rooms.

Yet, it would be misleading to suggest that the bulk of the novel is concerned with politics. Much of the story centers on the young boy's relationships, especially his relationship with the vast world to be found out of doors.

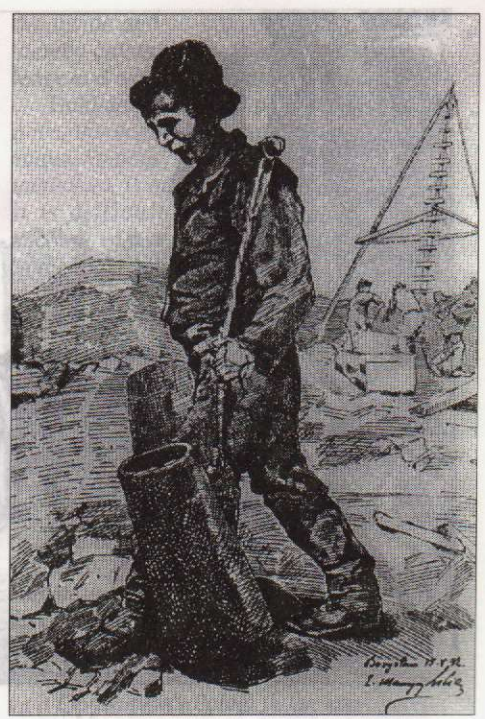
Kolya loves Nature so deeply that it almost becomes a separate character in the novel. The natural world for him is an endless source of delight and fascination, and he spends countless days in forest and field. His room contains collections of "treasures" — every variety of insect and bird that he can capture. The adult Bukharin acknowledged nature as "the passion of my childhood," a statement amply demonstrated by the novel. In this characteristic, as in others, Kolya reveals that "the child is father to the man."

Kolya's own father, Ivan Antonovich Petrov, is like a character out of Dickens, someone both brilliant and obtuse, a man whose great intelligence is not accompanied by insight or understanding of how to survive in the world, but whose spirit is buoyed by unfounded optimism.

Life genuinely confuses Ivan Petrov. He simply cannot comprehend why his supervisor at work, with whom he's been quarrelling in front of other employees about some minor matter, is not pleased to discover that Petrov was correct all along. In this way Petrov succeeds in winning his point but losing his livelihood, arguing himself out of a job and into poverty.

Not a natural storyteller

Bukharin relates the struggles of Ivan Petrov just as he relates most of the novel's events; he comments on the characters from the perspective of an outside observer. Rarely does he reveal the inner life of anyone but his alter ego, Kolya.



This method limits Bukharin's effectiveness as a story-teller. Frequently, a scene rendered from the outside narrator would have had greater dramatic resonance if developed from the inner perspective of the characters. Here, for instance, Bukharin sums up the unhappy marriage of Kolya's aunt and uncle: "Marya Ivanovna accepted all her torments and stayed with this husband, who on top of everything else was jealous of her — jealous in a crude and stupid way, as only thick-headed people lacking inner cultivation can be jealous, for despite all their malice they are aware of their own inadequacy."

Chekhov or Babel would have created an entire story from this conflict. Turgenev or Tolstoy would have developed a scene or chapter by which readers would have inferred, or themselves learned, the insight that Bukharin announces. For an accomplished writer of fiction, the entire story would have led to some special moment of revelation, either Marya Ivanovna's or her husband's heightened understanding. In Bukharin's hands this material becomes only background information, broad brush strokes to paint a character before moving on to another of Kolya's adventures.

Overall, Bukharin is a writer making use of the loose form that is the novel, but he is no novelist. For him, the novel is a soft, leather sack that can be filled with memoir, history, sociology, political science, and Marxism, all held together by the story of Kolya's life. Bukharin employs the simplest of plots — a boy's growth from childhood to maturity — and the simplest structure: chronology.

Characters appear and are described at length with sardonic observation, with witty personal and social insight, but these figures do little to further the plot.



Their appearance slows down the narrative drive. Nor are these numerous secondary characters integrated into the story as they would be in the hands of a seasoned novelist. Bukharin's characters appear in the story because, no doubt, they existed in real life and figure strongly, sharply, in his memory. For Bukharin, the novel stimulated and contained that prodigious memory and his clearly focused observations.

Yet, there is much to enjoy in Bukharin's prose style and perspective. A forgiving reader who willingly accepts Bukharin's limitations as a novelist will find a great deal to admire in this work which is finally a recollection and revelation of a past that straddled two eras, the decay of Tsardom and the rise of revolution.

Inadvertently, perhaps, Bukharin gives a superb description of the quality of his writing: "Children, like grown-ups, have their superstitions, prejudices, heartfelt dreams, ideals, and unforgettable incidents in life, which are stored in the memory forever and which suddenly, at terrible or tragic moments in life, come swimming into consciousness, surprisingly vivid, in full detail, down to the wrinkles in somebody's face or a spider's web illuminated by the evening sun. The world of childhood is vast and multifarious."

A unique manuscript

The translation by George Shriver successfully resolves the unusual difficulties posed by this manuscript. A characteristic of Bukharin's writing style — his pleasure in word play — is rendered well and the necessary explanations are given unobtrusively. Clarification for the references to obscure birds, flowers, insects, etc., are seamlessly woven into the text. (A glossary is appended for Bukharin's many literary

and political allusions.)

The story flows so smoothly, that a reader may wonder if the translator rounded off the rough edges and "improved" what was, after all, an unedited work composed under duress. Apparently not. In the "Introduction" Stephen Cohen states the manuscript was published as it was written — a tribute, then, to Bukharin's literary skill and the translation which brings it so clearly into English.

How can Bukharin's literary accomplishment be fairly judged? The customary standards seem not to apply — criticisms of shortcomings in the work seem beside the point. After all, Bukharin was not some retired statesman spinning out his memoirs in the leisure of his golden years. Nor was he by temperament a writer of fiction, though he read widely and commented on literary trends. Bukharin's novel-as-memoir does not fit neatly into any ready-made literary convention — and traditional standards are not sufficient to appreciate *How It All Began*.

It is difficult to understand or situate this novel within Russian or world literature given the unique and terrible circumstances of its composition. The list of autobiographical novels written by men awaiting execution is not extensive.

Dostoyevsky, of course, wrote about his experience in prison and a staged execution interrupted at the last moment by a royal act of mercy. But *The House of the Dead* was written after Dostoyevsky's release from prison when he could enjoy his renewed opportunity for life.

In the late 1930s other prominent Soviet writers and political figures were imprisoned and executed by Stalin, but it does not seem to be the case that they were able to write literary works in their jail cells. None of these examples apply fully to Bukharin; his work has no clear precedent.

At first glance Bukharin's book might be likened to Albert Camus' recently published novel, *The First Man*. Decades after his death in an automobile accident, Camus' unfinished, unedited autobiographical novel of childhood was published by his family. There are similarities to *How It All Began*, but there is one insurmountable difference: Bukharin wrote in prison, awaiting certain death. Camus expected to live and complete his work.

A comparison would be more revealing if Camus' character Meursault from *The Stranger* had actually existed and had written a novel before his execution. But, even then, the difference would predominate. Meursault, unlike Bukharin, had (in the world of the story) committed a real crime.

Bolsheviks and authors

Russian literature is rich in autobiography, memoir, and autobiographical

fiction, and classic works have been written by men like Aksakov and Herzen. The twenty-four year old Leo Tolstoy entered Russian literature with his *Childhood*, a semi-fictional account of his youth, followed by two further volumes.

Leon Trotsky's dismissal of the idealised accounts of childhood, with which he begins his autobiography, *My Life*, most likely refers to this tradition, if not these specific works.

Maxim Gorky also wrote three memorable volumes of memoir of a life far less privileged than that of Tolstoy. Yet, the work of Tolstoy, Gorky, et. al. does not help readers understand Bukharin's novel. *How It All Began*, as far as is known, constitutes its own unique and terrible genre.

With the notable exception of Trotsky, when exiled in Turkey, the major Bolshevik leaders were little given to autobiographical reminiscence, or produced little of value in this form. Personal revelation conflicted with Lenin's temperament. His wife, Krupskaya's *Memories of Lenin* has documentary value, but even her accounts are guarded, written as Stalin began to strangle the intellectual life of the USSR.

Stalin of course, could hardly afford to tell the truth about any aspect of his life.

Alexandra Kollantai's memoirs are uninformative and flat, written after she had succumbed to Stalinism.

None of these writings — with the exception of Trotsky's *My Life* — can compare for insight, liveliness, and honesty with Victor Serge's irreplaceable *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, but Serge occupied a lesser position within Bolshevism.

How It All Began, then, is an exceptional achievement, one of the few literary works by a Communist Party leader that deserves to stand alongside the autobiographies of Serge and Trotsky.

(The Communist Party in the 1920s asked its leading members to provide brief autobiographical sketches, and Bukharin obliged with a short "Autobiografiia" when he was 37. Excerpts can be found in the first chapter of Stephen F. Cohen's biography, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution*. The full text was published in *Makers of the Russian Revolution* but has been out of print for many years.)

The condemned man

It may seem an odd choice for a man in prison, awaiting certain execution, to compose a literary work. Why did Bukharin write a novel at all, much less a reminiscence of his childhood?

One possible answer is suggested in the part of Bukharin's courtroom testimony describing his imprisonment. "For three months I refused to say anything. Then I began to testify. Why? Because while in prison I made a re-evaluation of

my entire past. For when you asked yourself: 'If you must die, what are you dying for?' — an absolute black vacuity suddenly rises before you with startling vividness." (quoted in Roy Medvedev, *Nikolai Bukharin: The Last Years*, p.160.)

An examination of one's life, the "entire past," would obviously begin with childhood. Initial thoughts and recollections may have led Bukharin to realize that he had a great deal to say about his early life, the people close to him, and the Russia of those years.

Of course, had Bukharin been allowed to live longer, the story — if it had been written at all — may well have advanced into Kolya's adolescence, or beyond.

Perhaps, too, a man anticipating his extermination, staring at "an absolute black vacuity," would need to push back the void by writing. Understandably, the psychology of death produced a book about life.

The very act of writing would have been a necessary relief from unbearable tension. Bukharin's widow, Anna Larina, described him as a man whose "nervous temperament was surprisingly delicate — pathologically taut, I would say... his nature, exceptionally sensitive and alive, could not bear nervous overloads, for its tolerance was unbelievably slight, and the emotional strings would snap... these very traits would plunge him at times into a state of hysteria... And intense experiences could physically incapacitate Nikolai Ivanovich" (*This I Cannot Forget*, pp. 126-7.)

Larina's impressions, it should be emphasized, are based on observations of Bukharin *before* he was imprisoned for a year, awaiting trial and execution. Later in her memoir, after Larina herself had been forced to endure prison and interrogation, she explained why she needed to find solace in writing: "The only way to distract myself was the old recourse of composing verses... writing poetry, however talentless, was my salvation" (p.224.) Larina's husband may have felt an even greater need for some kind of personal "salvation."

Bukharin may have found that the very act of writing his novel served as a kind of oblique political statement defying the NKVD and Stalin, a balance to the obsequious script that Bukharin's interrogators demanded he rehearse for his show trial.

Another Marxist imprisoned by Stalin for his oppositional views, Victor Serge, gave the following account of his personal and political struggle: "I write, I write. I must create, work in order not to go mad, in order to fulfil my task here on earth; to be useful, to leave behind me a little emotion and thought. To work is to resist. For there is a soul in all work." (*From Lenin to Stalin*, pp. 75-76.)

Bukharin must have discovered for himself the truth of these words. Writing

may only have offered existential resistance, psychological affirmation of life against death, but it was resistance, nonetheless.

Stalin never replied...

Certainly, Bukharin could have maintained little hope for life or freedom for himself, though in numerous letters he tried to show how he might be useful to Stalin, explaining why it would be in Stalin's interest to allow him to live. There is no indication that the General Secretary ever responded to his former ally.

Bukharin also bargained for the safety of his family, unaware that his wife had already been arrested and sent to a detention camp and his infant son placed in an orphanage. He had little choice but to believe in NKVD promises on their behalf.

Anna Larina thought her husband "overly trusting" and even "gullible" in regard to Stalin (pp. 289-290). Naturally, Bukharin may have wished for a reprieve or hoped to suffer only some lesser penalty, but in reality nothing in Stalin's character was unknown to Bukharin.

In notes of a secret dialogue in July, 1928 with Lev Kamenev, a leader of the Left Opposition, Bukharin reportedly said that "Stalin... is an unprincipled intriguer who subordinates everything to preservation of his own power... He has made concessions now, so that later he can cut our throats... The result of this will be a police state." In this conversation Bukharin characterized Stalin as "a Genghis Khan."

Kamenev's notes also describe Bukharin as "extremely upset. At times his lips twitch from nervousness. Sometimes he gives the impression of a man who knows he is doomed." (The full text of these notes can be found in the appendix of Leon Trotsky's, "*The Challenge of the Left Opposition 1928-1929.*")

Bukharin surely knew he would not be allowed to survive the latest of the Moscow Trials. Bukharin may not have fully understood Stalinism, but he understood Stalin.

Conclusion

How It All Began deserves a wide readership, especially among socialists and students of history. While the work is fiction, at least in form, the story of the Petrov family can be read as a study of the conditions that created the Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917.

The novel also contributes details and impressions about Bukharin, a memorable figure by any reckoning. It complements the political biography by Stephen F. Cohen and the personal memoir by Anna Larina.

More importantly, perhaps, this book yields the pleasures that readers seek in the best fiction and autobiography: the opportunity to view a life intimately from

the inside and so come to know it well, thereby enlarging the reader's own knowledge and experience of the world.

Bukharin's detailed personal recollections, his portraits of family, friends, and acquaintances, stimulates readers' own memories, if only by way of comparison. It is difficult to observe Bukharin's account of his childhood without trying to recollect and reconstruct one's own.

The result is that Bukharin's example invites his readers, while learning about him, to reflect upon their own lives, to prod their memories into discovery of dimly remembered or forgotten events. *How It All Began* encourages the self-understanding that readers hope to obtain from literature.

"Revolution is the great devourer of men and character" said Trotsky. "It leads the brave to their destruction and destroys the souls of those who are less hardy."

When Trotsky wrote these words, he was recalling the civil war period and the Left Opposition's defeat in the inter-party struggle of the 1920s and the ignominious capitulation of former comrades. The Moscow Trials were still some years away, unimagined by anyone.

Even then, ten years before his execution, Bukharin spoke in prophetic metaphors, telling Lev Kamenev that Stalin lived for revenge and would "cut the throat" of his political opponents.

The final decade of Bukharin's life can be seen as a desperate attempt, sometimes heroic, sometimes compromised, to resist the terrible fate that Trotsky predicted.

Notwithstanding the above-mentioned qualities, *How It All Began* above all testifies to Bukharin's struggle to salvage his soul, to score a personal triumph in the face of personal and political catastrophe, and to demonstrate that, as Hemingway would one day write, "A man can be defeated but not destroyed."

Bukharin was executed in 1938. But with the publication of this work he has won a partial, posthumous victory. ★

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Net Working



Rouge

France's leading radical left weekly. Plus documents and debates on the 1999 European elections, the far-left electoral alliance between the LCR and LO, a review of the radical media, and listings on upcoming events in French politics.

www.lcr-rouge.org

SAP (DK)

The new Socialist Workers Party (SAP) website (mainly in Danish, but with some English texts and links). Articles from the SAP monthly *Socialistisk Information*, and youth newspaper, *Grænseløs*.

www.sap-fi.dk

SAP (NL)

Dutch e-mail newsletter from *Grenzeloos*, the radical left newspaper of the *Socialistische Arbeiderspartij (SAP)* with coverage of the youth group *Rebel*.

To join this list write to
<SAPREBEL@DDS.NL>

Luxemburg

The Revolutionary Socialist Youth (JSR) has updated its website

www.mygale.org/07/jsr4

Last but not least...

Check out our own website, archive and links, at
www.internationalen.se/sp/ivp.htm

Drop the debt!

In preparation for the next G7 (+1) annual summit (19th to 21st of June 1999 in Cologne - Germany), the Brussels-based Committee for the Cancellation of the Third World Debt (COCAD) is collecting signatures for a petition in favour of the cancellation of the Third World debt.

The text was originally written by the Argentine group *Dialogo 2000* in the framework of the "Jubilee 2000" debt initiatives. The final paragraphs is by COCAD

"We want the new millennium to be one of justice and peace for all of humanity, and that our common home, the cosmos, be preserved. This is why we ask, in the spirit of Jubilee, that the unpayable External Debt be cancelled by the end of the year 2000.

Contribute to a change by supporting this petition. With it, we are joining millions of persons in Latin America, the Caribbean and throughout the world who share the same hopes.

We, the undersigned, believe that the start of the new millennium should be an opportunity to generate new hope for Life for millions of people now imprisoned by poverty due to the illegitimate indebtedness of their countries.

In order to make a fresh start possible, it is vital that reparation be made for the injustice of an External Debt whose payment is demanded of those who neither contracted, nor were consulted, nor benefited from it.

A debt which has been repaid many times over but which continues to grow day after day. A debt for which those who made the loans are as responsible, if not more so, as those who received them.

We therefore call on the governments of the creditor countries to cancel these unpayable debts before the end of the year 2000, and to take effective measures to restore to those peoples who have been impoverished by them the means necessary for a dignified livelihood, by disactivating the mechanisms which helped to create the indebtedness.

[To be signed by the citizens of indebted countries]

We demand that those who govern our country, together with the leaders of other indebted countries, invest the resources that are now used to maintain the cycle of foreign indebtedness, so as to cancel the Social and Ecological Debts that are due our people as a consequence of the Foreign Debt.]

[To be signed by the citizens of industrialized countries]

In solidarity with the citizens of indebted countries, we demand that those who govern these countries invest the resources that are now used to maintain the cycle of foreign indebtedness, so as to cancel the Social and Ecological Debts that are due to the people of these countries as a consequence of the Foreign Debt.

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