

International VIEWPOINT

ISSUE No 48

12 March 1984

Latin America keeps heating up

New Jewel
Movement
taking up the
fight again

Deepening crisis
in Bolivia



International Viewpoint

ISSN: 0294-2925

Fortnightly review of news and analysis published under the auspices of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International.

| | | |
|------------------|--|----|
| CENTRAL AMERICA | US continue preparations for war by <i>Tom Gustafsson</i> | 3 |
| GULF WAR | New bloodbath in Gulf war by <i>Gerry Foley</i> | 5 |
| GRENADA | The New Jewel Movement reorganises Interview with <i>Kendrick Radix</i> | 6 |
| EL SALVADOR | New reports of death squad activity by <i>Philomena O'Malley</i> | 10 |
| UNITED STATES | Sanctuary — Central American refugees and US churches by <i>Steve Ashby</i> | 10 |
| BOLIVIA | A new stage opens by <i>Livio Maitan</i> | 13 |
| CONGO | Who profits from the oil income? by <i>Andre Bassinet</i> | 21 |
| AROUND THE WORLD | Sweden, Australia | 25 |
| WOMEN | March 8 — women oppose austerity and wardrive by <i>Leslie Serna</i> | 28 |

News closing date 5 March 1984

Subscribe now!

French francs preferred. Cheques to PEC. Postal transfers to PEC, CCP No 2 322 42T Paris. Bank transfers to PEC, BNP Robespierre, Account 230179/90.

Sterling: Cheques to International Viewpoint. Bank transfers to Williams & Glyns Bank, Account 14612874, Code 16-00-58, Islington, London.

Mail all subs to: IV, 2 rue Richard Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France.

SUBSCRIPTION RATES :

| | 6 months | 1 year |
|--------------------------------|----------|--------|
| Surface mail, all countries | 95FF | 175FF |
| Air mail | | |
| Europe, Middle East, N. Africa | 105FF | 195FF |
| The Americas, Africa | 130FF | 240FF |
| Asia | 145FF | 270FF |

Exchange rates :

| | | | | | | | | |
|----------|----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| FF | 95 | 105 | 130 | 145 | 175 | 195 | 240 | 270 |
| £ | 9 | 10 | 12 | 14 | 16 | 18 | 22 | 25 |
| US dol. | 16 | 19 | 22 | 25 | 31 | 37 | 42 | 47 |
| Can dol. | 19 | 21 | 26 | 29 | 37 | 40 | 49 | 55 |

1983 collection

A limited number of full collections of *International Viewpoint* for 1983 are available for 100 francs. This price includes surface mail postage worldwide.

These issues nos 21 to 43 contain consistent coverage on the anti-missiles mobilisations, the Central American revolution and the continuing activity of Solidarnosc in Poland.

Included in the collection are major documents of the Fourth International on the Iranian revolution and Southern Africa, and a major theoretical article by Ernest Mandel on permanent revolution.

Individual copies are also available of most issues during the year at a cost of 8 French francs including postage.

Rush your orders now!

BLOCK LETTERS PLEASE

LAST NAME FIRST NAME

ADDRESS

CITY COUNTRY CODE

RENEWAL

SUBSCRIPTION

US continues preparations for war

"We have to prevent the Sandinistas from consolidating their rule in Nicaragua. They are now providing a base for insurgency in Central America. If we can't prevent that, we have to prepare for a partition of the region. We would have to establish a new front line between East and West. Then we could be forced to send our own American troops into countries in Central America as we did before in Korea or West Germany." (1)

This statement was made by Fred C. Ikle. He is undersecretary of defense in the Reagan administration.

Tom GUSTAFSSON

Take another look at the five points in this statement. The US's aims in Central America could not be expressed more clearly. And it is precisely in pursuance of these objectives that Washington is now preparing for a massive escalation of military operations against the Sandinista government and the Salvadoran liberation fighters.

This involves making Honduras more and more into a staging area for the US military, increasing support for the Salvadoran regime and stepping up attacks against Nicaragua.

As more information comes out about Washington's military investments in the area, the clearer it becomes how deeply the US is already involved in war in Central America, in the war of the "contras" against Nicaragua and in the war of reaction against the guerrillas and the people in El Salvador and Guatemala.

Recently, two secret documents have been published by the American and the French press. One is a report to a congressional committee and the other is a memorandum from the Pentagon.

In the first document, General Paul Gorman describes how Honduras is being more and more transformed into a military base against Nicaragua and Cuba. This well-known military strategist and expert in "intelligence" calls for a permanent American military presence in Central America.

The report explains that the joint American-Honduran military maneuvers, entitled "Big Pine II," and which lasted from September 1983 to February this year, have to be seen in the context of building up such a presence. Some 3,200 soldiers were brought in at the start of the maneuvers, and another 2,000 in November. In all, the US now has more than 5,000 troops stationed in Honduras.

Washington has a treaty with the regime in Honduras that gives it access to the country's airbases. And a 21 million dollar joint investment plan has been

adopted to improve the two local airfields.

The next project, the report explains, will be an expansion of the US military center in Puerto Castilla, which will involve 160 million dollars in investments. In addition, it is planned to put 32 million dollars into a training camp. It is to be located on Honduras' Caribbean coast, and will accommodate 1,200 elite troops, 200 military instructors and an 800-man security force.

This training camp will serve the countries in Condeca, that is, the Central American Defense Council. This military pact was revived suddenly in October 1983; it had been kept on ice since the "football" war between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969.

The Grenada invasion model

The Condeca treaty was renewed at a meeting of representatives of the governments of Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, plus the chief of the Panamanian National Guard and the commander of the US army's "southern operational zone for Latin America."

At a meeting in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, on October 27, that is, two days after the US invasion of Grenada, military chiefs from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador discussed a possible invasion of Nicaragua and the area outside the control of the government in El Salvador. This was supposed to take place in the framework of the Condeca treaty, in the same way as the US invaded Grenada "at the request of the Caribbean Defense Council."

An invasion of Nicaragua under the cover of the Condeca treaty would not have been directed toward "trying to take over all of Nicaragua immediately." The objective would have been rather to "liberate" a smaller area and set up a "provisional government" there. Then, from Nicaraguan territory, this government would have appealed to "friendly powers" (i.e. the US) to send help.

In the US spy agency, the CIA, this whole operation goes under the name "Pegasus."

A future American invasion of Nicaragua could very well follow this pattern.

It was also with an eye to the future that the US and Honduras recently carried out "simulated air attacks" along the Nicaraguan border against proposed Nicaraguan targets.

The other secret document that has recently come to light, a Pentagon report prepared by the southern military operational zone command, discusses the financing of the US's military involvement in Central America. In particular, the report deals with building up the fire power of the Salvadoran army.

In the same sort of language that was used in Vietnam, the Pentagon report calls for 200 million dollars more in military aid to the Salvadoran regime. "Only in this way can the guerrillas be defeated before the end of the fiscal year 1985." But in 1985, a total of 1.4 billion dollars in combined economic and military aid will be needed.

This money is supposed to be used to better the economic and social situation and to build up a stronger army. Instead of 32,000 men, the idea is to put 48,000 under arms. And they are supposed to be better armed, better trained and have a better morale.

It is no accident that the so-called Kissinger Committee for Central America, which presented its report to President Reagan in mid-January, arrived at exactly the same figures. It was, in fact, based on the secret Pentagon report.

The Kissinger committee, however, did not seem so certain as the Pentagon report that the Salvadoran government could crush the liberation struggle in 1985 if it only had more US money for that purpose. For safety's sake, it called for a total of 8 billion dollars in aid over six years, extending to 1990.

President Reagan set up the Kissinger committee last summer to achieve two objectives. The first had to do with public opinion. The idea was to convince the American people that some progress had really been made in the fight against "Soviet-Cuban aggression in Central America," but that a lot more aid to "the friendly regimes" would be needed in order to finally stop this "aggression."

To judge from the new figures, the Reagan administration is as far as ever from achieving that objective, despite the support of public opinion for the invasion of Grenada.

An American public opinion poll published on January 19 (a week after the Kissinger report) showed that 76% of those questioned were against the

1. This quotation is from the *International Herald Tribune* of September 13, 1983. [It, as well as other quotes and references, have been retranslated from Swedish]. The material concerning the two confidential US reports mentioned further on in the article is taken from *Le Monde* of January 19, 1984.

committee's proposal for more military aid to El Salvador (only 17% were for it). Some 60% opposed the CIA's support for the "contra's" attacks against Nicaragua.

The Kissinger committee's second objective was to get the entire American establishment to commit itself to increased military involvement in Central America. That was why the committee included an equal number of Democrats and Republicans. It was for that reason also that Lane Kirkland was included.

Kirkland is the president of the American labor confederation, the AFL-CIO. He was named to the committee in order better to tie the US trade-union movement to Reagan's war policy.

But the committee did not achieve its second objective either. Opposition is continuing to widen among union activists to Reagan's policy. Protests are being voiced at the higher levels of officialdom as well. For example, Jack Sheinkman, the president of the American Clothing and Textile Workers Union, came out in opposition to the committee's conclusions.

The "aid" the US proposes

"The report proposes more of the same policy, it won't work."

The Kissinger report includes some high-sounding phrases about "safeguarding human rights in El Salvador." It claims that "the government is making progress in this area, despite the difficulties." This assertion, in fact, coincides with reports coming in constantly of new massacres committed by government soldiers against the rural population.

The report also takes up the economic crisis in El Salvador and proposes that the military aid be combined with extensive support to investment and reconstruction.

It was with respect to this "economic side" that Swedish Premier Olof Palme expressed a positive view following his recent trip to Central America.

"The Kissinger report has the advantage that it presents the economic facts and proposes substantial aid. This part is fine. But it is extremely difficult to combine an economic program with a military program." (*Dagens Nyheter*, February 13, 1984.)

But that is just what the Kissinger committee has proposed. The economic aid measures it calls for are closely tied to the military needs. Road building, development of energy sources, investment in strategic areas — none of this can be separated from the military aims.

This aid, moreover, will be funneled through the present regime. It is in order to reinforce this regime's social base that military investments are being coupled with economic ones.

In fact, a lot of American politicians have taken a more skeptical attitude toward these proposals than Palme.

Walter Mondale, a former vice-president and the leading candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination,

commented drily that "under the present conditions, a good part of the 8 billion dollars proposed could simply disappear or be siphoned off."

Even a former Salvadoran economics minister, Jorge Sol, expressed his skepticism, noting that the American aid program had in fact provided considerable support to the private sector in the past, but that only a thin layer at the top of the society profited from it.

"It may have been very progressive in economic terms, but its social effects were catastrophic, and did not help in the fight against poverty.

The far-right leader Robert d'Aubuisson, who is responsible for the notorious death squadrons and who has been recently accused by the former US ambassador to El Salvador of being behind the murder of Archbishop Romero, expressed a well-founded satisfaction with the report.

"It reflects the political convictions of President Reagan, a man who is a real leader and for whom we hold great admiration and respect."

It is not only in calling for increased appropriations for the reactionary Central American governments that the Kissinger report represents a continuation

Mass meeting in front of Salvador cathedral (DR)



of the political course taken by Reagan.

The Nicaraguan government is to be further punished for failing to dance to Reagan's tune. The US is to continue its support to the "contras." Economic sanctions and pressures will also be put on countries that trade with Nicaragua, such as Mexico.

The aim of this economic strangulation and these constant military attacks is to force the Sandinista regime to make decisive concessions. Washington wants it to end its support for the liberation struggle in El Salvador and to undermine its image as an example of progress in the eyes of the people of Central America.

If the US cannot extract sufficient concessions by this means, and if it finds an opening, it may also resort to direct invasion. It is to prepare for such an eventuality that the US is now stepping up its military involvement against the people of Central America.

One thing is certain, as US Ambassador to Costa Rica, Curtin Windsor, put it so explicitly, "The USA cannot, and will not, live with a Marxist-Leninist regime in its backyard."

From the February 16 issue of Internationalen, the paper of the Swedish section of the Fourth International.

New bloodbath in Gulf war

Although the Iranian offensive launched February 13 represents a major escalation of the Gulf war, the conflict still remained relatively contained after three weeks of heavy fighting.

The Iraqi regime did not attempt, despite severe military pressure, to launch major air attacks on Iranian economic or population centers. It seemed to be content to use its capacity for strategic strikes to pressure and threaten rather than to try to deal deadly blows.

In the first phase of the Iranian offensive, the Iraqis claimed to have launched a strike at the oil depot of Kharg Island, but this claim was quickly controverted by US intelligence. It may have been intended to test the reaction of Bagdad's cautious Western allies. In any case, the Iraqi threats were not enough to seriously worry the shipping insurance companies.

Gerry FOLEY

The stepped-up Iranian military pressure on Iraq has been accompanied by more open US support for the Saddam Hussein regime.

On December 19-20, US special envoy Donald H. Rumsfeld went to Bagdad for talks with Hussein. He was the highest ranking Washington official to visit the country in six years.

In early December a US delegation headed by deputy assistant secretary of state in the Bureau of Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, James Placke, and deputy assistant secretary of defense, Major General Edwin Tixier, visited Saudi Arabia and the Gulf sheikhdoms.

The State Department let it be known that these officials informed the local governments that the US considered an Iranian victory contrary to its interests.

With the start of the offensive, US naval forces were sent to the area, and made some threatening gestures, warning Iranian planes and ships to keep their distance. British Prime Minister Thatcher has also hinted publicly that her government would support US military actions in the area.

On the other hand, the failure of the Iraqi airforce to attempt major strikes against the Iranian oil centers suggests that Saddam's Western patrons do not want to see things go as far as that.

The shutoff of Iranian oil would cause real problems for Japan, and even US imports of Iranian oil have been growing.

In fact, the social and economic situation in Iran has been evolving in a favorable way for the imperialists for some time. And at this point, Washinton could not be sure what would happen if the Khomeini regime were suddenly destabilized by the loss of its oil income.

There is no doubt that the Khomeini regime remains a serious annoyance and worry to the imperialist powers involved in the Middle East. However, in the long run, such a regime represents no fundamental danger to them. It has effectively

halted and turned back the growth of independent mass organization in Iran and imposed a reactionary authoritarian regime.

Moreover, such a regime cannot last. It offers little or nothing to the great masses of people and it blocks a "normal" life by international standards for the well-to-do. Only the traditional merchant class, the clergy and the layer living off the patronage of the Islamic regime really benefit. And these are all parasitic strata.

The combination of the atomization of the masses, the extreme backwardness of a good part of the country, and the oil income allow the Khomeini regime to maintain this setup for some time. If it breaks down slowly, as the imperialists have every right to expect, it will leave a deeper depoliticization of the masses in its wake than Nasserism did in Egypt.

However, if the oil industry is shattered, the whole thing could start to come apart in the most violent way, ushering in chaos.

Both the Soviet Union, which remains one of the main arms suppliers to Iraq, and the West have no interest in seeing the present equilibrium broken.

Unfortunately for the imperialists and the Soviet Union, the Islamic Republic has been stepping up the pressure on Iraq to the brink of provoking dangerous reactions. Nonetheless, the Khomeini regime is still far from making the maximum effort.

The realization that the Iranian government has not yet thrown everything into the fight is probably an important reason for the Iraqis also to restrain themselves.

Over the past year, signs of war weariness began to appear in the Iranian population and there were echoes in the press of a debate in the top circles over ending the war. But apparently those who favored a new push that could offer the Iranian people the prospect of a quick victorious conclusion to the war won out.

The fact is that since its inception, the Khomeini regime has presented itself in Iran and outside as part of an Islamic revolution extending from Nigeria and

North Africa to Malaysia and the Philippines.

It is possible that in order to maintain credibility, a regime based on parasitic petty-bourgeois layers, without any historical perspective whatever, finds itself obliged to maintain the image of being part of a new international rise of militant Islam. It would explain why it is prepared to take big risks. It would have to appear invincible.

It is true that the regime faces more and more internal discontent but hardly enough yet in itself to drive it to make desperate gambles. On the other hand, if it is the nature of its base that forces the regime to act in an adventurous way, that does not mean either that it will necessarily risk everything.

So far the equilibrium has not been broken. On the Iraqi side, the major escalation seems to be the resort to atrocious antipersonnel weapons such as poisonous gas. This seems now to have been what a Bagdad military spokesman meant early in the offensive when he warned "for every harmful insect, there is an insecticide."

The Islamic republican leaders threat to bomb all the Iraqi cities but the Shiite holy places makes it clear that their aim is to intimidate and subdue the Iraqi people and not to win them over.

It seems clear that the Iraqi troops have been fighting hard, since a lot of the fighting has been hand to hand and the Iranian dispatches themselves talk about continual counterattacks. Likewise, it seems clear that most sections of the Iraqi population are prepared to support the regime against the invaders. This includes the doubly oppressed Kurdish minority, about a sixth of the population, which has every reason to be frightened at the approach of the forces of one of the worst butchers of Kurds in history.

In these circumstances, even if the Iranian regime forced an Iraqi capitulation and installed a government to its liking, it would still pose no fundamental threat to imperialist interests.

Islamic Iran and any satellite regimes would be no less neocolonial and the populations it controlled would be atomized and prevented from fighting for their own interests.

Worrying as the last two years of the Gulf war have been for the imperialists, so far they have brought them only benefits. And there is little evidence so far that the Iranian offensive will change this.

The interest of the masses in both countries is to weaken both regimes and keep the imperialists out. To this end, they need the help of the international workers movement, socialists and humanitarians, who must expose the game the imperialists are playing in the region and their complicity in the atrocities of the two warring regimes.

If the imperialists are kept out, growing mass revulsion against this senseless slaughter in both countries will give genuine anti-imperialist forces better opportunities to disarm both murderous regimes. ■

The New Jewel Movement reorganizes

In mid-February, Kendrick Radix, former justice minister of the Grenadian revolutionary government visited France, Germany and Holland. He was invited by the West German Grenada solidarity committees to discuss perspectives for continuing support to the liberation struggle in Grenada. He also had discussions with West German and French Socialist party leaders, officials of the French government and a number of left parties in France, including the Communist Party and Alain Krivine of the French section of the Fourth International.

During his trip to Western Europe, Radix also appealed for support for the Maurice Bishop memorial foundation and got promises of scholarships for Grenadian students from various universities.

He gave the following interview to Gerry Foley in Paris on February 18. Kendrick Radix has not had the opportunity to review the edited text.

Question. What do you think are the main features of the situation in Grenada now, nearly four months after the US invasion and occupation?

Answer. The American-led invasion on October 25, 1983, resulted in the establishment of an Interim Government Council headed by Governor-General Paul Scoon.

The revolutionary state is being systematically dismantled. All the social and economic programs of the revolution are being systematically dismantled. Social services have collapsed, and there is once again a high rate of unemployment.

All the volunteer technicians laboriously assembled by the revolution over the last four and a half years, who enabled us to develop the economy as well as to expand social services to an unprecedented degree, have been expelled.

So, medical and dental care has stopped. The teachers from Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana have been expelled. The result of this is a general despondency, especially when people look back to the days of social order and tranquility under the revolution.

However, to give an accurate picture, there is another side. There are the results of the terror against the population carried out by Bernard Coard and his faction, the fact that the people were shot at by Bernard Coard and company, that this group executed the prime minister and other leading people, including ministers and trade-union officials, that they held the people captive and prisoner in their homes for four days without letup.

So, of course, with the American invasion, people breathed a great sigh of relief to be rid of these Pol-Pot types, whose actions flew in the face of the sentiment and emotions of the masses.

Q. Besides the expulsion of the internationalist aid workers, what specifically

has been done to dismantle the social and economic programs of the revolution?

A. Well, the authorities set up by the invasion froze all the funds for the Corporative Development Agency, as well as the women's organization and youth organization. In addition to that, the Agency for Rural Transformation has also been wound up, since its director has also been expelled.

US citizens join Paris protest (DR)



Q. Have the youth organization and the women's organization been dissolved?

A. No, they have not been dissolved. But many of their workers have been sent home, some with pay, some without pay. In the case of the women's organization, many of their field people have been sent home. The administrative staff have been kept, but they have nothing to do. The same is true for the youth organization. The Agency for Rural Transformation is also in limbo.

Q. What has happened to the trade unions?

A. The American Institute of Free Labor Development is back again active in the trade-union movement. They have in fact been working very hard in the Seamen's and Waterfront Workers Union. They have just bought two light vans for that union and paid members of it to go around the country and systematically overpaint all slogans and billboards remaining from the revolutionary period.

The Institute for Free Labor Development is active in more than one union; they are moving on the trade-union front as a whole. They are trying to get people who were discredited over a period of years to reassert themselves and try to take over again, to get a leadership sympathetic to the American point of view. They have done so in the Seamen and Waterfront Workers Union. They are doing so now in the Technical and Allied Workers Union. They tried in the Com-

mercial and Industrial Workers Union, but they were rebuffed.

Q. Are there US trade unionists involved in this?

A. I don't know. The Institute for Free Labor Development is running training courses again, as it did before 1979. They are trying to redirect people into the narrow issues of wages and so on and turn them away from thinking about the need for popular democracy and that sort of thing.

Q. What has happened to the governmental structures set up by the revolution?

A. The popular democratic institutions of the revolution — the Parish Councils and the Zonal Councils — have collapsed. Inevitably a sense of nihilism, of total disconnection from the political process, has developed. This is because of frustration, the reaction to the fact that a small group of Coardite elements could have turned back the democracy and the gains the people were making under Maurice Bishop.

Q. Do you have any details about the extent of unemployment and where and why it exists?

A. About three thousand people have lost their jobs. First of all, work on the new international airport stopped. That accounted for about 500 jobs, being the biggest employer in the country. Then there are all the people laid off by the mass organizations and governmental agencies. The tourism sector, which provided as much as 40% of our foreign exchange earnings, is now virtually nonexistent. With one or two exceptions, which are being used to house US forces, all the hotels are closed. The capital projects in general of the revolutionary government have collapsed as well as the clinics.

Q. All the doctors were volunteers?

A. Yes. All of these people used to come for one year and provide internal medicine. There were gynecologists, obstetricians, neurologists, ophthalmologists. In fact, we did have very sophisticated eye surgery. People came from other places in the Caribbean to avail themselves of the services the Grenadians enjoyed.

Q. The US occupiers have not brought in any doctors to replace the expelled volunteers?

A. No. Well, the Americans, quite frankly, are not equipped for that. They have a capitalist system of medicine in which doctors earn 150,000 dollars a year. They're not going down to Grenada to earn a paltry thousand dollars or so a month; that's a horse of a different color.

Q. In view of all this unemployment, hopelessness and the massive US involvement, have you seen any attempts yet to build up a social base for a right-wing

regime through corruption, bribery, patronage and so on?

A. Nothing just like that yet. The US authorities are trying to buy good will, however. For example, last Christmas they flew in 200,000 dollars worth of toys from the US in C-130 Hercules transports. It must have cost them a million dollars to fly in 200,000 dollars worth of toys, but they did.

They are also working through the churches, particularly the Roman Catholic and Anglican ones. These two churches are preaching that God Himself, through the US, came down to save the people. They held massive services to thank God for being saved and so on. But at the same time, these churches refused to hold services in memory of Bishop and the other people who were executed. This seems to us to be a rather strange version of Christianity.

Q. Has there been a big influx of American missionaries?

A. Not yet, but we have been getting American missionaries of another sort, carpetbaggers, profiteers. There are quite a lot of Americans coming down trying to buy war damaged houses on the cheap, expecting to be able to sell them or rent them later at exorbitant prices.

Q. Is there much US money coming in?

A. We have had some visits from businessmen sent down by the White House who claimed that the place is ideal for investments. Fantastic amounts of aid have been announced. For example, they announced that they were sending 30 million dollars in assistance. It turned out that 15 million was to pay for military forces in the country, the other 15 million has yet to be allotted. But it's hard even to spend that money, because there are no technicians to administer programs. Everyone with ability has either left the country or been thrown out. So, despite all the talk about aid money, very little has actually been spent.

Q. But you say it looks as if there is private capital coming in?

A. Oh, well, I mean, they want to buy up everything. They want to build hotels. The country is exceedingly beautiful and picturesque, and in the post-invasion climate a lot of American businessmen are rushing to see what they can buy for nothing. Our view is still that our country is not for sale. Businessmen prepared to observe the code we established were welcome to help in the overall development of the country. But vulgar exploitation of Grenada will still not be allowed in the future by the people of the country.

Q. But hasn't the influx of US businessmen with money to spend aroused any enthusiasm among Grenadian business people?

A. Not among the small business people, only among the big businessmen.

Q. Who would these be exactly in Grenada?

A. Hotel owners, the merchandizing houses, people in the tourist sector who think that they could make a fast buck — these people feel that Fort Knox will open and money will just fall from the sky. There is that mentality.

There is a historic relationship between the United States and the Caribbean. A lot of our people live there and send money home to their dependents. So, there is no hostility as such to the people of the United States. The hostility is to its policies. When the revolution came, we approached the United States with confidence asking for help. They contemptuously offered us a few hundred dollars, I think it was 5,000 dollars. And then they started giving us lectures about our country, and orders, and they refused to help us with the international airport. These things, along with the military preparations against Grenada, soured relations.

Q. Is there any sign yet of attempts to build up right-wing goon squads or parallel police bands, such as the old Mongoose Gang of the Gairy dictatorship?

A. I have not heard of anybody being attacked or threatened yet. But we are worried about this. Gairy's back in the country, and he has a Mongoose Gang mentality stretching back 25 years. He has been reassembling the gang. They can be seen frequenting the place where he lives. So, you can't change the spots on a leopard, and certainly his mentality is one of violence, and there's no reason why he should change his attitudes today.

Gairy's return was not conducive to a climate of democracy because he used extraconstitutional force and secret police. People wonder why on earth the US facilitated his return.

The prime minister of Dominica, Eugenia Charles, did say in the early days that the Americans agreed with her not to facilitate Gairy's return. The Grenadian people are very outraged to see him back. They view that as evidence of some sort of scheme by the United States to impose a Somoza-type solution.

Q. Is the US trying to build up a right-wing political movement?

A. The United States is trying to bring around some young elements, trying to get an alliance between the Grenada Democratic Movement and the Grenada National Party to gain domination. In fact, they even want the people they are backing to adopt policies of the New Jewel Movement as espoused by Maurice Bishop, and so cut the ground from under the revived and resuscitated New Jewel Movement. However, the people are fully aware of those who struggled over the years on their behalf, who have put their lives on the line consistently over the last fourteen years. They are not fooled by any political maneuverings of people who have come now to be handmaidens

of imperialist powers and United States interests.

Q. What is the situation of the New Jewel Movement? Does it intend to resume public work? What are the obstacles?

A. The military operations in the country created a climate of intimidation. First of all they raided the party headquarters and the headquarters of the mass organizations. They took away all the documents, all the names and addresses of all the activists in the country. At some stage or another, all these people have been taken into custody and released only on the condition that they did not engage in politics or in "antigovernment activity," whatever that is. A number of people have been removed from jobs that they had in the public service. Everyone is being watched by the United States interests in this country.

Q. Are any New Jewel Movement people in prison?

A. They are holding about 45 people in prison. About 30 of them are people involved in the Coard conspiracy. There is ample evidence of a criminal conspiracy against them. More than enough time has passed now to be able to bring criminal charges against them. The No. 1 question in the country is to bring to justice the people who committed these outrageous murders. There is more than ample evidence against them. There are many eyewitnesses to the events. They can, and should, be prosecuted, and this should be done quickly so that justice can be seen to be done.

Q. Does that mean that the other 15 are political prisoners in the full sense of the word, people jailed because of their political activity and views?

A. Yes. In fact, some agitation is being organized to ensure their release.

Q. Is the New Jewel Movement able to publish anything, is it possible for you to do any public propaganda work?

A. Well, the radio is tightly controlled now. The Americans established a radio station called Spice Island Radio after the invasion. The name alone tells you it was American operated. They bombed one Radio Free Grenada transmitter, and there was a battle for the other one. They brought in their own radio station, which continued for several weeks after the invasion. Now the same facility is continuing to operate under the name of Radio Grenada. Only their propaganda is aired on this station. We have no access whatsoever to it.

The United States also funds a newspaper called *The Grenadian Voice*. It is the only printed newspaper in the country at this time, although there are some other cyclo-styled sheets being circulated. The Maurice Bishop memorial foundation certainly intends to get into the printing business, even with cyclo-styled sheets. There ought to be a news-

paper coming out with the formal launching of the reconstituted New Jewel Movement next month.

Q. Have you published anything so far?

A. We have put out one leaflet announcing the Maurice Bishop memorial foundation. But we have been under tremendous pressure. George Louison and myself have been detained a couple of times by the United States military, and we had in fact to secure our existence first and foremost before we could start to reorganize ourselves to get involved again in the political life of the country.

Q. What exactly is the Maurice Bishop memorial foundation, and what does it propose to do?

A. We established the memorial foundation to accomplish a number of things. The full name is the Maurice Bishop and Martyrs of October 19, 1983 Foundation. Its first aim is to establish a monument or some other fitting remembrance to these people, whose memory the occupation force is trying to efface and besmirch. Secondly, it aims to establish a benevolent fund to assist those who lost bread winners and other relatives who have left dependents. Thirdly, it is to provide scholars to primary, secondary and technical schools, and for university studies, both in Grenada and abroad.

The foundation aims to find the bodies of the martyrs killed on October 19 and to give them a decent burial. The authorities in Grenada have not divulged any information about the location of the bodies. If there were a funeral, the people would have the chance to manifest their feelings. This would be very embarrassing for the authorities.

We also intend to put out some propaganda materials — buttons, posters, leaflets, pamphlets. We are going to do some research into the lives of the martyrs. We also want to investigate the number of missing people, find out how many were killed on October 19 and how many after October 25, that is, during and following the invasion. We intend to investigate the extent of the damage done to the country by the invasion. We believe that over 5 million dollars worth of damage was done by the United States military when they came to Grenada, for which they are refusing to pay.

Q. You mentioned relaunching the New Jewel Movement. What exactly do you propose to do?

A. We intend to use the opportunity of the fifth anniversary of the revolution on March 13 to announce our reorganization and our active involvement in the political process, including our preparation to participate in the scheduled elections.

However, such elections must be free and fair and all parties must have the same rights and freedoms. The Grenadian people must have free choice to be able to elect a government that is repre-

sentative of their views. We have been having difficulties, as I said but we will continue because we believe that democracy is essential for independence and economic development.

Q. What do you expect from the elections?

A. Well, the United States is using its mandate for the invasion to seek to eliminate once and for all the revolutionary ideology, the revolutionary unity, the revolutionary norms of the society. In their place, it is advocating elections to be held sometime in November or December.

In fact, under the Interim Council, most of the decisions are being made in the newly established United States embassy.

For example, they are now proposing that the old Organization of Eastern Caribbean States be subordinated more to Barbados, the principal client state of the United States in the Caribbean. This involves setting up a force, centered in Barbados, for external defense, as well as internal security "to prevent foreign ideologies taking root in the region," as they put it. That means clamping down on people on the left. We have seen them building up an army of the OECS with weapons, vehicles, training, aid programs.

In addition, we have heard that they plan to set up a court of justice with its headquarters on Barbados.

It has also been said in Grenada that US troops will remain on the island until three years after the elections. Does this mean that irrespective of the color of the government that is elected the US and other armed forces will remain there?

Now the US claims that it has withdrawn all its troops from the region. That is not so. The 82nd Airborne are still there. Many soldiers are also brought back in the form of military police, and that doesn't fool anyone.

One wonders whether elections can truly and fairly be held in a country in which the guns of the invaders are still present. Perhaps a more democratic formula would be to adhere to the call by the British Commonwealth to have a withdrawal of the armed forces in the country and to hold elections in a climate free from this cloud of military force.

Q. Are you suggesting there be a Commonwealth force to supervise the elections?

A. In view of the American policy designed to ensure the squashing of the revolutionary movement, so that the Grenadian people will be free to express themselves without threat or intimidation by the occupying force, I think that it is quite desirable for the Commonwealth family of nations to be present and to observe, to be able to say that they found the conditions necessary for free and fair organization of elections or to say to the contrary.

Q. You mean observers and not a force?

A. That's right. I don't think a force



Paris protest against invasion of Grenada (DR)

is necessary. There have been no incidents of any sort over the last several months. The military forces are acting as occupation forces. They are totally unnecessary for internal security or anything like that. The function is simply to intimidate.

Q. What is your alternative to centralization in Barbados, after all the rest of the eastern Caribbean islands are very small?

A. Our revolutionary government did in fact accede to the treaty of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States, as a vehicle of cooperation among the smaller countries that face essentially the same problems. However, we believe that such a movement must be autonomous, free from outside pressure and interference. We think that the people of the Caribbean have the right to develop free from external dictates and pressure; what is necessary is to develop the region, not to polarize it.

It is clear now that the invasion of Grenada has caused even further polarization. It has divided the governments in the area and also the left. Some support the Coard point of view, although happily they are in a minority.

Q. What support was there for the Coard group in the rest of the Caribbean? Was it an international current?

A. No. There was only one group. It was exceptional. I don't care to go into details at the moment.

Q. Did the Coard group have any support outside the country?

A. Not that we can establish at the moment. We are carefully examining every aspect, every possible lead, and we will make public anything we find.

I want to stress that the Cubans remained scrupulously uninvolved. They did communicate with the Coard group warning them about what could happen. But the Coard group did not heed this message. They continued in their ruthless plot and this precipitated a disaster.

Q. What about these reports that Coard people have made threats of vengeance?

A. There was one statement made by one of them that unless they were given safe conduct to a third country of their choice there were thousands of trained people outside who would take the matter into their own hands. In my view, this was an empty threat, just an expression of the mentality of terror. The Grenadian people are not going to let them go to a third country, they are demanding that they be tried.

Q. Do you think that the fear created by the Coard coup will still be a factor favoring the right in the fall elections?

**SUBSCRIBE TO
INTERNATIONAL
VIEWPOINT**

A. I think there has already been a turn in the country. The God-Bless-America bit was overplayed. For example, a lot of paintings appeared on the walls saying "God Bless America." The handwriting was in a totally foreign style. We suspect that these slogans were painted by the Americans themselves with the grey paint of their battleships. People began to feel revulsion, as if something was being rammed down their throats.

People wanted some way to answer this. So, we printed two thousand T-shirts in memory of Maurice Bishop, and they were sold out in a week.

Some of the big business sector tried to organize a demonstration of support for the invasion. When they realized it was going to be a flop, they called it off at the last minute.

Q. What do you think are the main tasks for the international solidarity movement with Grenada now?

A. Well, we want help to get the facts out about what is happening in Grenada and what the invasion of our country means. We also need political and material help to ensure that progressives in our country get an equal chance.

We are also asking for contributions to the Maurice Bishop and Martyrs of October Foundation for the work I described. People can contact the foundation by writing to Maurice Bishop and October 19, 1983 Martyrs Foundation, P. O. Box 167, Grenville Street, St. George's, Grenada. Checks may be sent directly to the account of the foundation at the Bank of Nova Scotia, St. George's, Grenada.

New reports of death squad activity

'One in every fifty Salvadorans deported by the US Immigration and Naturalisation Service (INS) may have been killed after returning to El Salvador'. This statement by an immigration lawyer reported in the *International Herald Tribune* on January 26, 1984, is just one in a series of revelations in the last few months about the activities of the death squads in El Salvador.

Philomena O'MALLEY

The former American ambassador to Salvador, Robert White, has revealed that the Reagan administration, who delivered a one-month 'ultimatum' to the Salvadoran government about the death squads in December, had in fact known about their activity for some years.

In testimony prepared for a House sub-committee he reported that the government knew in 1981 that Roberto d'Aubuisson, a leading rightwing politician and presidential candidate, had ordered the assassination of the archbishop of San Salvador in March 1980. White also accused the government of covering up detailed information on Salvadoran exiles in Miami who have been directing the activity of death squads in their own country (*International Herald Tribune*, February 4-5, 1984).

As well as these accusations of a cover up, the US government is also charged with returning Salvadoran refugees to face possible death. The lawyer cited above, Peter Schey, director of the Center for Immigrants' Rights, states that, of 2,500 refugees whose fate on return to Salvador has been checked, 50 seem to have been killed although he adds that it has yet to be verified they are in fact the same people and not simply a common name that appears on the death lists.

Over the past few years thousands of those opposed to the far right, whether trade-union leaders, political figures, university lecturers, unemployed youth or religious figures have become victims of the death squads.

This presents a dilemma for the Reagan administration. On the one hand it is supposed to encourage the Salvadoran regime to make progress on the question of human rights. On the other, it is determined to prop it up and aid it to defeat the FDR/FMLN liberation forces.

The response of the Reagan administration has been, in the person of vice-president George Bush, to ask the Salvadoran regime to: transfer abroad military officers and prominent civilians involved in the death squads; end the clandestine arrest procedures leading to 'disappearances'; and take some visible legal action on cases like that of the four US nuns murdered in 1980, where even the US State Department accuses the Salvadoran government of a cover up.

While it appears that some of the top military, who are heavily implicated in the death squads, have been transferred

USA



Sanctuary - Central American refugees and US churches

Sanctuary. Underground railroad. The terms bring up memories of the distant past. Centuries ago sanctuary meant a place of worship and a place of refuge. Those facing political oppression from kings and the aristocracy could hide in the churches, temporarily finding safety. The underground railroad describes the system whereby thousands of Black slaves were secretly brought or escaped from the southern slavery states to freedom in the North, in the early 19th century before the Civil War.

Steve ASHBY

Today the terms have a new connotation. Those seeking to escape oppression are not Black slaves, but Central American workers and peasants. They flee not kings, but brutal dictatorships armed by the United States government. The modern-day Abolitionists helping the refugees escape North through the underground railroad are religious activists.

abroad there is no confidence among the Salvadoran opposition that life has become any safer. Recently leaders of the Christian Democrat trade union, the UPD, which receives funds from the American Union federation AFL-CIO, who challenged the far right over the new truncated constitution and the agrarian reform were killed. Those still alive keep constantly on the move to avoid the death squads.

One political observer quoted in the same *Financial Times* report pointed out that 'To fight the elections you need 3,000 signatures to register a political party. Who is their right minds, left of the Christian Democrats, is going to sign such a list in the present circumstances?'

So much for the Salvadoran 'progress on human rights' and 'free elections'. ■

the government: Minister of Foreign Affairs Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockman; Minister of Culture Father Ernesto Cardenal; and Minister of Social Welfare Father Edgard Parredes.

In the United States, the reflection of this liberation theology is the growing sanctuary movement. As of February 1, 1984, less than two years since it began, the one hundredth church in the United States took in refugees from Central America — refugees who face torture and execution if the US government gets its way and deports them back to Central America.

Since the military junta unleashed a reign of terror against the Salvadoran people in 1979, over 40,000 people have died. According to Amnesty International, in a letter to then Secretary of State Haig in mid-1981, "Analysis of all available data suggests that the majority of the reported (human rights) violations, including torture, 'disappearance' and deliberate cold-blooded killings, have been carried out by the security forces, and have been directed against people not involved in guerrilla activities."

Thousands flee

The civil war in El Salvador has forced hundreds of thousands of Salvadorans to flee the government terror. The International Committee of the Red Cross estimates that 150,000 to 200,000 Salvadorans are displaced within El Salvador. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) representative in the northern Latin American region estimates that up to 350,000 Salvadorans have fled to surrounding countries: there are 100,000 or more in Mexico, 30,000 in Honduras, 7,000 to 10,000 in Belize, 100,000 to 180,000 in Guatemala, 20,000 in Nicaragua, 10,000 in Costa Rica and 1,500 in Panama.

While masses of Salvadorans flee the violence in El Salvador and go to Guatemala, the military dictatorship there has likewise unleashed a terror campaign. Fearful of the Nicaraguan revolution and the gains of the FMLN/FDR in El Salvador, and the examples they provide to the oppressed Guatemalan people, the dictatorship has begun a state of siege. A 1983 Americas Watch report on Guatemala notes that the government's counterinsurgency strategy consisted of "bombing, shelling, selective killings and massacres in suspected 'subversive villages,' combined with a scorched earth policy of crop burning, confiscation of harvests and slaughter of livestock, calculated not only to deny the guerrillas food but also to force peasants to near starvation."

The Guatemalan Episcopal Conference estimated in March 1982 that as many as one million Guatemalans were refugees, uprooted from their homes by violence, and that 200,000 or more have left the country.

As many as 200,000 Salvadorans have fled to the US during the last two years, seeking a temporary refuge from the



violence and terror the Salvadoran government has unleashed. Los Angeles, California, is said to be the second largest Salvadoran city in the world, after San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador.

The Salvadoran population has risen dramatically since the escalation of the civil war in El Salvador, rising from about 80,000 in 1979 to 240,000 in 1982. In addition, over 80,000 Guatemalans live in Los Angeles. Other large concentrations of Salvadorans in the US include: San Francisco, 80,000; New York, 70,000; Washington D.C., 35,000; New Orleans, 40,000; Chicago, 15,000; Texas, 60,000.

According to the UNHCR, "Much of the violence in El Salvador is politically motivated in order to instill fear and submission into the populace whose political sympathies are suspect. Persons fleeing this kind of violence are bona fide political refugees and not simply war-displaced persons and should under no circumstances be compelled to return."

Nevertheless, the US government considers these refugees "illegal aliens" and denies they face execution if deported. Of course, this is the same government that certifies time and time again that the Salvadoran junta is making "human rights progress." The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has been arresting Salvadoran refugees and returning them to El Salvador at a rate of 1,000 a month.

Even though the Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees meet the requirements of the US Code, Refugee Act of 1980, and are recognized by the United Nations as refugees deserving protection, the State Department refuses to grant them proper status. Of the 10,743 asylum applications by Salvadoran refugees in 1981, for example, only two were granted. In the 1982 fiscal year, only 74 applications were granted, and tens of thousands of applications still await action.

Salvadoran refugees are boarded on planes bound for the Ilopango airport in El Salvador, where their flight is met by the Salvadoran military. Many deportees simply disappear. Western Airlines was under contract from the US government

to deport refugees, but protests forced Western to withdraw from the deportation business. Now, apparently, US military planes are used to deport refugees.

The hypocrisy of the State Department's position is exemplified by its handling of refugees from such countries as Cuba or Poland. For its own anti-communist reasons, the State Department has declared a moratorium on deportation of Poles. According to Marc Van Der Hout, director of the Central American Refugee Program of the Most Holy Redeemer Church of the Archdiocese of San Francisco, "The Salvadorans have the best case for political asylum I've ever seen. The denials show the political nature of the government's attitude toward them. If they were Russian ballerinas or Romanian tennis players, they would have no problem."

The smuggling of "illegal aliens" into the United States by mercenaries, known as "coyotes," is a familiar story. What is new, beginning nearly two years ago, is the involvement of American churches and laity. As of February 1, 1984, 100 local religious congregations in 23 states have declared themselves public sanctuaries for Salvadoran and Guatemalan refugees. Over one thousand congregations have endorsed and are publicly supporting the sanctuary movement.

100 sanctuaries

On March 24, 1982 (1) the Reverend John Fife, pastor of Tucson, Arizona's Southside United Presbyterian Church, led his congregation in declaring his church a safe haven for a family of Salvadoran refugees. Since that time a rapidly increasing number of churches have joined this new underground railroad, establishing a network of safe houses, relays and sanctuaries for Salvadorans and Guatemalans who have fled the civil war in their country and managed to enter the United States illegally. While the sanctuary movement began in Tucson, that city is more of a stopping house on the way to cities that have a larger concentration of Salvadoran refugees, such as Chicago. The Chicago Religious Task Force on Central America coordinates the sanctuary movement nationally. A congregation that commits itself to being a sanctuary provides food, shelter, clothing and medical assistance until the refugees can become self-sufficient. They help find jobs for them, arrange school enrollment for their children, and help them adjust to life in the United States.

So far, the movement has directly involved Roman Catholic, Baptist, Presbyterian, Quaker, United Church of Christ, Mennonite, Methodist, Lutheran and Unitarian churches.

It has been endorsed by regional and national bodies of major denominations,

1. March 24, 1982 was the second anniversary of the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero by rightist death squads in El Salvador.

and has won strong support from two Roman Catholic Archbishops, Rembert G. Weakland of Milwaukee and Raymond G. Hunthausen of Seattle.

Activists in the sanctuary movement see sanctuary as a direct way to challenge the US government's policy in Central America and to offer protection for its victims as well. Further, the presence of refugees in the church gives the refugees themselves the opportunity to offer living testimony of the war's effects.

Refugees in sanctuary speak frequently to other church congregations, high schools, colleges, women's groups, etc. Their first hand accounts of the torture and repression handed out by the Salvadoran and Guatemalan military juntas often inspires listeners to oppose US intervention and involvement in Central America.

David Chevrier, speaking last year when his Wellington Avenue United Church of Christ opened its doors to a Salvadoran family, passionately summed up the driving force behind the sanctuary movement: "We live in a time of encroachment...a violation of the holiness of even the most basic of human rights. A demonic domination has been unleashed that is profaning the human through torture and terror. It is time to provide a safe place and cry out, 'Basta! Enough! The blood stops here at our doors!'"

There is no legal basis in the United States for a church to declare itself a sanctuary, nor is a member of the clergy exempt from laws against smuggling and harboring "illegal aliens."

The thousands of religious activists involved in the underground railroad for Central American refugees face a fine of

2,000 US dollars and a five year sentence in a Federal penitentiary if caught.

So far, no church activist has been caught "smuggling," and the INS has refrained from raiding any churches. No doubt the government is mindful of the immense amount of bad publicity that would ensue if such an attempted raid were to occur. Duke Austin, speaking for the INS nationally, would not speculate on INS action toward churches if the movement grows. If "it [sanctuary] got to a large proportion, we might change our present policy...which is that INS does not apprehend by entering homes, churches, etc." Since Austin made that statement last year, the number of churches giving sanctuary has doubled, and is growing at a rate of one or two a week.

As Leon Ring, chief of the Border Patrol's Tucson sector has said, "We'll take action if we encounter these people on the border or on the highways. They will not be treated any differently than anyone else."

The political impact of the sanctuary movement is positively seen in the passage of a "sense of Congress resolution" calling on the Administration to grant extended voluntary status to Salvadoran refugees. While passage of the resolution is good, it does not bind the Reagan administration, which undoubtedly will not implement it.

Clearly the Reagan administration is not pleased with the rapid growth of the sanctuary movement, and its effect on public opposition to the government's war moves. Three White House staff

people are now assigned full time to "interpret" the US policy in Central America to the religious community, and the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Security and Terrorism just held hearings on "The influence of Communism in liberation theology."

In January of this year, nine anti-war activists in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, involved in both the solidarity and sanctuary movements were questioned by Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) agents about alleged connections to "smuggling terrorists into the country." No arrests have been made, but the intent of the harassment is to intimidate activists in the anti-war and sanctuary movements.

Link with antiwar movement

Father Dick Sinner, a Roman Catholic priest in Tucson who has been active in the movement, has said, "Almost every moral issue is political and every political issue is moral, and to make a judgment that you don't get involved in these issues is to avoid a very important element of our ministry, to me at least."

"This is no different from what the German people had to do when they smuggled their Jewish friends out of the country into Italy and into Holland, Denmark and Norway to avoid the Nazi oppression. If our government is wrong, if our government is doing things that are immoral and unjust in the name of law and order, and we see that it is immoral, we have a duty to challenge that law."

Or, as Tucson Quaker Jim Corbett puts it, "You can overemphasize the kinds of risks we're taking by helping refugees. We only face a jail sentence. The people down there face death every day."

On June 12, 1982 a million Americans marched on New York City to protest the escalating nuclear arms race. While the focus of the march was to protest nuclear weapons, thousands of banners and placards demanded "US Out of Central America" and "No More Vietnam Wars." Since the invasion of Grenada, the death of 249 Marines in Lebanon, the showing of the television film "The Day After" about the effects of nuclear war, and Reagan's escalating threats against Nicaragua, there has been a growing discussion in the anti-nuclear weapons and peace movement on the need to get more actively involved in the anti-intervention movement.

Thus far, recent demonstrations protesting US intervention in Central America and the Caribbean, such as March 27, 1982 and November 12, 1983 have not gone beyond the size of 50,000.

This pales next to the massive June 12 demonstration. While all polls show an overwhelming majority of Americans oppose US military intervention in Central America, the polls have not been translated into numbers in the streets. The million people that came out June 12 have not been organized to join the anti-intervention movement. ■



Victims of the death squads (DR)

A new stage opens

October 1982 marked the opening of a new stage in Bolivia. An upsurge of struggles culminated in the fall of the military regime put in power by General Garcia Meza's coup on July 17, 1980, and in the installation of a government of the People's Democratic Union (UDP).

The UDP is a coalition comprising the Communist Party of Bolivia (PCB), the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) of Vice-President Paz Zamora and the Left Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNRI), the left wing of the old nationalist party brought to power by the revolution of 1952. The new regime was presided over by Hernan Siles Suazo.

The struggles that led to the downfall of the military dictatorship began in November 1981, when the Huanuni miners mobilized to fight for higher wages and recognition of their union, for a general amnesty and for reinstatement of all the workers who had been fired for political reasons.

In late August 1982, the Mineworkers Union of Bolivia (FSTMB) called a 48-hour strike. Then the Huanuni miners took a new initiative, going on an indefinite strike. In turn, the industrial workers in Cochabamba joined in the struggle, while peasants set up roadblocks.

On September 16, 1982, in response to demands by the miners at Siglo Veinte and Catavi, the Bolivian Confederation of Labor (COB) issued a call for a general strike. The country was paralyzed.

At that point, the military announced the departure of General Vil-doso, who had been made head of state in July 1982. On October 1, the parliament which had been elected on June 29, 1980 — and whose installation was blocked by General Garcia Meza's coup — was called into session to ratify the accession of Siles Suazo to the presidency and the formation of a government of the UDP, which had won 40% of the votes in 1980.

Livio MAITAN

To better understand the 1982 crisis, it is useful to review briefly the period opened by General Hugo Banzer's military coup of August 21, 1971.

Banzer's regime was in a relatively strong position for a number of reasons. A grave defeat had been inflicted on the workers movement. The peasants were largely neutralized. The prices of raw materials were rising, and Bolivian oil production had started to soar.

Banzer had the support of a social bloc including the mine owners; an agrarian bourgeoisie linked to international finance capital; the industrial, banking and commercial bourgeoisie. He had, moreover, the backing of imperialism.

In this context, Banzer sought to promote a process of restructuring and "modernization" similar to that experienced in other Latin-American countries after the late 1950s. This policy brought some results.

Between 1971 and 1976, national income grew on the average 6% a year. Tin remained the country's main product, but its share of exports declined from 44.6% of the total in 1970 to 30% in 1976. At the same time, oil rose from 6% to 25% of total exports. (1)

Moreover, the smelting of ore started to be done in the country itself, while a

petrochemicals industry and a steel industry also began to develop. There was a boom, to some extent, in the building industry, especially in the capital. Major projects were undertaken to build up the economic infrastructure of the country.

In this period, the semi-colonial socio-economic structure was brought to a new stage of complexity, with the traditional forms of backwardness and dependence being combined with more modern forms of concentration and penetration of imperialist capital. This involved not just North American capital but Japanese, British and West German as well.

As well as through direct investments, foreign capital penetrated and came to dominate major sectors of activity through loans, the granting of licences, the introduction of relatively advanced technology, the supply of raw materials not available locally and the "aid" offered by international agencies. Bolivian businessmen were often partners in multinational enterprises.

This process of modernization rather quickly began to run out of steam. The effects of the world economic crisis that began in the mid-1970s hit Bolivia with some delay, but subsequently they stepped up and multiplied the tensions and contradictions in the Banzer "model." Economic growth was blocked or even wiped out. The political repercussions of



this were inevitable. The Banzer regime came to a dismal end, six years after its installation.

The period from the end of 1977 to the military coup of July 1980 represented an interlude, marked by the resumption of mass struggles, reorganization of the workers and peasants movement, and the growth of the UDP, which gained the largest number of votes but not an overall majority in three successive elections (July 1978, July 1979 and June 1980).

General Garcia Meza's coup on July 17, 1980, was the response of the most reactionary sector of the military and of the sections of the ruling class most involved in the extralegal accumulation of capital stimulated by narcotics production and traffic. These forces wanted to impose a reactionary solution along the lines of the Argentine coup of 1976.

However, the situation in Bolivia in 1980 was not the same as the one in Ar-

1. It should be made clear that mining is decisive as regards the creation of financial resources through exports. But, as a whole, in 1978 mining accounted for only 7.3% of the GNP and employed 5.2% of the economically active population. Agriculture and husbandry together accounted for 16% of the GNP and employed 45% of the economically active population. (V. J. M. de la Cueva, *Bolivia: Imperialismo y Oligarchia*, La Paz 1983, p. 170.) In 1982, 4.7% of the economically active population were employed in tin production, and this industry accounted for 6% of the GNP. But 35% of state revenues derived from the production and sale of tin. (Cf. *Le Monde*, January 31, 1984.)

gentina four years earlier. In Bolivia, the workers movement had already begun to undergo a process of recomposition and reinforcement after several years of building up its forces. New tendencies had begun to develop in the peasant movement. Moreover, the general context in Latin America had changed considerably.

General Garcia Meza had the support of only a section of the ruling classes. He had to contend with the distrust of the imperialists, who did not accept him as more than a temporary interlocutor. He faced growing discontent among the petty-bourgeois strata, whose hopes of being able to enjoy the benefits of a "consumer society" had been dashed. And he failed to crush the workers and peasants opposition. Garcia Meza's reign lasted only a year, after which he was replaced by General Celso Torrelío at the head of the junta, and Torrelío in turn made way for General Vildoso in July 1982.

So, what is called in Bolivia the "democratic process" began in an atmosphere of rather broad consensus. The basis of this was a political compromise that involved respect for the results of the 1980 elections, the accession of Siles Suazo to the presidency and the convocation of the two houses of parliament elected in 1980. The UDP got only a relative majority, however, in 1980. It is in a minority in the Senate, and has a majority of just two seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

The bourgeoisie and the army accepted the installation of Siles Suazo for two reasons. On the one hand, they feared an uncontrollable explosion of the mass movement (it should be remembered that the miners initially rejected the compromise and continued their strike). On the other hand, they could use parliamentary means to keep a rein on the president and prevent him from taking any steps they considered unacceptable.

Before the compromise was accepted, the mass movement was demanding immediate elections, and the miners in particular were insisting on a guaranteed minimum wage. When the miners decided to continue their strike despite the decision of the COB leadership to end it, the confederation's veteran leader, Juan Lechin, threatened to resign. The miners left the FSTMB leaders free to decide on the future of their struggle, giving them a vote of confidence. The FSTMB then decided to end the action.

In this respect, the UDP government, and, in particular, Siles Suazo have played a Bonapartist role. They derive a certain strength from the fact that since what would follow Siles Suazo is an unknown, nobody is in a hurry to oust him.

The various political organizations and blocs prefer to defend their interests by bringing to bear all sorts of pressures to extract concessions or to force the abandonment in practice of government measures they do not like.

In fact, the first 15 months of the UDP government, from its formation to the end of 1983, were marked by growing

tensions and conflicts at all levels. This was the result of an extremely unstable situation, which worsened with the government crisis of December 1983. (2)

Over this entire period, we can distinguish five successive stages in the social and governmental crisis:

— The period from October 1982 to the beginning of January 1983 involved a reorganization and realignment of the various social classes and strata and of the various political forces. The popular masses took advantage of the favorable conditions created by the "democratic process" to rebuild or reinforce their organizations. They were favorably inclined toward the UDP. That was because they were not mobilizing actively.

Under the pretext that the military regime left it a disastrous situation to deal with, Siles Suazo pushed through a series of economic measures resulting in an increase of about 60% in the cost of living. (3)

— A second phase lasting from January to March 1983, which was opened up by a political crisis. The MIR walked out of the government. Despite the demagogic operations indulged in especially by the party's leader and the vice-president of the country, Paz Zamora, this move gave the conservative and reactionary forces more room to maneuver.

It is after this that a perspective began to loom of a "constitutional" coup d'etat, that is, ousting Siles Suazo by means of a vote of the two houses of parliament. This threat has not materialized so far but it offers a means for applying pressure and even for blackmail.

Under the full lash of the economic crisis, the popular masses gradually came to take a different attitude toward the government. They started to mobilize again, to organize strikes and even factory occupations, to discuss perspectives and methods of struggle in trade-union congresses and assemblies.

In March 1983, the government adopted a series of economic measures that offered only partial concessions to the workers. They provided for wage readjustments when prices rose by over 40%. The discontent of the working masses grew, and the government was wracked with new internal conflicts, especially among the various factions of the MNRI.

— A third stage opened in April 1983, continuing until August 21 of the same year. Under the pressure of the working masses, the COB took its distance from the government. In a statement adopted by its April 5 plenum, the confederation accused the regime of "following the line of the imperialist banks and the International Monetary Fund" and of adopting measures "benefitting the privileged at the expense of the workers."

This was the opening gun of a new process of radicalization that spread in the following months. Its most significant expressions were the following: A wave of struggles developed, involving almost all categories of workers, marked by



Huanuni miners — in the vanguard of Bolivian working class

more and more militant forms of mobilization. The FSTMB launched an offensive, occupying the headquarters of the Bolivian Mining Corporation (Comibol) to force the government to accept a workers majority in the comanagement boards it proposed for running the nationalized mines. There was a rise of mobilization and politicization among the peasants, which was reflected in the second congress of the peasant confederation last July. (4)

2. *International Viewpoint*, No 45, January 30, 1984.

3. Cf. the POR-Combate document published in IV, March 21, 1983.

4. In July 1983, *Presencia*, the main La Paz daily, published a series of articles giving an overall picture of the conflicts that developed in the preceding six months. There were 554 of them. The methods of struggle were the



class (DR)

This situation led to a new political crisis much graver than the one of January 1983. Despite all attempts at conciliation, an open split developed between the MIR and Siles Suazo. In this context, the COB and the Bolivian Confederation of Working Farmers (CSUTCB) demanded a role in running the country, in the framework of a cogovernment. On August 2, the COB organized demonstrations throughout the country. Thrown onto the defensive, President Siles Suazo de-

most diverse, going from declarations of a state of emergency and strike warnings, to strikes, general work stoppages in cities and regions, blockades on the main highways and railroads and in the airports. On the struggles and demands of the miners, see *IV*, No 28, April 18, 1983 and No 34, July 11, 1983. On the congress of the CSUTCB, see *Inprecor*, No 160, November 7, 1983.

clared that he was ready to negotiate with the COB on giving it a role in the government.

It was hard to tell if Siles was trying a tactical feint, or whether he really intended to conclude such an agreement. Nonetheless, his statement produced a further radicalization of the situation. All the political and social forces mobilized and took strong positions.

On August 9, the COB presented an economic plan calling for a series of urgent measures. If adopted by the government, it would have meant a drastic change of course. The Confederation of Private Industry called a special assembly, which vehemently opposed the COB's proposals and appealed for "a national dialogue involving everyone to draw up a program for national salvation."

The IMF let it be known that the scheduled visit of a delegation had been postponed until the political situation had cleared up. Sections of the military also sent up an alarm signal through a statement by a former president, Padilla, who in fact belongs to the moderate wing of the military. Finally, the conservative counteroffensive achieved its objective. On August 21, Siles Suazo rejected any cogovernment with the COB.

— A fourth phase then developed going from the end of August 1983 to mid-December, when the latest government crisis erupted.

On August 30, the COB organized a new mobilization. After rejecting COB participation in the government, Siles Suazo did not want a major confrontation with the workers organization. He made some concessions. On September 9, several weeks after the deadline of July 31 that had been set by the miners, the president approved a decree calling for a workers majority in the comanagement boards in the Comibol.

On September 22, Siles Suazo signed an agreement with the CSUTCB, which had renewed mobilizations for its demands. Other agreements were reached following this, notably with the COB on reorganizing the transport system. However, in most cases the government did not keep its commitments. It sought, on the other hand, to use the comanagement in the Comibol above all as a means for getting the workers to pay the price for the crisis of the nationalized mining corporation.

For its part, the right was becoming more and more aggressive. It was taking better advantage, from its point of view, of the relationship of forces in parliament, in particular in the Senate, harassing the government by the continual posing of formal questions.

With the complicity of the army, the right mounted demagogic operations about alleged plans for guerrilla actions, based either on invention pure and simple or the blowing up out of all proportion of insignificant events. For example, on October 26, about a dozen young people, including some from other Latin-American countries, were arrested on the charge of plotting to set up a guerrilla

focus in Luribay, in the department of La Paz. The aim of the reactionary forces was to force the government to take repressive measures against the far left, and to discredit the left of the MIR, one of whose leaders, Rospigliosi, is presented as an accomplice of the guerrillas.

The employers organizations and "civic" committees of a dubious character have continuously assailed the government and blocked the implementation of its decisions. For example, for a whole period the bosses refused to pay the workers for Sundays, although the government had decided to make this a paid day off. Likewise, in November, they refused to readjust wages when prices rose by clearly more than 40%.

All these campaigns have had little effect on the activity of the masses. The political objective of cogovernment was put in abeyance after August 21, and the demand for a minimum wage and sliding scale got nowhere. The result is that workers struggles and mass mobilizations now focus on partial demands and develop on a sectoral basis.

The miners, with the Huanuni workers out in front, are still in the vanguard. At the end of September, they launched a new action. In turn, the industrial workers have gone on strike, notably in Cochabamba. The peasants have mobilized several times. The public transport, bank and hospital workers, as well as the over-the-road drivers, teachers and doctors, have also become involved in struggles. They have resorted to tougher and tougher forms of action, sometimes continuing for weeks, to win their demands, which have been basically for higher wages.

The economic steps the government took on November 17, including a higher official rate of exchange for the dollar and big increases in the prices of a series of staples, were an additional spur to mobilization. The small business people are also fighting for their specific demands.

— In mid-December, finally, a new phase opened in the politicization and centralization of the struggles. The government resigned after a vote of censure in the Senate. The COB, which had called for a strike after the November 17 measures, fearing now that the struggles could become fragmented and tend to get out of hand, resumed this call on a national scale. It declared a 48-hour general strike on December 13-14, which was a clear success.

After a governmental crisis lasting several weeks, Siles Suazo reshuffled his cabinet, reconfirming most of the former ministers in their posts. At the same time, the COB resumed mobilizing. A hunger strike was organized, first in La Paz, and then in other cities as well. Thousands of union leaders and activists participated in them.

Important gains were also achieved as the result of an agreement with the government. They included a 57% wage increase, a four-month freeze on the prices of staples (sugar, flour, rice and cooking

oil), the organization of supply to the poor neighborhoods, the placing of the gold mines under the Comibol (and therefore under comanagement boards with a workers majority). On the other hand, the demand for a minimum wage with a sliding scale was not accepted.

Thanks to their new struggles, the peasants won the right to sell their products directly, to import agricultural machinery and to organize their system of transportation. But they have not gotten the ouster of the new minister of agriculture, whom they consider *persona non grata*.

For their part, the industrialists decided in a special congress to halt production in their factories for 48 hours in protest against the government's decisions in the economic field. So, the political and social crisis remains open.

All these social and political conflicts have developed against the background of a continuously worsening economic situation. In 1982, the Gross National Product dropped by 7.43% by comparison with the previous year. The annual rate of inflation went well over 220%. The foreign debt exceeded 2.5 billion dollars.

In 1983, there was no major change in this situation. The same tendencies continued to operate. In addition, the country was also hit by natural disasters, with drought in some areas and floods in others. A third of the country was affected, with the losses totalling about a billion dollars.

The official figures for 1983 have not yet been released. According to year-end estimates, the GNP decreased by 10% in the past year, with the per capita product falling by 25% since 1979. Over all, the economy of the country has fallen back to the level of twenty years ago. In 1983, the annual rate of inflation reached 300%. According to the COB, in last July the buying power of workers had already declined by 57% from the level of October 1982!

It should be pointed out in particular that the crisis of tin production remains extremely grave. According to the Bolivian bourgeois press, Comibol's production has fallen to the 1962 level. For some minerals the drop is even steeper, 36% for tin, 33% for silver, 27% for lead, that is, below the 1952 level.

The financial losses were already on the order of 45 million dollars in 1981 and reached 133 million dollars in 1982. Bolivia is in danger of losing its place as the world's fourth largest tin producer to Brazil. (5)

The crisis of the ENAF (the national smelting company) is no less significant. The ENAF started operating in 1977-78, this being hailed at the time as a great event in the economic history of the country. In the past year, this trust came to the brink of catastrophe, and in July 1983 it needed 65 million dollars to get production going again. It is estimated to have run up a total deficit of 100 million dollars in 1983.

The new oil industry also fueled the

most extravagant hopes at the start of the Banzer era. However, today the national oil company, YPFB, is paying the price for a policy of pillage and selling on the cheap that has directly or indirectly benefitted the foreign companies. At the same time, it is having to pay for maintaining a low "political" price for gasoline on the national market, which amounts to a dead loss of 11.10 dollars on every barrel.

As for industry, it has remained in a very deep crisis. The building industry in particular has virtually collapsed. It is difficult to evaluate exactly what the effects of the economic crisis have been on employment. There is no doubt that unemployment and under-employment are growing steadily. But the figures given by various sources differ, and are clearly not precise. Some estimate that there are 200,000 unemployed wage workers and 800,000 underemployed working people.

According to other sources, the rate of unemployment rose from 5.6% of the economically active population in 1979, to 7.4% in 1981, and 12.4% in 1982. It is estimated to have gone up further in 1983. (6) According to the statistics provided by private enterprise, utilization of industrial capacity stands at 50%.

Moreover, we should not underestimate the effect on the Bolivian economy of racketeering, such as drug trafficking, smuggling and the theft of ores. In the Santa Cruz region and still more so in Cochabamba, there are veritable free zones where drug trafficking goes on without any controls or limits.

The minister of the interior himself was able to get a look at this situation in one of these zones, when he went incognito to the village of Shinhota in the department of Chochabamba.

Obviously, it is difficult to know how much money is involved in this traffic. According to some estimates, the foreign currency obtained by this means amounts to double that brought in by the sale of tin. Others have calculated more precisely that in 1981, drug sales abroad brought the traffickers a return of 1,336 millions of dollars. (7)

5. These economic dates were reported in the Bolivian press, including *Hoy* of December 25, 1983. As regards tin, FSTMB sources confirm the crisis. Even the Huanuni mine, the most profitable one in the past, was going a million dollars into the red every month. The fundamental causes of such a crisis lie in the fact that over a long period the necessary technical renovation has not been carried out, and this has brought on a considerable increase in the production costs. Moreover, the state has drained off resources into the private sector. According to recent statements by F. Escobar in the political weekly, *Aqui*, over the last thirty years, the Comibol has sold the equivalent of 18 billion dollars worth of ore, 80% of which went to private firms through the intermediary of the state. Moreover, the successive governments have not kept their financial commitments to the nationalized enterprises. Finally, it should be noted that the miners are working and living in conditions that are not conducive to productivity. For more details on cost prices and price races on the world market, see *Le Monde* of January 31, 1984.

6. According to the figures provided by the National Institute of Statistics (INE), the economically active population adds up to

In a remarkable study, Rene Bascope Aspiazu writes that there are three main dates in the economic history of Bolivia — the start of silver mining in 1545, the start of tin mining in 1904 and the start of the cocaine business under Hugo Banzer in 1976. Pablo Ramos has also stressed the role of the coca-dollars.

It is true, as Bascope shows, that the attempt to integrate the "criminal" economy into the state's financial and economic system finally failed. Nonetheless, the coca-dollars are continuing to enrich certain social strata, especially in some regions, and Bolivians belonging to the ruling classes have hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars coming from the drug trade invested in US banks. In any case, this represents an important economic distortion.

In the case of smuggling, it involves not only food products such as sugar, meat and bread. There is also smuggling on a considerable scale of petroleum and its derivatives, as well as gold. On top of this, a lot of automobiles are brought into the country illegally.

According to the prefect of La Paz, where a bread shortage lasted for weeks, 3,000 kilos of bread were shipped illegally to Peru every day last July. Moreover, 10,000 litres of kerosene are smuggled to Peru every day. The better part of the rubber and chestnuts produced in the country are also exported illegally.

In the course of a single year, it is estimated that 20,000 automobiles were brought into the country illegally (the total number of vehicles registered was 177,000 in 1982). In 1983, it is estimated that the amount of gold smuggled added up to 41 million dollars worth. According to calculations by the union leaders, in Huanuni, for example, where in the past monthly production was around 500 tons and has now fallen to 200 tons, about 100 tons are stolen.

In other words, more than in other countries, there is a full-fledged parallel economy in Bolivia. It should be added, that even within the legal economy there is more and more commercial and financial speculation linked to inflation, rising prices and the dual exchange rate for the dollar. (8)

1,964,000 persons out of a total population of around 6 million. Of these, 1,355,400 are non-wage workers. There are about 200,000 wage workers in the public sector, and about 300,000 in the private sector. It is also necessary to take into consideration a large number of Bolivian emigrant workers. According to *Presencia* of November 4, 1983, there are 1.4 million Bolivians abroad. According to recent International Labor Office statistics, 13% of the Bolivian population has emigrated since 1945, or 40% of the economically active population.

7. *La Veta Blanca*, Rene Bascope Aspiazu, La Paz, 1982; *Siete Anos de Economia Boliviana*, Pablo Ramos, La Paz, 1980. According to Bascope, there is a close link between the crisis in cotton production and the boom in the drug traffic.

8. At the end of 1983, the dollar was officially worth 500 pesos, but on the parallel market it was worth at least 1,200 pesos. Importers who get currency at the official rate and use it, in part at least, to speculate on the exchange market. Or they can import goods and then sell them at a price established on the basis of the rate of exchange in the parallel market.



Crowds greeting president Siles Suazo (DR)

All these factors tend to break down the fabric of the economy. And this has repercussions not only on the standard of living of the masses but at the same time produces wrenching conflicts within the ruling classes. For example, clashes are multiplying between the private sector and the state sector, between the representatives of industry and agribusiness, between some entrepreneurs and the banks, and even within these various sectors.

Thus, the private entrepreneurs accuse the state of wasting its resources. According to them, over the last twenty years, the state's investments have roughly equalled those of the private sector, which accounts for 80% of production. The owners of small and medium-sized mines are constantly complaining about the conditions imposed on them. Very sharp conflicts, marked by the publication of communiqués published in the big press, recently shook Unagro, one of the largest sugar companies.

The political differentiations and wrangles reflect this reality. The conservative forces are at the moment pinning their hopes mainly on an alliance between the Nationalist Democratic Action party (ADN) founded by General Hugo Banzer and the Historical Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNRH, the right wing of the old MNR) led by Paz Estenssoro and their various appendages.

However, while these two parties act together to obstruct the UDP government, they do not have a common plan for the medium term, inasmuch as each claims to represent the real alternative leadership. What is more, inside all these bourgeois parties and blocs, there are contending tendencies, cliques and rival pressure groups.

In this context of economic and social breakdown, the Bolivian bourgeoisie is more incapable than ever of producing a party to represent it on the national scale. The major role that the employers organizations play, in the political arena as well, is moreover, a striking confirmation of this.

Siles Suazo is taking advantage of this political vacuum, keeping himself in power because of the absence in the short run of any concrete alternative to him. But his main base, the UDP, has been seriously weakened by the departure of the MIR, a formation of petty-bourgeois origin with a vaguely socialistic ideology. At present the MIR is playing a more and more dubious role, one that in fact benefits the reactionaries. The UDP is now tending to break down.

Siles Suazo can only really count on the support of two parties, the MNRI and the PCB, apart from the phantom Christian Democratic Party (PCD), whose representatives have been included in the government.

The president's party itself, the MNRI, is extremely heterogeneous. The gamut goes from conservatively oriented personalities, to political adventurers deeply implicated in support for the November 1979 coup, to representatives of the radicalized petty bourgeoisie and workers and popular leaders. The various chiefs battle publicly, sometimes even resorting to physical violence. There is almost no common organizational framework.

As for the "party" of the "criminal" economy, it has very powerful means for putting on pressure, corrupting people and applying blackmail. The "party," moreover, does not lack a social base, inasmuch as the sectors involved in the production, initial refining and trafficking of cocaine, as well as in smuggling, are by no means a tiny minority of the population.

The smugglers, for instance, can count on the support of the merchants who sell contraband merchandise. A few months ago when the workers at a shoe factory mobilized against smuggling, which was threatening their jobs, they ran up against the resistance of a layer of shopkeepers.

The drug traffickers, for their part, try to get the support of the layers of the peasant population who, while exploited by them, fear that the international schemes for destroying the coca planta-

tions would condemn them to destitution.

These big drug traffickers have very great resources. The fall of the military regime did indeed weaken them. But they are nonetheless able to defy the state power and plot against the precarious democratic institutions that exist today. (9)

The question arises, therefore, whether the present crisis may end in yet another military coup d'état. It goes without saying that there are always in Bolivia, individuals both inside and outside of the military, who are preparing for this eventuality. Nonetheless, a military coup d'état does not seem to be on the agenda in the immediate future for three basic reasons.

First of all, after nearly twenty years of military-dominated government, the military are very badly discredited, even in the eyes of the ruling classes and the petty bourgeoisie. Secondly, the working class has regained all its political and organizational strength. In particular, the attitude of the peasants has changed radically since Banzer ushered in the period of military dominance in 1971. Finally, the Latin-American situation in general, and in particular in the countries of the Southern Cone, is not favorable for such military solutions.

The economic evolution under the Banzer regime brought some modifications in the makeup of the working class and other layers of the exploited population. Specifically, the percentages of industrial and building workers grew relative to that of the miners. And among the miners, themselves, the percentage of those working in the privately owned small and medium mines increased. (10) The growth of agribusiness increased the number of agricultural wage earners, while the poor peasants sunk deeper into poverty. Service workers became more numerous. The weight of the so-called modern petty bourgeoisie increased relative to that of the traditional petty bourgeoisie.

The economic crisis has blocked, or considerably slowed down, these tendencies. Industry and construction have been hard hit. The peasants have gotten poorer. The disinherited masses have grown. So, the miners continue to be the most solid contingent of the proletariat, benefitting from considerable internal cohesiveness and geographical concentration.

However, it should be recalled that this geographical concentration is both a

9. A symbolic episode occurred in July 1983. A very well known trafficker, Roberto Suarez, asked for a meeting with President Siles Suazo. Siles refused. Suarez then defied the government to come get him, warning that he had even airplanes equipped with missiles to defend himself. At the same time, the minister of the interior confirmed that the drug traffickers had "an economic and military power that in many cases exceeds the capacities of the state itself." (*Presencia*, July 5, 1983.)

10. This has gone hand in hand, among other things, with the growth of the capital. The most spectacular manifestation of this growth was the building of the "El Alto" neighborhood, which has more than 200,000 inhabitants, mostly workers and "marginals."

strength and weakness of the Bolivian proletariat. It is a strength insofar as it facilitates general mobilizations of the miners, and from time to time the mining regions get out of direct control by the central government. But it is a weakness also in the sense that the miners are relatively far removed from the political center of the country, and they cannot bring their weight to bear on the third major pole in the country, Santa Cruz, traditionally the bulwark of the most reactionary forces and the cradle of coup d'états.

An economic crisis that is having unprecedented disastrous effects and increasingly bringing a breakdown of the social fabric may in the long run also have negative effects on the fighting potential of the masses. In fact, it has caused a certain disarray among the poorly politicized strata of the disinherited masses. And it has also created centrifugal tendencies and conflicts among different categories of workers. (11)

Nonetheless, this crisis has arisen and developed in a context that, since the end of 1977, has been generally characterized by a rise of the mass movement. In fact, the combativity of the working masses and poor peasants has been exhibited many times in a spectacular way, and it has gone hand in hand with a growing awareness of the political issues.

This process has been reflected by the COB resuming a key role. As in its most glorious days, this organization today is not just a trade-union confederation embracing the great majority of the workers. It is also taking up the defense of the workers' interests on the political level, especially on the local level, where it offers an embryonic alternative power.

The departmental headquarters of the COB, as in a city such as Santa Cruz, for example, are visited all day long by delegations not just from workers but from citizens in general, who raise all sorts of problems that might seem to be in the sphere of the political authorities rather than that of trade-union leaders. What is more, the unions have taken action on several occasions, including organizing pickets, to control prices and punish speculative traders.

After a period of wait and see, the COB adopted an attitude of challenging the UDP government, even going as far as open opposition. It was the FSTMB that waged the first major political battle, advancing the demand for a workers majority on the comanagement bodies running the mines.

This demand, in fact, went beyond both comanagement and workers control based on the right of veto, a right that the miners won in the 1950s. It involved the workers having the right to take over running the enterprise. And this demand was backed up by direct workers action, that is, occupation of the Comibol offices.

In August, the COB leadership presented a program of economic measures. They included the following: a decisive voice for the workers in the government through their union confederation; workers-majority comanagement in state and



Women's organisations joined the hunger strike (DR)

public enterprises; workers control over private industry; distribution and sale of staples through state agencies, workers organizations and people's stores; comanagement, with a peasant majority, of all rural development programs financed by the state; the setting up of a Foreign Trade Institute to rationalize, develop and control imports and exports.

Over and above some vague formulations and the maneuverist intentions of some trade-union leaders, the COB program amounts to a program of transitional demands. The fight to achieve them would stimulate a process of anticapitalist mobilization.

The evolution of the peasant masses and their organization is still more significant. The 1953 agrarian reform eliminated the traditional big landlords and distributed the land to the peasants. It is true that this did not bring a notable improvement in their standard of living and still less a real solution to their problems. Nonetheless, the peasants supported the MNR regime of Paz Estenssoro that had taken these steps, and subsequently the majority of them remained passive during the big political crises.

The essential new element in recent years is that under the impact of growing impoverishment and repression, the peasants burned Banzer's Military-Peasant Pact. This shift can be dated from January 1974, when Banzer ordered a massacre of the peasants in the Cochabamba region.

More and more peasants have joined the working farmers association, the CSUTCB, which was formed in 1979 and is now included in the COB. They began to play a growing role in social and political conflicts. The second congress of the CSUTCB very clearly reflected the politicization of very broad layers of peasants and the emergence of young cadres with a strong fighting spirit.

Some peasant struggles have already won victories. The government has been obliged to make certain concessions and some major gains have been achieved, in-

cluding the extension of labor legislation to categories of rural workers formerly not covered. What is more, the CSUTCB has very clearly declared its independence of the government and the bourgeois parties, demanding a share in cogovernment as an independent force with the same status as the COB. (12)

The significance of the idea of cogovernment proposed both by the COB and the CSUTCB should be highlighted. The formula as such could be discussed, and if it is put into practice, it could not be excluded a priori that it might lead to class collaboration. It is true, moreover, as Juan Lechin noted for his own reasons, that the idea is not entirely new. It was proposed before in the 1950s and in 1970-71.

However, in the first case, the result was the participation in the government of leaders of the MNR left, as representatives of the COB. In 1970-71, the COB supported the government of General Juan Jose Torres without participating in it. In other words, the workers organization gave up its class independence.

Today, the demand for cogovernment implies specifically that the COB and the CSUTCB do not consider themselves to be represented by the UDP and President Siles Suazo but that they want to represent the workers and peasants in the government themselves in an independent way.

Thus, this demand helps the masses to understand the class nature of the conflicts and the political issues. It has an anticapitalist potential. The Bolivian

11. A conflict developed among the state functionaries who demanded an undivided workday. The COB was ill-inclined to support a category that seemed relatively privileged. Various organizations have also taken positions opposing the road blockages. This method of struggle has been adopted not just by the peasants, but also by other categories.

12. Painful experience with the MNR and the military regimes led the peasant cadres and leaders to distrust all political formations, including those that identify themselves with the workers movement and revolutionary ideas.

bourgeois and imperialists have, in fact, understood this, and they reacted violently during the crisis of August 1983.

The first question that can be posed is whether there is at the moment a pre-revolutionary situation in Bolivia. On the basis of the elements indicated above, if we apply the traditional criteria of revolutionary Marxists, the answer can only be affirmative. It is undeniable that since 1952 the present crisis is unprecedented, and is tending to worsen on all levels. It is leading to a radicalization and politicization of the masses marking a qualitative advance over every previous period.

This radicalization and politicization have been reflected in the actions undertaken and the positions adopted by the big trade-union organizations. To a large extent, however, these positions have been imposed by growing pressures from the ranks, which have even in some cases gotten out of the control of the leaderships.

Thus, the COB has been under constant pressure from its larger member unions, such as the FSTMB and the industrial workers federation. It came in for severe criticism for holding back the mass mobilizations in the crucial weeks of August 1983.

The FSTMB itself has been outflanked several times by its local organizations. Already in October 1982, the miners remained on strike even after the COB had decided to suspend the action. More recently, in September 1983, the miners launched a new mobilization, against the advice of Juan Lechin and independent of any decision by the national leadership of the FSTMB. In fact the FSTMB national leadership was accused of wanting to isolate the Huanuni miners' leaders.

In Huanuni, in fact, the unionists voted against workers-majority comanagement for fear that it would lead to class collaboration, and the provisional comanagement boards have not been set up. It should be noted, however, that this majority against the comanagement proposal was the result of a convergence between the opposition of the extreme left and the Communist Party, the latter being favorable to comanagement but against a workers' majority on the comanagement boards.

This article cannot attempt to answer all questions that the Bolivian revolutionary Marxists have to deal with. They are organized in the United Revolutionary Workers Party (PORU) and have defined their conceptions and orientations in the documents adopted by their unification congress in July 1983. (13) It should be noted, however, that at this stage two wrong conceptions still exist in the workers movement.

The first is represented by the Revolutionary Workers Party of Guillermo Lora (POR-Lora), which makes proclaiming the need for the dictatorship of the proletariat the central axis of its politics today. This leads to dogmatic propagandism.

The second wrong conception is far more dangerous, inasmuch as those who



Announcing the 1982 election results to the people (DR)

defend it, first of all the Communist Party, unlike the POR-Lora, have a mass influence. It consists of building up a whole theory of the "democratic process" putting it in the framework of revolution by stages. This is the ideological justification the CP advances to explain its participation in the UDP coalition and the Siles Suazo government.

In a debate on the "deepening of the democratic process," one of the CP's leaders, Ramiro Barrenchea, explained that "the people's democratic anti-imperialist plan is a state-managed economy meeting the needs not only of the working class, peasants and urban middle strata, but also of broad sections of the bourgeoisie not dependent on the imperialists."

Barrenchea specified, that this was a "composite program of a composite government." (14)

However, on the basis of an analysis of the economic and social crisis whose depth is not denied by anyone, the conclusion you have to come to is the following: No real change can come about without the adoption of such measures as nationalizing the medium-size mines, the key industries, the banks and the big trading networks, without a new agrarian reform, without the destruction of a state apparatus that even after the April 1952 nationalizations remained fundamentally in the service of the ruling classes and operated the nationalized economic sector for the profit of the private sector, including both Bolivian and international capitalists. Anticapitalist structural transformations are required. The workers and peasants struggles must, therefore, be focused around transitional demands. It is in this area, much more than in characterizing the nature of the revolution that clarification is necessary.

Both the workers unions and the peasant confederation have advanced demands that represent a step forward.

But in the last analysis their real content will be determined by the general dynamic of the mobilization of the popular masses.

For example, the proposed basic agrarian reform law presented by the CSUTCB is based on the local peasant community. If this law were passed and applied by a government representing anticapitalist working-class and peasant forces, the centrality of the peasant community would set in motion a process of marginalizing the capitalist enterprises, even though the letter of this proposed law provides for the continued existence of such enterprises. If on the other hand, the new agrarian reform is carried out without a qualitative change in the social and political framework, capitalist agriculture will remain fundamentally intact and restructuring on the basis of the peasant communities will not enable the peasants to improve their living conditions substantially.

As for workers-majority comanagement in the Comibol, it also involves dangers. If it is looked at from the standpoint of maintaining the status quo, it will either remain dead letter or it will threaten to lead the miners and their representatives to accept the logic of capitalist productivity, that is to accept a stricter austerity policy as the only way out of the economic crisis.

If, on the other hand, the workers-majority comanagement in the Comibol is conceived of as a transitional demand, the starting point for the miners will be an understanding of the need to break down the obstacles represented by the capitalist mode of accumulation and the socio-economic options imposed by the bourgeois governments, including the

13. Cf. IV, No 37, October 3, 1983.

14. Cf. *Unidad*, the organ of the Bolivian CP, the first week of March 1983.

MNR governments in the 1950s, and they will be led to pose the question of power.

Finally, the question arises, by what instruments can the workers and peasants fight effectively in pursuance of a revolutionary perspective of taking power. In this respect, the traditional contradiction between the strength of the trade-union organizations and the extreme weakness of the political ones has not been overcome.

The emergence of the UDP in the 1970s as the centralizing pole of the workers and peasants struggles could have created the impression that a new phase was opening up in this respect. But the UDP was only an electoral coalition of different social forces. Today the great majority of the exploited masses do not see it as an instrument for their actual struggle.

On several occasions, political-ideological currents have raised the idea that the COB itself could lead the struggle for the seizure of power. Such a concept has been outlined, for example, by Filemon Escobar, a miners' leader who for a long time identified himself with Trotskyism. He presented this view in an article published by the weekly *Aqui* in late February 1983.

This means, in other words, that the COB could simultaneously play three roles — its own role as a labor confederation, the role of an organ of dual power and the role of a revolutionary party. This is a hypothesis that revolutionary Marxists are not prepared to accept. First of all, there is no experience of a victorious revolution to confirm it. All revolutions have demonstrated the need for a specifically political instrument for leading and organizing the masses. In this respect, neither the Cuban nor the Nicaraguan revolution is an exception.

Secondly, the COB had a strength comparable to what it has today in the period following the insurrection of 1952 and in 1970-71, that is, in previous crucial periods when a struggle for power was on the agenda. However, it not only did not take the leadership of these struggles but proved incapable of preventing the reconstruction of the semicolonial state and the installation of General Banzer's authoritarian regime.

On April 29, 1980, the COB signed a nonaggression pact with the military general staff. It involves a mutual commitment to respect the verdict of the June 1980 elections, not to interfere with the activity of the COB and to respect the military institutions. Nonetheless, this did not prevent General Garcia Meza's coup d'etat on July 17.

The problem arises in still more concrete terms. As a general rule, the COB has adopted political orientations reflecting those of the parties whose members played the decisive role in its leadership, in turn the MNR, centrist formations and the Communist Party. Today, the majority of the leaders belong to the CP, which has a very great weight, even in the FSTMB.

It is true that independently of the po-

litical composition of the leadership, Juan Lechin has played the main role in leading the COB. But Lechin was not born yesterday. Is there any need to recall what he did in the 1950s when he was still a member of the MNR to canalize and hold back the revolutionary struggles?

Later Lechin became vice-president of the country in 1960, at the height of the "normalization" conducted by the MNR regime. In 1970-71, he supported the government of General Torres. In 1980, after agreeing to stand as the candidate of a front of workers organizations in the June elections, he backed out at the last minute. In July 1980, he even agreed to appear on TV to call on the workers to end their strike against General Garcia Meza's coup d'etat.

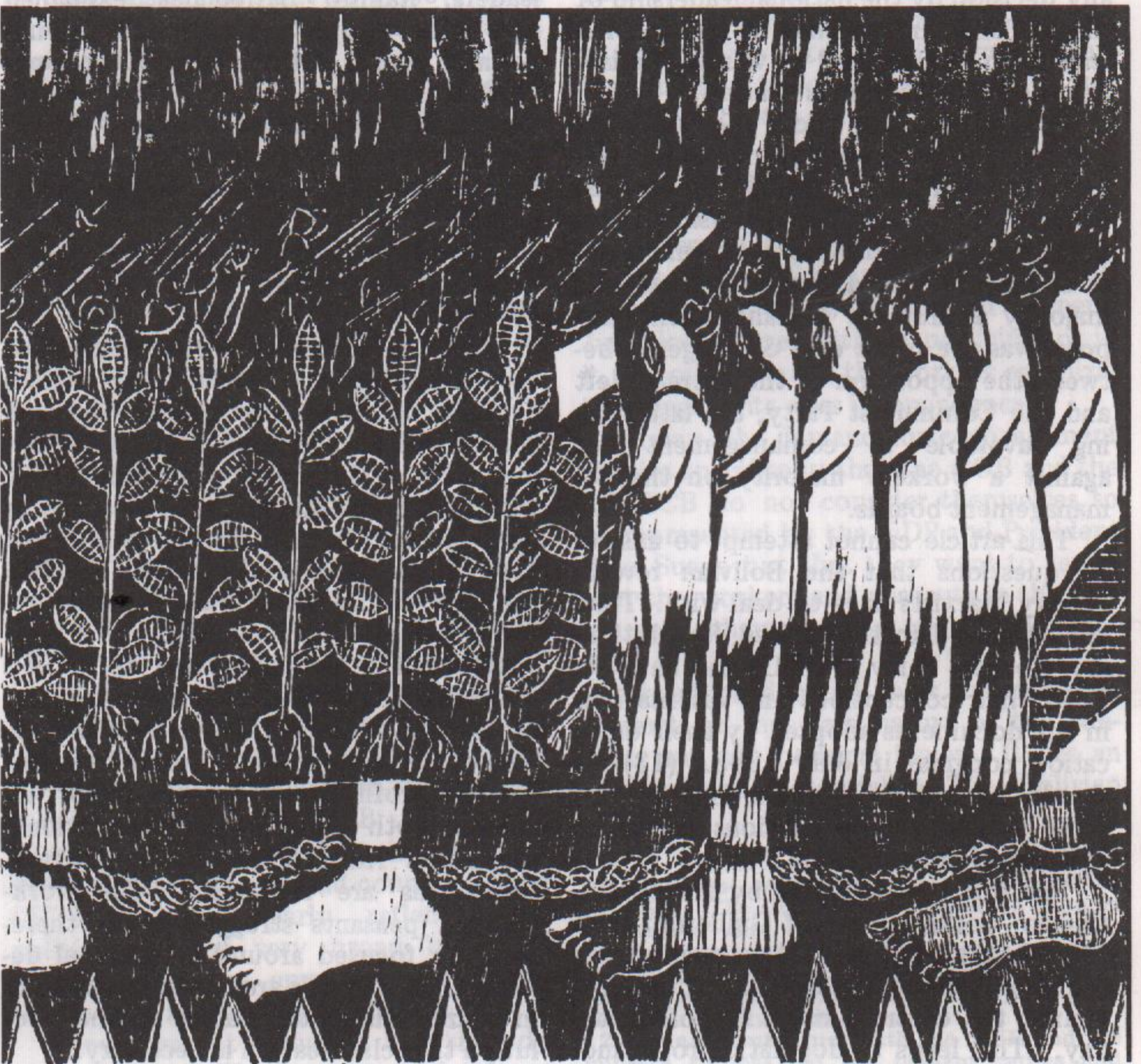
Although the peasant leader, Genero Flores, has not had the same sort of checkered career as Lechin, he is nonetheless a figure not without political ambiguities. He represents the fighting spirit of the peasants and had an influence on the adoption of the CSUTCB's present positive orientations. But he remains a member of the Tupac Katari Revolutionary Movement (MRTK), a movement with gradualist, reformist conceptions.

In conclusion, there is no question of challenging or minimizing the role the COB has played over the recent months and the role that it will continue to play in the coming stage of mass mobilization. But it does not follow from this that the task of building the revolution-

ary party is no longer posed. To the contrary, the Bolivian revolutionary Marxists consider it more urgent than ever.

The COB congress scheduled to open this May 1 will, therefore, be an important test. The COB can and must play a key role in organizing and centralizing the workers struggles, as well as those of the peasants and other exploited layers of the popular masses, for their immediate demands and for transitional demands. What is no less important, it must lead them in organizing self-defense against any threat of a military coup d'etat.

However, the COB will only be able to accomplish these tasks if it overcomes its weaknesses and contradictions. It has, in particular, to develop structures and a mode of functioning that will enable the ranks to express their will democratically at all times. It must also renew its leadership by advancing cadres who have proven themselves in the struggles of recent years and who are capable of breaking from all that there is negative in the traditions of the COB. This means especially combating spontaneism, organizational looseness and maximalism in demands which, on the one hand, reflects the lack of a consistent revolutionary orientation, and, on the other, the gap between the verbal declarations of the leaders and their real practice. It means also building the means for beginning to overcome the ill-preparedness of the workers movement to face decisive confrontations. ■



Who profits from the oil income ?

Despite the makeshift 'Marxism-Leninism' preached by the ethnic-based military clique that rules the neo-colonial state of the Congo, despite the links of the regime with the USSR, or of the ruling Congolese Party of Labour with such 'sister parties' as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union or the Cuban Communist Party, the economy of the Congo-Brazzaville remains in the grip of imperialists, particularly of French companies.

The article below explains this in some detail through looking at the place of oil production, controlled by the French company Elf and the Italian company AGIP, in the country's economy.

Andre BASSINET

Oil has been produced in the Congo for more than ten years. During the first few years production varied between one and two million tons per year, while in Gabon production in the same period was between 12 and 14 million tons per year. The Congolese state received only a very modest income for this whole period.

From 1980 there was a sharp rise in oil income. This was partly due to a significant rise in oil production but more to the rise in world oil prices. So, from 1979 to 1982 production increased by 160 per cent, from 2.8 to 4.5 millions of tons per year. The value of oil produced increased by 450 per cent, and the income to the state by 550 per cent.

This oil boom got started at just the time that the present Five Year Plan (1982-86) was being prepared. Thus, the Plan was premised on the idea that the Congolese state would have increasing resources based on a big growth in the production of hydrocarbons (oil, coal and gas) and on a continuing upward trend in prices. The planners put their trust in the statements of the oil companies (the French company Elf and the Italian AGIP) who had, in 1980, announced some important discoveries, which allowed the state to count on a big increase in production.

Thus in 1982 the five-year plan projected the production of 5.2 million tons, and almost 6 million in 1983. For the period beyond, up to 1986, it had different estimates varying between 7 and 11 million tons. The plan also projected a price range of 32 to 35 US dollars per barrel for 1982, and 46.8 to 51.2 dollars per barrel for 1986.

Revenues from oil production represent more than 80 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product of the Congo. Oil income — more exactly, that part of it that is not directly taken by the foreign oil companies and which goes through the state — gives the state and the political group that holds the reins, an enormous power to intervene in society.

The tax income raised directly on oil has provided two-thirds of the resources of the Congolese state during the last three years. Added to this should be the indirect income raised by the taxes on the subcontractors. The Congolese state has obliged all the foreign oil companies active as subcontractors in oil production (builders of offshore platforms, or pipelines, public works enterprises building onshore installations, etc.) to create Congolese subsidiaries which, as such, are subject to local taxes.

In addition, the local spending of the foreign personnel employed by Elf and its subsidiaries has stimulated the growth of a whole sector of economic activity, particularly commercial, at Pointe-Noire (1), which also pays taxes to the state.

Finally, the importation of material by the oil companies and of consumer goods for the foreign technical personnel involves the collection of customs duties. In total then, more than three-quarters of the state's income is supplied directly or indirectly by oil production. However, the benefits for the private sector or public enterprises of the effects of oil production have remained small. They are only felt at Pointe-Noire, and there more in commercial activity (such as supermarkets, hotels, etc.) than in directly productive activity.

Spending the oil income

The expansion of state revenue has brought about a big increase in spending on 'state functioning' and a still larger growth in investments. The total budget for salaries paid out in the government service has risen considerably, although much less than the general rise in state spending.

However, this increase has served to bump up the number of government employees — this doubled between 1970 and 1979 — but not at all to pay them better. From 1980 to 1982 the wage component of the budget grew at the same rate as inflation, 16 per cent per

year. But at the same time a policy of intensive recruitment was followed, increasing staff by 9 per cent per year. Adjusted for inflation, the amount paid in salaries in 1982 was the same as that in 1980, while the number of government employees had grown by 18.5 per cent. Buying power for each of them had, on average, diminished by as much.

In a way the Congolese regime has widened the number of its dependents by this policy, but has not stabilised its social base. Even badly-paid, government employees form a less-disadvantaged category than many others. By increasing their number the regime has undoubtedly tried to erect a guarantee against the social problems caused by a huge increase in the number of 'educated and qualified' persons in the towns.

At the same time, by blocking wages the government is creating the conditions for a pronounced discontent in a category which is also its base for social reproduction. It is spending on equipment for the administration that has grown more than the spending on staff — the former has tripled in three years. However, there is not a single photocopier in working order in several of the ministries, the offices lack paper, and there is a striking lack of tables, chairs, etc. in the schools. But it is true that it is easier to divert funds allotted to purchase equipment than those allotted to pay wages.

However, it is the investment budget that has gained the most from the oil manna. Since the time that the rise in income was announced the Congolese government has been gripped by a complete frenzy of road and airport building. In 1982 more than one-third of the oil income was assigned to transport spending. With a complete disregard for all prudence, almost all the schemes projected in the plan were started at the same time in the first year. The ruling clique's predilection for this type of infrastructure is easily explained. Above and beyond the 'prestige' nature of these projects, there is the fact that it is on public works that it is easiest to get big commissions. The pay-offs to the different Congolese officials for contracts usually boosts the prices of roads by 20 per cent. This would mean 6,000 million CFA francs in 1982. (2) Of course, these millions then are divided up again among political clients who are generally recruited on the basis of coming from the same region or clan. This is the way the regime reproduces its social base.

The railways are the biggest item of investment spending after the roads. The reconstruction of the Bilinga-Loubomo section of the Congo-Ocean railway is one of the most scandalous cases of over-

1. Pointe-Noire, the second largest town in the country and the main port, is situated in the centre of the oil production zone, which is mainly offshore production.

2. The CFA (Communaute Financiere Africaine) franc is a currency linked to the French franc which is valid in all countries in the 'franc zone'. One CFA franc is worth .02 French francs, thus, approximately 400 CFA francs equal 1 US dollar.

running cost limits in the history of the Congo, rich though it is in such practices. (3)

The part of the state's budget allocated to the directly productive sector — agriculture, forestry, mines, industry and fishing — is small compared to that for spending on the state infrastructure. In particular it produces very few new productive units. In fact, the greatest part of the budget for the productive sector is used for subsidies for its functioning. Some 10,000 million CFA francs are allocated for this in the finance ministry's budget.

But there is a roughly equivalent amount that should be added, which appears in the equipment budget under the title 'Measures for helping enterprises'. In fact, there is hardly a single public enterprise that is not in deficit.

This is in general explained by the embezzlement that goes on, and the incredible chaos that exists at the level of supplies. The money allocated to the productive sector is not, thus, strictly speaking, investment designed to increase productive capacity but rather endowments given to try to ensure the simple reproduction of capital. This is comparable to the labours of the Danaïdes who were condemned to fill an unplugged barrel with water. The public enterprises are the flowing barrels at which those people whom politicians are rewarding, or who have a family or ethnic link, can serve themselves from the posts of responsibility that they are given.

In fact, the oil income, or at least that part which the Congolese state receives (Elf and AGIP help themselves to comfortable profits at source), is only in transit. A considerable portion leaves for pockets abroad. The big hotels in Brazzaville are filled with the commercial representatives of multinational companies. These are the people who sell most of the fantastic 'development projects', the 'turnkey' model firms, or the measures for helping the public sector.

Shameless imperialist pillage

Particularly in the industrial sector the 'prospecting salesmen' from the multinationals play on the fact that the state enterprises are all in deficit, arguing that the reason is the 'old age' of the material, or that equipment is 'out of date'. The ways for improving these firms always include an element called 'renewing equipment' which is usually the only measure which is really applied. No one among the Congolese technocrats bothers to find out if the equipment thrown away like this is repairable, or if the new machinery really works better than the old.

Nor is there any effort on the Congolese side to find out if the material or services sold are at a 'normal' price for the international market. Machines could be being sold at two or three times the price that they are sold in Europe, no one would protest. To tell the truth, everyone wants to see the equipment sold

Doumeng— An example of 'new relations' with under-developed countries

The Doumeng group is known for the links that its president, Jean-Marie Doumeng, has with the French Communist Party. Doumeng is at the head of a series of companies and co-operatives that specialise mainly in food production, but also in the construction industry. The group makes substantial profits from trade in agricultural products with the USSR. In the last few years the group (Societe Interagra, Silos du Sud-Ouest, etc.) has also become a specialist in activity in certain so-called 'progressive' Third World countries, particularly the Congo. It is present there in the form of 'advisory companies', charged with setting up and selling 'development projects', as a supplier of agricultural equipment, in the import-export trade of food products, and in the form of public works enterprises constructing agricultural buildings, silos, etc.

The Doumeng group's originality and success in a country like the Congo stems from its apparently 'anti-imperialist' speechifying and tactful concern for the sovereignty of the country. Unlike other advisory companies it never proposes dismantling the public sector, but offers its services to help the nationalised enterprises to work better.

A typical example of its activity is in regard to the MAB, a cereal-processing plant inherited from the colonial period and nationalised by the Congolese authorities. Up to 1980 the MAB, like all the other public enterprises, had got into a deep deficit. The machinery was not looked after, there were frequent breakdowns, production had dropped sharply, and it looked as if the firm would shut down very soon.

Doumeng then proposed to save the business. The MAB remained the property of the Congolese state, but Silos Sud-Ouest were given the responsibility of managing it. The Doumeng group promised to balance the accounts and to make enough of a margin to pay for the new equipment that it advised be bought, given that it would be one of the companies in the group that would supply and install it. However, it made one condition. The MAB would have a monopoly on the import of wheat and flour for the whole of the Congo and would set, in agreement with the government, a 'fair' selling price. Deal agreed.

But a little later Doumeng revealed that, after study, the factory would never be able to lower the cost price of flour to a level that was competitive with the world market. So it proposed the following solution: the factory would slow down production and, with imported wheat, would produce 7,900 tons of flour in 1982, some 16 per cent of domestic needs. The cost price of each ton of flour thus produced would be almost 200,000 CFA francs. The additional flour necessary to supply the Congolese bakers would be imported by MAB at the world price, 110,000 CFA francs per ton in 1982. The selling price of flour on the Congolese market was fixed at 127,000 CFA francs per ton, that is, in such a way that the losses on flour produced by the MAB factory would be covered by the profits made on the resale of imported flour.

So, every one is happy, thanks to Monsieur Doumeng. The MAB staff, who kept their jobs by working part-time, the government which no longer needs to close or subsidise the factory, and, of course, Doumeng. The group has taken its profits on the equipment supplied, and it supplies MAB with its wheat and 41,000 tons of extra flour. What is more it also receives a subsidy for its sales from the Common Market, as on all exported agricultural products. And for all that it is also paid as a 'management advisory company'! It really cannot be said to be losing out.

The Congolese government can congratulate itself that there is at least one nationalised enterprise that is not in debt. In the meantime Congolese consumers have seen the price of bread rise sharply in the bakeries. The cost of flour rose by 45 per cent in 1982.

for the highest price. The foreign suppliers, because they will increase their profits; the Congolese officials, because they get a pay-off calculated as a percentage of the sale. What does it matter if afterwards the public enterprise cannot pay the buying loan which the seller or a foreign bank has given it? The state will pay instead, or give it a subsidy, thanks to the oil income.

The foreign suppliers do not even hesitate at the most gross subterfuges to get a sale. But are they actually subterfuges? No one is taken in. So it is quite usual for the cost of construction works to be raised by 100 per cent in the course of the project without arousing very much protest from the Congolese client. (4) Other firms act more subtly, such as the Doumeng group particularly in its role as manager of the nationalised group MAB (see box), or Elf-Congo.

The French national company Elf controls 62 per cent of oil production in

the Congo. The rest is produced by the Italian company AGIP. In 1982 Elf sold 2.8 million tons of Congo oil for 208,000 million CFA francs. It had to pay 96,000 million to the state on this sum: 38,000 million under the heading of 'duties',

3. The cost of the works were first estimated at 16,500 million CFA francs. But the sale was finally made at twice that price to an Italo-German-French group. The completion date was originally in 1980 but work is still continuing and the company is demanding 94,000 million, 73,000 million of which has already been paid, to finish in 1984. Between 1978 and 1982 spending on this project ate up almost one-fifth of the oil income for that period.

4. The German firm Klockner was engaged to refit a match factory (Falco) for 540 million CFA francs. After delivering part of the equipment it demanded 3,000 million francs to finish the work. The government complied, the president stating, 'Taking account of the need for regional balance, the Falco project will be carried through whatever the cost.' The factory is obviously situated in the northern area of the Country where the leaders of the military clique presently in power come from.

calculated by taking 17.5 per cent of the official price on each ton of oil produced, and 58,000 million as taxes on profits.

But who calculates the profits? It is Elf that gives the state the costs for production and for investments for research and production. Given that one knows that the equipment (platforms, pipelines, exploration machinery, pumps, etc.) is supplied by companies linked to Elf, or by the Bouygues firm in which Albin Chalandon, managing director of Elf until June 1983 and a former Gaullist minister, has personal and family interests, there seems very little doubt that the equipment will be over-billed. What that means in fact is that it is more or less Elf itself that decides on what profits it will pay taxes. Poor Elf! Just so — in 1982 its production costs were more than it had planned at the beginning of the year. It was the same with AGIP. So, these two firms paid only 91,900 million in taxes rather than the 103,700 million predicted at the beginning of the year.

And as things have turned out to be really bad in 1983, Elf and AGIP have not only demanded that the official oil price be reduced by the same proportion as the price set by OPEC (Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries, of which the Congo is not a member), but also the way of calculating the tax on profits be revised. Unless this happens they will not guarantee to maintain the rate of production. Moreover, they already slowed down considerably in the first part of 1983, in order to show that they produce oil in the Congo almost out of charity.

How Elf makes its profits

The oil refinery opened in 1982 is the property of the Congolese state, for which it has paid a high price. But it is managed by a mixed economy company, CORAF, whose shares are held 60 per cent by Hydro-Congo (a national company with a monopoly in the distribution of hydrocarbons), and 40 per cent by Elf. The agreement between the two partners stipulates that CORAF will make neither profit nor loss, and will buy all its oil from Elf. But CORAF buys this oil from Elf at the official price, that is 38 US dollars per barrel. The official price determines the bill for taxes and duties. For many years it has been higher than market price. This means that, thanks to this agreement, Elf sells oil to the Congo that it produces there at a price that is 8 to 15 per cent higher than that on the world market.

Some two thirds of the refinery's production is heavy fuel and one third 'light' products (fuel oil for industry, diesel oil, petrol, kerosene for aeroplanes but also for domestic usage, e.g. oil lamps, as 90 per cent of the Congo's population do not have electricity) and butane gas. The light products are for the domestic market, but heavy fuel oil is mainly exported because it can only be used for domestic heating (which is hardly necessary in Equatorial regions), for

thermal power stations or fuel for ships. The Congo does not have a sea-going fleet.

The price of heavy fuel on the international market is dropping sharply. The oil-saving measures introduced by consumer countries have in fact mainly affected the consumption of heavy fuel. On the other hand, consumption of oil products like petrol, diesel and kerosene for aeroplanes continues to increase. Thus, it is difficult for CORAF to sell its heavy products for export. Elf, which has an international network which CORAF is denied, buys its heavy fuel to sell abroad. However, the price offered by Elf is linked to the average world price. This fell from 185 US dollars per ton in December 1982 to 140 dollars in February 1983.

In these conditions CORAF would be in deficit (which its statutes forbid) if it did not compensate for its export losses by increasing prices for its 'light' products on the domestic market. And as it produces twice as much in heavy as in light products, one can see that every time the world price for heavy fuels drops one point the price for petrol, etc., has to rise two points.

So one arrives at this paradox: since the Congo has had an oil refinery the Congolese, enterprises and individuals, have paid 50 per cent more for their hydrocarbons than when it was imported. Thanks to the agreement with Elf, the Congo has the privilege of being undoubtedly the only country in the world where every time the world price for hydrocarbons drops, it rises by double that amount inside the country!

This policy gives Elf, which did not pay a penny for the refinery (6), the following advantages: with the refinery in full production at the end of 1983 it is guaranteed a sale for one million tons (one third of its local production) to CORAF for a price that is clearly higher than that on the world market. And then Elf will take its commission on the resale of heavy fuel for export without having to carry the drop in price for it. Finally, Elf will then bill CORAF for its services as a 'management advisory company'.

There are many examples of this type. The exploitation of the Congolese economy by imperialism is done with the willing complicity of a regime that has made big pretence in New Delhi at the conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, or at the meetings of the Organisation of African Unity of being one of the 'hard-liners' in the 'progressive' camp. The streets of Brazzaville are lined with banners denouncing imperialism or the 'bureaucratic bourgeoisie in the state markets'. No doubt these are for the edification of the foreign business men, briefcases full of wonderful contracts, who come to dine at the Meridian Hotel with Congolese officials.

The management contracts cited, with Elf or the Doumeng group, allow only balanced accounts for the public enterprises that are managed by foreign companies. That is, they cannot even make

profits to ensure there will be new investment. In these examples, Congolese officials are quite content to simply look for the biggest commission. Thus does the parasitic and dependent on imperialism character of the local neo-colonial bourgeoisie show itself. A military faction of this layer, organised on an ethnic basis, holds the reins of power in the state apparatus.

Before they enjoyed the manna of the oil production, the ruling clique in the Congo tried to carry out a policy of centralised levies on the surplus product produced in agriculture. Peasants were forced by law to sell all their produce to the state offices, at the lowest prices, and then to buy what they needed at the same offices at the highest prices.

Spending but no investment

In order to succeed in thus stripping the peasants, they had to have means to enforce their policies. The Congolese peasantry went on a production strike and sold their produce on the black market. This produced higher prices for the consumers. The shops and warehouses of the Office for Food-Producing Cultivation have been empty for several years, and the state circuit now carries less than 20 per cent of the national production of maize, and 2 per cent of cassava. After all, what does it matter, since the 'black gold' has made up for everything in the last three or four years. The said office continues to equip itself with lorries, warehouses and offices, despite the fact they are all empty.

Oil income has become almost the sole source of revenue for the ruling class, although this has not allowed it to base itself on the development of local capital. One cannot even say that the colossal embezzlement that results has allowed beneficiaries to set up private enterprises for themselves as a source of capital accumulation. Certainly, they all have, through one front man or another, interests in restaurants, bars, nightclubs, trading firms or land speculation. But this remains in specific and secondary sectors of the economy, with the essential parts of production and resources being controlled by imperialism. When the drop in oil revenue leads to a general lowering of buying power these small outfits will collapse.

Without the possibility of ensuring the extended or even the simple reproduction of capital — productive potential drops from day to day — the Congolese bour-

5. The Congo got less advantageous conditions than the Middle East countries. In Saudi Arabia the duty is 20 per cent rather than 17.5 per cent, and the tax on profits 85 per cent rather than the 60 to 75 per cent, according to the field, in the Congo.

6. A simple management company, CORAF, was created with a derisory capital of 10 million CFA francs. Four million, hardly the price of a lorry, came from Elf.

7. For a detailed analysis of the political situation in the Congo, see the article by Claude Gabriel in the French-language *Inprecor*, No 101, May 13, 1981, 'Congo, a progressive mask for a neo-colonial state.'

geoisie remains a class of brokers. It uses state power in order to better negotiate with imperialists the size of the commission it gets.

In this sense, the diplomatic alliance with Cuba and the USSR serves the Congolese bourgeoisie as a means of blackmail in order to bump up the size of their commission. At the same time it constitutes a guarantee that imperialism will not make a coup d'etat to replace the present team of brokers if they show themselves to be a little too greedy. What matters is that the oil companies' profits are not hurt by this political alliance.

The outlook is somewhat more sombre since the end of 1982. Oil consumption is down, and the price, clearly overvalued, has dropped. Thus, the oil companies have had a tendency to slow down production. This is particularly true in oil fields that are difficult to work. In these fields the profit margin, already lower than that for Middle East oil, has been further reduced by the drop in price.

In 1982 already, production in the Congo was lower than forecast: 4.5 million tons rather than 5.2 million. In 1983, according to the companies, production will have been again lower than the Plan (by 10 to 15 per cent), and it is implied that it will level out in the following years at around 5.5 or 5 million tons, rather than going up to 7 or 8 million as planned.

Excessive borrowing to cover huge deficit

As for the official price per barrel, the companies demand that it be at minimum put at the OPEC price, in order to reduce the gap between the official price, which is the basis for calculating the taxes paid to the state, and the market price. How far will it go down? At least to 29 dollars per barrel, perhaps even to 25 dollars, in place of the 32 dollars in 1982.

The gap in the state's oil income between what was budgeted and what was finally received should be about 25 per cent for 1983. Above and beyond that will be the recessionist effects on the local economy of the drop in investment made by the oil industry.

The Pointe-Noire region is in danger

Immortal glory for the former president but what for the people? (DR)



of being seriously affected. All the sub-contractors who work for Elf and AGIP in assembling or repairing material have had empty order books since January 1983. Several sub-contractors based abroad have already liquidated their Congolese subsidiaries. Others have begun to get rid of staff.

The oil industry sub-contractors supply the tax collectors with a substantial part of their ordinary income. So the state is not going to win on that front either. The provisional estimated loss for 1983 is 8,000 million CFA francs. Thus, the 1983 budget would have to be reduced by at least 60,000 million CFA francs in the course of the year. The borrowing capacity of the Congo on the international money market is dwindling. In fact, the country has resorted to excessive borrowing in the last few years.

Repayments due in 1983 reach 87,000 million, that is well over half the oil income received. Thus, in May 1983 it was necessary to hurriedly rework the budget of the current year. A painful operation.

Both operating budgets and investment budgets had to be cut. This ran the risk of upsetting both government employees and directors of public enterprises. After some sly bargaining the budgetary readjustments downwards were made on posts where no doubt it was assumed the incumbents had less chance of making their protests heard. Thus, 1,150 million CFA francs were cut from the school repairs budget, 350 million that was allotted for providing drinkable water for some villages and the allocation for providing two villages with electricity. On the other hand, the budget allocated for the care and upkeep of the president's residence was carefully preserved. In 1983 this item would have paid the cost of electrification for 46 villages.

In fact, during this reworking of the budget, the government has only made a few petty economies. The bulk of the expenditure planned in the original budget remains. After long debates within the ruling bodies, it was decided not to cut down on government employees salaries more than had been planned. The biggest supply contracts, particularly for roads, have been kept — too many different interests were at work. Given all this, the government did not succeed in June 1983 in balancing the budget, and

the gap of expenditure over income reached the tidy sum of 110,000 million CFA francs.

Even so, there are other expenditures to be added to this record deficit, which the ministers hid at the time that the new budget was adopted and which came to light one by one afterwards. In the space of one month it appeared that 10,000 million francs worth of expenditure had not been taken into account, each minister and the president having hidden from their friends a few dubious operations.

Rising discontent

The initial budget already had a deficit of 73,000 million CFA francs which would have to be covered by borrowing. But to raise the sum to be borrowed from 73,000 to 110,000 to 120,000 million seems to be out of the question. The foreign creditors are worried because they do not see how the country is going to be able to repay its debts when they fall due. So they will refuse to agree to supplementary borrowing on such a scale.

The government, with its back to the wall, is trying some discreet approaches to the Elysee along these lines, 'If the Congo is obliged to reduce its orders for supplies and its road contracts drastically, it will be the French companies operating in the Congo who will suffer.' Or in other words, 'Finance our budget, the money will go back into your enterprises.' It could be that the Mitterrand-Mauroy government will be amenable to this argument for an 'upturn', that is an upturn for the companies of Bouygues, Creusot-Loire, TPM, Alstom... But it will demand tighter control over that part of the budget deficit that does not go to French companies, and which finances the Congolese leaders in their own operations. In any case, they will demand a reduction in expenditure on state functioning, and the first target will be salaries.

If the French government remains determined, the Congo will perhaps be led to declare a suspension of payment of its debts before the end of the year. (8) During the renegotiation of the schedule, it will then be the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank who will try and impose their views, undoubtedly in a more determined fashion.

The Congolese leaders are thinking how to reduce expenditure without creating sharp social agitation and without touching their own incomes. As for reducing the salaries of the ordinary government employees, at a time when there is a certain reawakening among the workers, would not that also be dangerous? Discontent is on the rise, while it has not taken the form of strikes so much as of movements of revolt during an official visit, or acts of collective sabotage. ■

8. This article was originally written in July 1983.



AROUND THE WORLD



Australian Fourth Internalists hold successful conference

SYDNEY — The Resistance and Socialist Education Conference held near here in early January culminated a year of steady growth for the revolutionary socialist movement in this country.

Attendance at the six-day conference peaked at 420, a 35 per cent increase on the previous record established in January 1983. Over half those in attendance were born outside Australia with the largest contingents coming from Turkey, Chile, El Salvador and Sri Lanka. Forty-two nationalities were represented.

The average age of participants was 25 and 51 per cent of those who registered as members of the Socialist Workers Party and/or Resistance had joined the movement since 1980. Fifteen people decided to join during the course of the conference.

The participants included members of 42 different trade unions with the largest numbers coming from the Amalgamated Metal Foundry and Shipwrights Union, and the Australian Railways Union. Forty-six different political and solidarity organisations were represented and 40 per cent of all participants were women.

The presence of such a wide cross section of the Australian working class showed that the SWP and Resistance made the most of their opportunities in 1983.

During the year a group of Turks in Melbourne, members of the organisation Revolutionary Path, fused with the SWP. Discussions held during the conference resulted in a similar group from Sydney also deciding to unite with the SWP.

A highlight of the conference was a panel featuring militant zinc miners' leaders from Rosebery in Tasmania. They told of their long struggle to prevent the closure of their mine and their town by the mining bosses. Also on the panel were SWP members who provided valuable support during a bitterly fought strike.

Another significant feature of the conference was the attendance of a number of supporters of a socialist journal distributed inside the Labor Party. This group had carried out its own fusion at the end of the year and the presence of these people indicated the growing interest in Marxism in the ranks of the Australian Labor Party.

International guests included Frej Anderson, a member of the United Secretariat of the Fourth International and a

leader of its Swedish section; Peter Camejo, a well-known United States socialist who is also a member of the International Executive Committee of the Fourth International, and Byron Ackerman representing the North Star Network, a revolutionary socialist organisation in the United States.

Anderson presented a well-received feature talk on recent workers' struggles in Europe. He described the growing isolation of the Mitterrand government in France; the anti-working class policies of the Socialist government in Spain; and the development of the 1983 strike movement in Belgium. Turning to his own country he described the effect of the return of the Social Democrat government of Olaf Palme.

Camejo presented two feature talks, on US politics and on the possibility of socialist revolution in advanced capitalist countries. Both were enthusiastically received. He ended his second talk by urging all young people to join Resistance: "I would if I could, but I can't, but you should."

The conference also heard presentations by representatives of the revolutionary movements of El Salvador and the Philippines.

Raul Torchez is the Australian representative of the Mexico-based World Front in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador. His speech was punctuated with chants of "FMLN" and at the end he was given a standing ovation as members of the audience returned his clenched fist salute.

Equally inspiring was the presentation of a representative of the New Democratic Front of the Philippines. His talk demonstrated the similarities between the struggle in his country and that in El Salvador, in particular the military tactics used by the repressive regimes and the progressive role of sections of the Catholic church. He gave a vivid account of the innovative tactics of the Filipino revolutionaries, and described the situation in the wake of the assassination of Benigno Aquino.

Always a highlight of conferences of the SWP and Resistance is the rally to launch the fund drive for the following year. On this occasion the panel of speakers included the general secretary of the Socialist Party of Australia, Peter Symon. The SPA is a party that looks to the Soviet Union as a model.

Symon's talk focused on the economic

crisis and the policies of the Hawke Labor government elected in March 1983.

He pointed out that the Prices and Incomes Accord, a social contract similar to that of the British Labour government of Harold Wilson, had done nothing to stem rising unemployment and falling wages. During the elections, he reminded the audience, Hawke and his colleagues had promised tax reforms to favor the poor, yet their first budget had increased indirect personal taxes and reduced company taxes.

Symon stressed the need to continue the work begun by the SWP and the SPA in forging a united front against the Prices and Incomes Accord, and the importance of continued co-operation in the peace movement.

In response to the fund appeal made at the rally 52,000 Australian dollars was pledged towards the year's target of 80,000.

Jim Percy, the national secretary of the SWP, gave a major address on the theme of revolutionary unity. He pointed out that the election of a Labor government with pro-capitalist policies in the midst of a capitalist crisis made the construction of a viable socialist alternative both more urgent and more feasible. The need to build broad movements in opposition to the Labor government's social contract policies presented the socialist movement with big challenges.

Observing that the penalty for failing to rise to these challenges would be costly Percy examined the plight of the Communist Party of Australia. Leaders of this party were important in convincing the trade union movement to accept the social contract with the Labor government. Eight months after the election of the Hawke government this party was clearly in a rapid membership decline and convulsed by an internal debate about whether or not to liquidate into the Labor Party.

The conference had two major components. On the first four days Resistance held its 13th national decision-making conference. This involved discussion and adoption of resolutions on the international situation and the fight against war, how revolutionaries relate to the Labor government, the role of youth in the class struggle and building Resistance. At the end of this process a new National Committee was elected by the delegates.

During the conference it was announced that the weekly socialist newspaper *Direct Action* would become a joint publication of the SWP and Resistance and that its size would be increased from 16 to 24 pages. These steps will coincide with a vigorous campaign to increase the circulation of the socialist press.

The other part of the conference spanned the full six days and involved the feature talks, the rally, a cabaret of political skits and music, and a series of educational talks on various aspects of Marxist theory.

Several Latin American participants commented that the conference had been the most internationalist event they had been involved in during up to 10 years in Australia.

Peter Camejo pointed out in one of his talks that if we were able to have it out in a worldwide poll between capitalism and socialism, we socialists would be sure to have a big majority. What emerged from the conference was a better-educated movement, confident that it will continue growing and deepening its political abilities so that it will prove equal to the task of organising the socialist victory.

"But at Volvo, the union elections are often fought out on the shop floor. Various *trade-union currents* campaign with leaflets and posters. The whole membership can thrash out the arguments and then cast their votes for the line they want to see carried out in the union officers' next term of office."

Obviously, it would be a sign of health in the trade-union movement as a whole if this sort of election became the rule instead of the exception. What chance is there that the oppositionists at Volvo can promote the development of a more militant line in other places?

Because of their national importance, the union elections at Volvo get a lot of publicity, especially — but by no means only — in the regional papers and on the local radio in Goteborg. More than a few trade-union radicals in other parts of the country draw their lessons from what happens at Volvo — through direct contacts with the opposition, through discussions at union conferences, or through the revolutionary socialist press.

This time, the effects were still more direct. Goete explained:

"In this year's group leadership elections in the shop where I work, about forty workers on temporary transfer from other Volvo plants in the country are studying our elections with some amazement. All the discussions at the coffee table in the cafeteria, the "leaflet war" and the high level of participation in the elections have planted important seeds in

Important new gains for Swedish trade union opposition

STOCKHOLM/GOTEBORG — The trade-union opposition at Volvo-Goteborg, Scandinavia's biggest workplace, made further advances in a series of elections at various levels held at the end of January. The biggest gains, as earlier, came in the Lundby truck assembly section. This has historically been the stronghold of the opposition.

The opposition won the section chairpersonship, to which Goete Kilden, also a leader of the Socialist Party (Swedish section of the Fourth International) was reelected by a big majority. It also won all the other posts up for election, including three full members of the board, three alternates and 22 representatives to the Volvo works Union Council [which represents all union members in the works].

On the average, the opposition candidates got 60% of the votes in the Lundby truck assembly section. Some 90% of the workers voted, which must be a record for Swedish elections.

The opposition ran slates in five of the other sections, as well as in several group elections in the truck factory and also in the car factory.

Some new oppositionists were elected in the car-painting section, with strong support from the big group of Finnish-speaking workers. They now represent about a thousand workers.

In other sections, the opposition's vote varied from 40% to just under 30% in the car-assembly section. In the latter section, the opposition remained far below the record vote it got in 1979, which provoked an intensive campaign by the Social Democrats, who resorted to the crudest anti-Communist scare mongering.

Both Volvo's size — there are 12,800 workers in the Goteborg works alone — and the local Union Council's role as the "pace setter" for Swedish union elections made the elections at Volvo a topic of national concern.

This attention has increased since the union opposition emerged ten years ago. The union contests have more and more become a political confrontation between the local Social Democratic leadership and the opposition fighting for decent working conditions and union democracy.

This fight will reach a new peak in a few weeks when the elections are held for the leadership of the whole Volvo works Union Council.

Goete Kilden commented on the significance of the Volvo elections for *International Viewpoint*:

"The elections for Volvo's Union Council are something of a rarity in the union movement," Goete said. "In most Swedish unions the leadership posts are filled at poorly attended annual general meetings, without any campaign by representatives of different trade-union lines. At most, there might be some personal infighting and intrigue among the Social Democratic leaders in the workplace.

The development of the Trade Union Opposition

For nearly ten years now the Trade-Union Opposition at Volvo-Goteborg, with its 12,800 workers, have been the driving force behind the demands of the membership.

The Trade-Union Opposition has become a general label for the radical trade-union left in the Volvo Union Council. It is not a structured organization with statutes, a membership list, an elected leadership or finances of its own. Rather, it is a movement, a loose current, given form by the initiatives of the shop stewards who represent it and by the leadership of campaigns for contract struggles and union elections.

Like any current, the opposition ebbs and flows. In every upturn, it has filled up with politically unaffiliated workers. In downturns, the political elements play a more important role. In many union actions as well as elections, the name of the Trade-Union Opposition is not used, but in most cases the workers involved identify with the current or base themselves on its platform.

Nationally, the opposition has perhaps become best known and had the biggest impact in connection with the demand for more rank-and-file democracy, in particular for the right of the membership to vote on their contracts. But the opposition's long-term struggle against the Social Democrats' incomes policy has struck a chord elsewhere.

Moreover, the fight against poor working conditions and the speedup, especially on the assembly line, has been one of the opposition's main concerns.

In the fight against increasing the number of days that workers have to be out sick before they can collect full benefits, the opposition has also been in the forefront.

The name "Trade-Union Opposition" came into use throughout the whole Volvo-Goteborg works for the first time at the time of the local Volvo elections in 1975. It represented an electoral bloc including politically unaffiliated forces, the Socialist Party activists and the Swedish Communist Party (VPK). There were other left groups besides the VPK, but they have since died out. The VPK itself underwent a split, with its former members going to the Workers Communist Party [APK, the anti-Euro-Communist wing].

Today, the Socialist Party is the only organized political force that supports this united-front line.

For further details about the Trade-Union Opposition, see the background interview with Goete Kilden, "Ten years of building class-struggle unionism in Sweden's biggest plant," *International Viewpoint*, No 34, July 11, 1983.

the minds of many of them that may take root in other places in the country.

"Overall, we are satisfied with the results. Where things went well, we gained new bases for the future. Where things did not go so well, in general this was because the mobilization was not strong enough, because the opposition's arguments were not got out. Here we can draw some important lessons for the future, because we are still far from getting the results we *could* get."

Goete thought also that the severe handicaps imposed on the opposition could not be overstressed. The opposition, for example, cannot run a slate under the name of the "Trade Union Opposition." The engineering workers congress decided this in 1980 in an obvious attempt to limit the room for union opposition currents.

The Volvo opposition now has to run its candidates either on a general "strike-off" slate, that is, one where all the candidates are listed, and the voters strike off the name of those whom they do not want; or else run them under a *party* label. For an opposition that is broader than the support for any party, this is a problem.

"In particular when the elections cover large groups of workers and there are a lot of candidates, since it is harder for the workers to have personal knowledge of them, the strike-off slate is a big handicap," Goete said. "I can cite just one case that I know about personally that happened at the polling station in my group. The vote is supposed to be secret, and a lot of union members found it difficult to know who to strike off, since it is forbidden to ask for help from fellow workers."

In this same election, outside the Lundby plant, the opposition had to cope with this handicap.

"Outside Lundby, for the first time, we tried running under the name of a bloc between the Socialist Party and unaffiliated workers. The high vote we got on the average is a good indication that this can be a better method for overcoming the hurdles set up by the bureaucracy," Goete said.

The SP-Volvo leader was convinced, moreover, that the Volvo election should be taken as a warning by the Social Democratic leaders in other places.

"The results indicate a reaction against the poor policies of the Social Democrats in government, the severe austerity policy and bureaucratic misuse of power."

This opinion is supported by other local elections recently where candidates who distinguished themselves over a long period through consistent defense of the interests of their fellow workers made gains against *graa sossar* ("grey SDs," a term used for right-wing Social Democratic loyalists).

However, Bjoern Mattsson, the spokesperson for the Social Democratic Party leadership at Volvo, has tried to present the opposition's gains as a purely *personal* triumph for Goete Kilden. He denies that the Social Democrats' big losses in the

Lundby plant reflect a lack of confidence in the policy of the Social Democratic Party, either nationally or locally.

continued from page 28

women's meeting also called for a day of struggle against austerity which was to converge with the general strike movement.

It was proposed that in each neighbourhood some form of organisation should be set up that would carry out the various tasks decided at the meeting; whether these were committees, women's leagues, etc., which would encourage women to participate and allow for the exchange of experience and ideas. For the Conamup itself it was decided to set up a national co-ordinating committee in which all the regions belonging to the Conamup would be represented. This structure would also have a certain flexibility, allowing specific working groups to also function. A second meeting should take place within a year.

It is important to point out that a number of male comrades attended the meeting. The organising committee for the conference had decided that men who wished to could attend, and that they would discuss the different topics among themselves, thus allowing the women to express themselves freely and openly, without any inhibitions. Thus there was one workshop of some twenty men. At the end of the meeting they read a message containing their conclusions. They recognised a series of errors and wrong ideas that capitalist society had educated them in, and called on their companions in struggle to make an effort to abandon these attitudes. This contribution of the male comrades was warmly welcomed.

Although the content of the different resolutions was a sign of the broad character of the conference and a general consensus emerged in the plenary session, there is still a long way to go in the ideological debate. Some very different positions were put forward on the specific problems of women and possible solutions, and the debates were not always easy in either the workshops or the plenary.

'Women decide' — everywhere! (DR)



This sort of self-satisfaction can set the Social Democrats up for some serious shocks in the future. ■

All the organisations represented were certainly in agreement on the existence of the oppression of women, but the extent of this oppression and the ways of fighting it were far from being commonly agreed. In the women's movement, or certain components of it, there is the idea that the socialist revolution, and women's participation in the process of bringing it about, will liberate them and they have no need to undertake a specific struggle for their liberation. The idea that feminism in general — without taking account of the different currents who describe themselves thus — creates divisions between men and women is deeply rooted. As if this division did not already exist in real life!

It was clear from all the discussion and experiences put forward that all the inhabitants of the *colonias* have to wage a common struggle against the land and property owners. But they also know that as women they suffer from particular conditions to which they are subject, both in the family and society as a whole. Some women were reduced to tears as they told of their own personal experiences, their life as the mother of more than ten children, the fact that they were beaten by their husbands, or that their daughters were raped and sacked from work because they were pregnant. Women who for years and years had been only doing the cooking, the washing and giving birth. However, the idea of fighting for something a bit more than sheer survival had got into them.

For some women from political organisations who can choose whether to have children, who are not battered women, who benefit from a different cultural level, this reality of the situation for women of the poorer and working-class layers of society seemed not very important, secondary. For them the only contradiction is the class contradiction. 'For us, wrote *Bandera Socialista*, we have to fight this society from every standpoint.'

What came out as the most important at this meeting is that the discussion stays open and that it is not now limited to small groups of radicalised women but can be taken into the heart of the organised mass movement. It was decided that there should be space set aside in the Conamup bulletin for the question of women, which in the future could be a place for debate.

A plan of action was also widely discussed, many proposals put forward and experiences of struggles such as the first national protest exchanged. The resolutions adopted at the Durango conference represent a big step forward for women's struggle and open up the possibility of very good perspectives for the future. All the organisations interested in the struggle for women's liberation should seize this opportunity, particularly in order to prepare for International Women's Day. ■

March 8 – women oppose austerity and war drive



March 8, International Women's Day, is the occasion throughout the world when women take to the streets, and organise meetings, debates and other actions. The focus of this activity is to defend and extend their rights as workers and equal citizens, and highlight the specific oppression that they face as women, as well as demonstrating solidarity with their sisters all over the world.

Not surprisingly, the themes that will be taken up this year turn around the effects of the economic crisis on women as workers and in the family, and opposition to the imperialist arms race. The British women's peace movement, for example, will be demonstrating outside an arms conference in London organised by the Technical Marketing Society from the US (entrance to which costs a mere £380) on 'New Trends in Nuclear Weapons'. Other women from Britain will be crossing to Ireland to support their Irish sisters in a picket of Armagh women's gaol in the North where women Republican political prisoners are held.

In many countries in Europe a major focus of women's mobilisations will be opposition to bosses' attempts to force women to accept part-time work or 'flexible' working hours as a first step towards denying them a place in the work force. The 'Women Against the Crisis' co-ordinations that exist in Belgium and Turin in Italy will be taking up this theme. In Italy, as in Switzerland where the question of work time is also a major focus, there will also be opposition to attempts to raise the retirement age for women, in the name of 'equality'.

As well as rights as workers, women are also fighting for the right to control their own bodies, whether against violent assault and rape, a principal theme of the mobilisations in the Spanish state, or for the right to abortion — a major question still in the Spanish state as well as in Ireland where even a limited right to abortion has still not been achieved. In France, although abortion is possible in the first ten weeks — and paid for by the state — the government's policy is to encourage a higher birth rate. For example, they have just announced a new allowance for the third child in the family — a not so subtle 'encouragement' that the French women's movement will be opposing on March 8.

Among the women's groups calling for a demonstration on March 8 in Paris is a group of women from the Maghreb, North Africa. This highlights another theme present in many of the activities in Europe, the specific problems and demands for equal rights for immigrant women, and opposition to racism, which often hits hardest at women who are less integrated as workers and citizens into the 'host' society.

Similar themes will be taken up in demonstrations and other activities in the other advanced capitalist countries; the United States where opposition to nuclear weapons, reproductive rights and international solidarity are common themes in the planned activities. Australian women will be demonstrating in Melbourne and Sydney.

The same general themes find their reflection in the activities of women in the semi-colonial and under-developed countries. In India the demands for March 8 elaborated by the Women's Forum in Bombay centre around the particular problems of violence against women — the treatment of women who are victims of rape used as a method of repression by state forces, preventing and punishing 'dowry deaths' and so on.

For the poor peasant and working class women of Mexico the questioning of their traditional role in the family is only beginning, and the struggle against their specific oppression is very much linked to the fight for decent living standards and democratic rights for the whole population. The article below, summarised from *Bandera Socialista*, paper of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, Mexican section of the Fourth International, reports on some of the first important steps being made in the self-organisation of women in these layers.

Leslie SERNA

Almost 450 women from the working class and popular neighbourhoods (*colonias*) of Mexico came to the first national conference of women of the Urban People's Movement (CONAMUP). This took place on November 25, 26 and 27 in the town of Durango. There were women present from almost all the neighbourhoods of the capital, Mexico City, members of Conamup, as well as other women from the capital, and from Sinaloa, Nayarit, Tijuana, Torreon, Jalapa, Taxco, Chilpancingo, Morelos, Guadalajara, Monterrey and Zacatecas, thus representing most regions of the country.

The discussion, organised in workshops, particularly centred on the following themes: women, work and family; women and the present situation in the *colonias*; forms of organisation and alternative solutions. On the last day the results of these discussions were presented in a general assembly.

This was the first time that a body bringing together several currents of the workers movement had called a special meeting of women to discuss their specific role and situation in the class struggle. *Bandera Socialista*, newspaper of the Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, Mexican section of the Fourth International, published a dossier on this meeting in its December issues. (See Nos 277, 278 and 279). Here it described as a historic step forward that a co-ordinating body of this size and importance had taken up the specific question of women.

The resolutions that came out of the meeting clearly established that women are oppressed, explaining the forms in which this is expressed in the particular case of poor urban zones, and its expression even in democratic organisations and the need to fight it.

The meeting demanded that Conamup take on various tasks, ranging from the education and training of women to aiding them to take on leadership tasks within popular mass organisations.

The meeting took place at a time when the Mexican workers and democratic movement was preparing a second national day of protest (which did not finally take place) following that of October 19, 1983 (see *International Viewpoint*, No 40, 1983). In this context the