

International VIEWPOINT

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International VIEWPOINT

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EDITORIAL

CHRISTMAS could look a bit brighter here at *International Viewpoint*. Although many of our supporters have been contributing to our subscription and fund drive, there are some weak spots, and so the overall effort appears less. Moreover, many introductory subscriptions from our last drive are about to run out.

In these days, it requires a special effort to keep an international publication going, and the minute our supporters lapse into complacency we start to see the negative results. In particular, we were hoping that we could get enough initial support to restore the issue for the second half of July, which we had to cut two years ago. But it is now far from certain that we will be able to do so. The small size of our print run means that printing costs still make up a large proportion of our total costs.

Even an increase of a few hundred in circulation would significantly reduce this.

There is, however, a way to brighten up Christmas at *IV* and that of potential readers at the same time. *IV* would make an excellent Christmas present for revolutionary activists and students of international politics.

At the end of the year, unfortunately our circulation usually drops. We assume that is because people are putting off whatever outlays they can in order to save for Christmas presents and the like. The problem is that the holidays are a festival of commodity fetishism, and subscriptions to magazines are not considered in that category.

But a subscription to *IV* would have much more use value than traditional gift goods. It would continue for six months to a year (depending on the generosity of the donor), and its value would grow rather than fade with the usual post-Christmas letdown. Furthermore, many gift subscriptions would help us increase the value of the magazine for all its readers. ★

The anti-imperialist movement after Enniskillen

AN IRA BOMB explosion in Enniskillen while crowds were gathering on November 8 to commemorate British war dead opened the way for a propaganda and repressive campaign against the revolutionary anti-imperialist movement in Ireland. Eleven people were killed in a crowd including many elderly people and children.

The bombing was portrayed by the pro-imperialist press and authorities, as well as the Irish conciliationists, as an attack on Protestant people as such. All sections of the Irish people were shocked by the pointless suffering of harmless individuals. The Republican leadership characterized the planting of the bomb as a grave error, saying that it had been triggered accidentally and was not intended to harm civilians.

Such errors have in fact been a feature of the IRA's guerrilla campaign from the very beginning, being related to the difficulties of small popular units waging war against a massive modern military machine. Enniskillen was thus far from the first such error, and previous ones were no less costly in innocent human lives.

But this miscarried operation came in the context of general loss of momentum of the Republicans' political campaigning and of increased losses of militants involved in the armed struggle. It thus exposed the Republicans and the anti-imperialist movement as a whole to particularly grave dangers. They are illustrated by the widespread raids of homes of anti-imperialist activists that came in the wake of Enniskillen. Although these coordinated operations of the Dublin and imperialist repressive forces were ostensibly searches for arms, the net was cast wide enough to include purely political activists, such as Ann Conway of the Dublin branch of People's Democracy, Irish section of the Fourth International.

In the following article, a leader of People's Democracy takes up the dangers of the post-Enniskillen imperialist and pro-imperialist offensive and how to meet them.

JOHN McANULTY

JOINING IN the British hue and cry against the anti-imperialist struggle, the representatives of bourgeois nationalism, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) in the North, and the major southern parties have been no less hysterical.

Their hysteria is tinged by relief. The tragedy occurred just a few days before the second anniversary of the Anglo-Irish

agreement, which committed Dublin to actively support the continuation of British rule and Unionist ascendancy in the North, in return for cosmetic reforms that would supposedly guarantee equality for Catholics within the northern state.

Two years later, there is still no reform. But the British have been pressing the bourgeois nationalists to support new repressive measures — the extradition of re-

publican suspects from the south and an anti-violence pledge to effectively ban Sinn Fein, the political wing of the republican movement, from elections in the North.

Now the Enniskillen tragedy has become cover for a massive wave of repression north and south. It has become clear that the Dublin government intends to introduce an extradition law permitting extradition of Republicans to Diplock [no jury] courts in the North. The Northern bourgeois nationalist party, the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), has swung behind the new repression, announcing that it was withdrawing cooperation from councillors that support violence, thereby paving the way for excluding Sinn Fein from local government.

A fortnight after the deaths, what president of Sinn Fein Gerry Adams called the "hidden agenda of the Anglo-Irish agreement" was shown in the coordination of Irish and British state forces in a single all-Ireland imperialist offensive involving raids on Sinn Fein offices and mass arrests of republican activists. The Catholic hierarchy have issued a statement declaring it a sin to support the anti-imperialist struggle.

Gerry Adams has refused to condemn military action by the IRA, but in a shift of emphasis said that he would not attempt to justify the bombing and that it should never have happened.

Need to review strategy and tactics

Despite the many correct points made in Sinn Fein's statements about the hypocrisy of the British government and the source of the violence, the Republicans have tended to withdraw into themselves and not to build a broad counter-attack to expose the hypocrisy of the imperialists and the neo-colonialists.

There is a need to review the tactics and strategy of the anti-imperialist struggle. How has the republican movement become so dangerously isolated just a year after Gerry Adams proclaimed the primacy of politics and urged a turn to the left?

The history of Irish republicanism is the history of the domination of the military organization over the political wing. In practice, the military command still has overall authority in the eyes of most activists.

Also there has traditionally been confusion about the role of Irish capitalism. When the Anglo-Irish agreement was signed, Sinn Fein were conducting an electoral unity offensive directed at the SDLP, one of the main supporters of the agreement. The Republicans did not attempt to campaign against the collaborators. The first test of the new political orientation came with last year's general election in the 26 counties.

Sinn Fein did badly, with around two per

cent of the vote. They had not defined a political line at their ard-fheis [conference], but had looked to a pragmatic process of development through electoral and community struggles. The result was a manifesto that included a formal statement of opposition to imperialism, but which did not point up imperialist control of the 26 county neo-colony in a clear enough way to distinguish it sufficiently from the reformist parties of the left.

Election result a blow for Republican leaders

The election result was a real blow for the Republican leadership. The absence of mass struggle or electoral victories prompted caution. A stagist view of the revolutionary process began to develop, with Gerry Adams declaring "socialism is not on the agenda."

The results of this were seen at the ard-fheis debate this year. Discussions of major issues in the class struggle were either opposed by the leadership or relegated to the side lines. In his presidential address, Gerry Adams said "most people will not struggle, never mind vote, for abstract things. The big ideas the party has about liberation, nationalism and independence will have to develop out of the small ideas concerned with local grievances, protests, aspirations."

Rarely can a political orientation have survived so short a time. Within a week, the Enniskillen tragedy had ensured that the battle centered around the "big ideas." Who was to win the allegiance of the Irish people? The imperialists and capitalists with their calls for the imposition of order, or the anti-imperialists calling for freedom?

Good possibilities for a fightback

In the mid-1970s, a similar isolation of the military struggle and a strategic weakness of the anti-imperialist movement led to the formation of the pro-imperialist "Peace People."

Such a movement is unlikely now. Partly because the masses have gone through that experience. But mostly because the masses of the working people, despite all this hysteria, have not rejected the republicans. They accept that the Enniskillen deaths were accidental, while recognizing dangers posed by the policy that led to them.

There are thus good possibilities for a fightback. The Irish bourgeoisie are locked in a crisis which compels them to keep in step together behind a common political and economic policy of collaboration with imperialism. The present government in Dublin has a majority of one. But on every major issue, they can count on the support of the opposition. This eases conflict over

alternative strategies. But it also reduces their room for maneuver and increases their isolation from the masses of the population.

The Anglo-Irish agreement was meant to provide cover for such collaboration. In practice, Unionist resistance has badly worried Britain. They cannot afford to see the mass base on which their military occupation of the North rests become completely demoralized. For that reason, they have called a halt to cosmetic reform, and the Dublin government has been pushed into a tight corner, from which the Enniskillen tragedy cannot extricate it.

The Anglo-Irish agreement has not succeeded in altering the basic situation. If it had, there could be no conflict now in the Dublin parliament over extradition. If it had, the Sinn Fein vote in the North would have collapsed, and there would be no need for trying to exclude Sinn Fein from elections.

Socialism has to be on the agenda

The Republicans can still rise to the challenge. They are now a more political movement with a mature and experienced leadership. Stagism is not yet a hardened current.

The dominant characteristic of the leadership is a flexible pragmatism. Politicization has led to the emergence of a number of currents within the movement. The prisoners have formed Marxist study circles, and are urging the movement to have the results of their study included in its strategic discussions.

At the recent ard-fheis the debates were more rooted in the actual movements and struggles of the masses. This was very evident in the debate on women's rights and around resolutions on the struggles of organized workers.

The extradition of militants and the growing coordination of state forces on both sides of the Irish border have created a great deal of resentment among working people. Before the extradition machinery can really roll, the Irish state will have to face risky battles to extradite militants for the sort of activities that distinguished its alleged founding fathers.

The British plan to ban Sinn Fein is no mere administrative matter but involves disenfranchising a major section of the northern electorate, stripping away the last pretences of democracy in the northern statelet.

People's Democracy, the Irish section of the Fourth International, will discuss building a fightback with the Republicans and other anti-imperialists.

We will argue that in this struggle socialism has to be on the agenda, that Irish capitalism has to be identified as an enemy and that the organized power of the working class is a major weapon in the fight for Irish freedom. ★

Editorial from An Phoblacht/ Republican News November 12

The terrible price of British rule

"Republicans will never forget it, and in the ongoing struggle to end injustice and bring about a free, peaceful Ireland, will carry it in their hearts and minds forever"

THE REPUBLICAN MOVEMENT, its members and supporters everywhere have been shocked and shaken by what happened in Enniskillen last Sunday [November 8]. We do not try to excuse or defend the action which caused the deaths and injuries inflicted by the IRA bomb.

The most telling criticism of this disastrous IRA action has come from republicans themselves.

To the families and friends of the dead, and to the injured, the sympathy of republicans goes out. It will be no consolation to them, and will be scorned or ignored by those who do not wish to understand the suffering of *all* of our people.

But bereavement and injury are things republicans deeply understand because they have experienced them at first-hand so many times.

"The consequences will be with us for a long time"

After the dead, the injured and their relatives, it is republicans who have directly to lose from this action. Its consequences will be with us for a long time to come because of our sorrow and because our enemies — the enemies of the Irish people — are so strong and have been strengthened by it.

Those enemies who have inflicted so much suffering on our people for centuries — and in particular in the last 20 years — have been quick to use the grief of the victims of the reaction of people generally to further their political ends. The British government has secretly revelled in the opportunity this has given them to justify their occupation of our country. When the emotions of this week have eased, the vast majority of the Irish people will recognize the talk of Margaret Thatcher and Tom King [British secretary of state for Northern Ireland] for the hypocrisy that it is.

The current phase of the war in the Six Counties, which enters its 20th year in 1988, has wrecked many lives. Our people,

nationalist or unionist, are not to blame for that war, no more than they are responsible ultimately for the death and suffering which foreign interference has brought to our land over hundreds of years. Generations of Irish people have tried to end injustice and bring about change by peaceful means and have been met with British violence.

Twenty years ago, the present phase of nationalist resistance to British-sponsored injustice began with the campaign for civil rights. It did not begin with the IRA going out to shoot RUC men or British soldiers, but with ordinary Catholics demanding simple reforms within the Northern state — votes and houses and jobs. The guns and batons which were used against them by the forces of the state are now part of history. Many people have died since, but the basic injustices which existed then — the denial of civil and national rights — are still maintained and defended with British guns.

If that was not the case, there would be no IRA. There would be no support for the IRA or any reason for the IRA to exist. But the support and the reason are facts and will remain so as long as Britain continues to deny our people the right to national self-determination. Where there is oppression, there will always be resistance; where there is armed oppression, there will always be armed resistance.

Those who this week have hypocritically hidden behind the bereaved and blamed the IRA for the entire war are not interested in peace. They have thrown in their lot with the British government, which holds the key to peace, but which, by enforcing its unjust rule here, withholds it. There can be no peace without justice. If the IRA laid down its arms tomorrow, it will not bring peace.

Next Sunday the Catholic pulpits of Ireland will thunder with denunciations of the Republican Movement and the bishops will brand as sinful anyone who supports the republican cause. It has happened many times before, and has changed nothing,

least of all the injustice which is the root cause of violence.

The statement which will be read out is one of the most dishonest that has ever emanated from the Catholic Hierarchy. It refers to the "present campaigns of republican violence" and implicitly lays the blame for the violence and deaths in the Six Counties on republicans. It links the Republican Movement with the renegade criminal elements responsible for the kidnapping and maiming of John O'Grady. This is a lie and the Catholic hierarchy knows it as well as everybody else.

Double standards about peace

In attempting to morally blackmail people, the hierarchy is showing its double-standards about peace. It says that it "sympathizes" with the "police force" in the Six Counties, but that it is "sinful to join organizations committed to violence or to remain in them". They are clearly saying that British violence is not sinful. We strongly contest that view. The bishops have not tried to end the war but have taken sides in it — the side of the powerful, the establishment.

The position of republicans has not changed. But not because we want this war. Our people have suffered bereavement, physical and mental injury and long years of imprisonment. We go on because the state of our country demands it and because we know that peace with justice cannot come short of a free Ireland. Armed resistance to British rule will bring that freedom because it is ultimately the most necessary political weapon against an armed aggressor and the only one the aggressor will heed. The experience of oppressed peoples all over the world and, most of all, in our history, proves that. That is the tragic context in which the Enniskillen bombing took place. Republicans will never forget it, and in the ongoing struggle to end injustice and bring about a free, peaceful Ireland will carry it their hearts and minds forever. ★ **5**



Rank and file organize against austerity

ITALIAN WORKERS have had enough of wage freezes and are no longer willing to accept the shilly-shallying of the union leaderships, who are busy managing the austerity. Strikes have been taking place since September in the transport sector and especially on the railways. (See back page for a report on the latest situation).

This article on the background to the growing militancy was first published in the paper of the French section of the Fourth International, *Rouge*, on November 25.

ALEXANDRE LYS

“MORE DELAYS for passengers: chaos returns to the airports.” No, that is not a headline from an Italian tabloid. It was on the front-page of *l'Unita*, the daily paper of the Italian Communist Party, over a report announcing a four-hour strike on November 16. Called by the three unions in the Italian state airline, Alitalia, and the airports, the walkout paralyzed transport in Italy.

Since the beginning of September, many industrial actions have disrupted air transport. They have been focused on getting a new three-year contract in which the main issues are wages and the length of the working week.

Air transport workers are the worst paid in the industry in Italy, and transportation itself lags behind other industries, such as engineering. A skilled airplane mechanic, with fifteen years seniority, earns about \$1,000 a month for a forty-hour week.

The unions are calling for a monthly raise of about \$300, along with a two and a half hours reduction in the work-week. The last contract dates back to 1981, but was not renewed when it legally expired. So the present one is two and a half years overdue, and real negotiations started only in June. Last year was marked by a series of struggles in sectors of the industry, in particular airplane maintenance, over “flexible” working hours and staffing.

In September, a mobilization of air transport workers started with a series of very well supported revolving strikes that put the Alitalia management and the government on the defensive. During this struggle, there was a very strong upsurge of rank and file militancy, with the setting up of rank and file committees in some sectors.

The authority of the trade-unions is in fact sharply disputed, despite a high level of unionization (55 per cent). There have been no elections to the enterprise council for five years. Bugged down in co-management, the unions have refused to organize them.

Self-organization of railworkers

Other workers very much in the news have been train drivers and more generally train crews. Here the struggle was launched by the ranks and has led to six strikes that brought out an average of 95 per cent of the workers concerned. The train drivers are also strongly unionized. But, facing the hesitations of the union leaderships, they have formed a united coordinating committee. They are threatening to call a new 48-hour general strike at the end of November.

The railway workers are also fighting over wages and working conditions. Subsequently, a new coordinating committee representing other categories in the train crews, such as conductors, was formed.

In any case, in rail, the rank and file committees, the COBAS, are continuing to apply pressure. Lightning strikes are organized by professional categories on a regional basis in this very decentralized country. One day, it may be the cleaners in Siena or the railworkers in Venice, another the conductors in Milan. In short, delays are multiplying on a rail network that already had a record number in ordinary times. Trains are shunted away from regions affected by stoppages.

Unlike France, Italian railworkers have a long experience of self-organization. The COBAS have existed for a very long time, having survived, like those in the engineering industry, since the Italian “Creeping May” of 1969. They also very often serve

as local organizations for the three unions.

Finally, in education, after the strong mobilization in the spring against a contract signed by the ministry and the three unions, the fight led by the COBAS remains very substantial. Other strike mobilizations are already in the offing.

Today, after more than ten years of austerity accepted by the three main union confederations and all the parliamentary parties (from the Communists to the Social Democrats), workers' combativity is clearly reviving.

Distrust of the union bureaucracies

Italian workers are sick of having their wages frozen, especially when they have been regaled with stories about the virtues of Italian economic recovery, and they have not seen any benefits from this.

These initial struggles are also shaped by a distrust of the union bureaucracies, which are torn between their acceptance of austerity and the need to maintain their base among the workers. This is why struggles that were at first sectoral and won a lot of support have given rise to forms of self-organization and debates about the possibility of reforming the unions or the need for building new ones.

For the time being, the ruling coalition government, which includes the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and the Christian Democracy, is taking a tough line. It is threatening to push an anti-strike law through the Senate, providing for advance notice of strikes, during which time work stoppages would be illegal. Another bill would also ban walkouts on holidays and during vacations, as well as lightning strikes.

Finally, the government is threatening to use a law adopted under Mussolini against the railway stoppage projected for the end of November, making it possible to conscript the workers.

However, the government has been weakened by the repercussions of a recent referendum, in which nuclear energy was rejected, despite a campaign by the Christian Democrats. It has also been divided again over a finance law as a result of the drop in stock prices.

The three confederations called for a four-hour general strike against the finance law on November 25, impelled by the need to offer their base some perspectives. At the same time, they are trying to control it by proposing a “self-regulation” of strikes (even taking up certain provisions of the anti-strike law), which is to be decided on locally in the contract negotiations.

The revolutionary left is in the forefront of the fight. The teachers' COBAS, a conference of the railworkers' coordinating committees, of delegations of air transport workers, as well as of workers from other enterprises met on Sunday November 15 to issue a call for mobilizing. ★

Defending the right to strike

ELETTRA DEIANA, a leading member of the Italian section of the Fourth International, the LCR, explained to Cecilia Garmendia what happened at the recent November 21/22 meeting of the COBAS.

■ **THIS WEEKEND**, a national meeting of the COBAS was held. What came out of it?

COBAS representing all categories took part in the meeting — teachers, railway workers, postal workers, subway workers. The airport workers now on strike could not take part, but sent a message of support.

The meeting was rather representative. There were 700 people there. The assembly decided to call a national demonstration in Rome on December 12 in defence of the right to strike. The government is trying to "regularize" the right to strike in services and the public sector. This national meeting was called by the teacher's COBAS to discuss that. A decision was made by the national commissions of the COBAS (including leaders of the various industries), so eliminating the need for a vote in the assembly, which would have been premature.

This decision has to be ratified in the various industries and in the local structures of the COBAS. In the coming weeks, the demonstration will have to be confirmed by the categories that have mobilized over recent months. I think it will be. This is a demonstration unaccompanied by a strike, with both a political and trade-union objective. Delegations will go to Rome on Saturday, December 12.

■ **What debates took place at this coordinating meeting of the COBAS?**

The debate centered primarily around the question of the right to strike and on the linkup between the various struggles that have developed over these last weeks. But there was also debate over the self-organization of workers outside the union's bureaucratic structures.

The left current in the CGIL (Democrazia Consiliare, Council Democracy) took part in the meeting, as well as a left section of the CGIL teachers' union in Rome, which for months has given impetus to organizing what are termed "self-called assemblies," bringing together 300 to 400 left teachers.

■ **What are the perspectives for the movement?**

In the public sector and the services, there are very great possibilities for mobilization. New contract negotiations are coming up in many categories.

A vanguard is developing. Yesterday's

meeting showed that. It began to take responsibility for questions going beyond the problems of specific categories. It posed political problems of management,

more general questions. But they have to be careful not to go too quickly in order not to cut themselves off from the broad masses of working people. ★

US oil companies refuse to handle Cuban petrol in Nicaragua

EVERY MORNING from 6am on, long lines of cars pull up front of Managua's Shell station a good while before it opens. Other filling stations are empty. For many days, Chevron, Esso and Texaco have not brought in petrol. Trucks come in every afternoon only at Shell stations and fill up the tanks so that every car in the daily lines can get a maximum of 12 liters.

Keeping in mind the worldwide boycott campaign against Shell's because of its trade with South Africa, it is an astonishing sight in revolutionary Nicaragua to see crowds of people going to their stations. But this patronizing of Shell is certainly not a reflection of any enthusiasm for South Africa among Nicaraguans. It is rather due to the fact that the three US companies — Texaco, Esso and Chevron — are refusing to bring Cuban petrol to their filling stations.

Nicaragua has normally received its fuel from the Soviet Union, but in order to cover an acute shortfall in deliveries, the Cubans sent a full petrol tanker to the northern Nicaraguan port of Corinto. The US-owned companies have a rule that they cannot transport or sell Cuban products. The English- and Dutch-owned holding company Shell does not have the same rules, and at the moment is the only company in Nicaragua distributing the Cuban petrol.

Nicaragua is 100 per cent dependent on imports of petrol and diesel fuel. Earlier, Mexico and Venezuela, among others, provided some of this. Now, the Soviet Union has become the sole supplier.

Petrol is rationed. Every car owner is allocated 17 gallons a month (about 70 liters). Those who have specific work-related needs can apply for more. And there is an extensive trade in petrol ration tickets on the black market.

From November on, diesel fuel will also be rationed, and diplomats and foreign aid workers will have to pay for fuel in dollars. The price is cheap — less than about 30 cents a liter. In cordobas, the local currency, the price is even cheaper — 1,000 cor-

dobas. Petrol is refined at Nicaragua's only refinery, which is in Managua. It is owned by Exxon.

When the Sandinistas took power in the country in 1979, 168 US firms were operating in the country. Thirty of them were nationalized. Some wound down their activities, and now there are only about a dozen left, including IBM and Exxon. No new US companies have come in over the last eight years.

The Exxon refinery is in a key position in the Nicaraguan economy and industry. It processes 10,000 barrels of Soviet oil a day, but cannot touch the Cuban oil. So gasoline is shipped in already refined from Cuba. This is also of Soviet origin. Cuba gets only a tiny proportion of its petroleum from its own wells. The bulk comes 10,000 kilometers from the Soviet Union.

One of October's major stories in Nicaragua also had to do with gasoline. The minister for international cooperation, Henry Ruiz, made a new proposal for foreign investment in the country. In a speech to the Nicaraguan parliament he said that there were good chances of striking oil in Nicaragua, but "We will need \$100 million and the sort of equipment that only a multinational corporation could have."

Paradoxically, it was the right-wing opposition that was unhappy about the Sandinistas' proposal to open the doors for multinational corporations. "They want to sell the fatherland," some rightists even commented.

Until Nicaragua can pump its own oil, motorists will have to continue to line up in front of the Shell tanks, and save on gas, so that their 70 liters will last the whole month. The other filling stations will open up when the petrol from the Cuban tanker runs out and Soviet fuel is back in the tanks, refined by one of US industrialists' last bastions in revolutionary Nicaragua — the venerable Exxon refinery, which will soon be 25 years old. ★

[From the November 12 issue of *Klassekampen*, paper of the SA, Danish section of the Fourth International.]

Rajiv in quicksand?

INDIAN FORCES in the Tamil area of Sri Lanka were put at 40,000 on November 26 by Rajiv Gandhi's defence minister, KC Pant. The figure was nearly double previous estimates. Pant's account of the Indian commitment, given in answer to a question in parliament, seems to reflect a further escalation of his government's involvement in the Sri Lankan ethnic conflict.

The Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) now far outnumbers the security forces of the Sri Lankan state. Significant voices are beginning to be raised in India to express fears that Rajiv Gandhi has bitten off more than he can chew.

GERRY FOLEY

AFTER THE LAUNCHING of the Indian offensive against Jaffna, the major city of the Tamil heartland in northern Sri Lanka, the major Indian news magazine *India Today* commented in its October 31 issue:

"The initial assessment that the action would be over in five days was later revised to 20 days. The very fact that IPKF strength in northern and eastern Sri Lanka was doubled to an official 16,000 (unofficial sources put it closer to 30,000) and supplemented with squadrons of tanks, APCs [armoured personnel carriers] and even a battalion of para-commanders who air-dropped over Jaffna, indicates that the IPKF has literally caught a tiger by the tail."

Furthermore, the Indian magazine quoted statements from Tamil moderates expressing concern about the political effects of the Indian offensive. Dr Neelan Tiruchelvam, described as "a leading Colombo lawyer" and a former MP for the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF, the Tamil parliamentary party), said:

"The action of the IPKF in launching its military offensive against the LTT [the Tigers] is a set-back to the whole peace process. It is alienating significant sections of the Tamil population, because a large section of the Tamil population had emotionally identified itself with the Tigers."

In its following issue, November 15, *India Today's* worries increased. "On October 26, Jaffna fell to the IPKF and the guns were silenced, but the war is far from over." Even taking the IPKF's figures on the Tiger casualties, it estimated "at least 1,500 Tigers have managed to evade the IPKF noose and mingle with the locals or have escaped to other areas." It went on to point out: "The Tigers are certain to carry

on their guerrilla war using the hit-and-run tactics similar to the terrorists in Punjab. The only difference is that they will be facing the Indian Army who privately admit that they could be bogged down in northern and eastern Sri Lanka for at least another two years. In fact, according to top level defence sources, the Indian Army is in the process of setting up a reserve Southern Command headquarters sector in northern Sri Lanka under Lt-General Khajuria, a former director of Military Intelligence, which obviously means that they are prepared to stay around for some time."

The same issue carried an unusual report from behind the Tiger lines by correspondent Shyam Tekwani. He took note of brutalization and fanaticism of the youthful guerrillas. "Occasionally the blood just came through, when they pulled out chocolates from the shirt pocket of a bloody corpse and passed them around while idly kicking at the remains of a human brain."

But he was also impressed by their conviction and the way that they had been hardened by a long war with the Sri Lankan security forces: "Their confidence, after two weeks of fighting, comes from their conviction that the IPKF is untrained in the kind of urban guerrilla warfare that, for many Tigers, has been their whole life. The trademark cyanide phials [for suicide, if captured] are no longer worn inside their shirts but flaunted openly." Tekwani was convinced that popular support for the Tigers remained firm: "There is no mistaking the complete identification of the Jaffna civilian with the LTTE fighters."

In its next issue, *India Today* expressed the fear that the Indian government was also getting bogged down on the Sinhalese front: "New Delhi's entanglement in the Sri Lankan situation is starting to drag it

ever deeper into the shifting sea of quicksand that the island's ethnic crisis now resembles." While in the Tamil north, "the daily body count is a sobering reminder that the battle will continue to be a bloody one," in the Sinhalese south, the peace accord itself was "now under siege from all sides."

In the latter respect, it referred to two main events, a bombing in Colombo attributed to Sinhalese nationalists and to a Supreme Court decision that two provisions of the package designed to implement the autonomy provisions of the accord were unconstitutional. Four of the nine judges considered the entire package unconstitutional, in contradiction to the unitary state enshrined in the country's constitution. The court ruling raised the spectre of a referendum on the accord, which politicians fear could create an explosive situation.

Jayawardene manages parliamentary majority

The Sri Lankan president, Jayawardene, managed to get a majority in parliament for his measures. "But still, the backdrop to the parliamentary drama was bloody. Apart from the bomb outrage, JVP [Janatha Vimukti Permana, a Sinhalese nationalist organization] sympathizers staged strikes on campuses, burnt state buses, tried to derail trains and threw three southern towns into darkness by sabotaging power lines."

The liberal-left Colombo magazine *Lanka Guardian* made little direct comment of its own on the situation following the Indian offensive. It preferred to run two major articles by Indian observers. One, by Bhabani Sen Gupta, director of the Centre for Policy Research in Delhi, ended with the following conclusion:

"What is needed on the Indian side is determination to secure the minimum objectives of the fighting in Jaffna — significant disarming of the Tigers — and quick withdrawal of the bulk of IPKF. No more than a few thousand Indian soldiers must remain in Sri Lanka on New Year's Day. This country has always opposed prolonged foreign military presence on the territory of a sovereign state, except in the case of UN peace-keeping forces. India can hardly make India an exception to one of the articles of faith of its own foreign policy." The other article, by Nikhil Chakravarty, editor of the influential *Mainstream*, ended with a conclusion that seemed to be a counterpoint to that of Bhabani Sen Gupta:

"The perspective before the Indian Army in Sri Lanka is fearsome. The scope of conventional positional operations is minimal: instead, it will have to grapple with full-scale guerrilla attacks by a determined, well-armed group, well entrenched in the support of the local population....Had the Indian authorities made a serious assessment of the type of adversaries they had to contend with, they would have realized the enormity of the disaster which our armed forces are being pushed into." ★

THE SUCCESS of Chesterfield was also a response to the third Tory victory in June this year, a victory which was at the same time a third defeat for the Labour leadership. The background to this lies in the defeat of the miners' strike, but the Tory victory was based — in part at least — on their ability to convince enough people that their economic policy was sound and could produce wealth enough to overcome mass unemployment and maintain the National Health Service and parts of the welfare state, despite clear evidence that they did not intend to spend money in these ways. The Labour Party's incapacity to develop a credible economic policy, despite popular manifesto commitments on social policy, partly explains their defeat.¹

However, the world stock market crash and the continuing turbulence in the markets since has suddenly and dramatically undermined this Tory ideology of a "share-owning democracy". The flotation of British Petroleum shares was a fiasco, with the underwriters left to pick up a bill of several billion pounds.² This leaves the privatization policy of the government in some doubt, as well as the future of projects such as the Channel tunnel, whose shares are due to be floated shortly.

Despite these events, the Labour leadership is hard put to it to make any gains out of the problems of capitalism. At the party conference Bryan Gould [Labour's trade and industry secretary] led the Labour leadership's capitulation to Thatcher's economic framework, calling for the workforce to be allowed to take shares in their companies — a policy which now looks like a call for the workforce to carry their share of the losses!

Collapse into Tory consensus

This collapse into the new Tory consensus reveals very starkly the crisis of leadership, in the face of mass unemployment, falling living standards, the increasing unpopularity of Tory policies and growing resistance by the working class to the effects of Tory rule.

This crisis also extends to the trade-union leadership. The majority of union leaders — with the honorable exception of Arthur Scargill of the National Union of Mine-workers (NUM) and the leadership of the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA, whose deputy general secretary is Militant supporter John MacCreadie) — have succumbed to the "new realism" of Trade Union Council general secretary Norman Willis. This is a "realism" that, as Scargill pointed out at Chesterfield, is neither new nor real but simply old-fashioned class collaboration.

Along with continued moves to the right on economic policy and defence at this autumn's Labour Party conference, there were increased attacks by the labour

A breath of fresh air for the left

THE SOCIALIST CONFERENCE held in Tony Benn's Chesterfield constituency the weekend of October 24/25 could not have been better timed. It came three weeks after the Labour Party's annual conference, which had seen many rank and file members frustrated both by the Kinnock leadership's continued moves to the right and by the lack of any alternative leadership from the left. It also took place only five days after the crash on the world stock markets.

The conference, which brought together 2,000 socialists from both inside and outside the Labour Party, may well mark a turning point in the fortunes of the Labour left in Britain, in decline since the defeat of the miners' strike in March 1985. In a more profound way, it reflected a growing mood of resistance in the working class.

Here a leading supporter of the magazine *Socialist Outlook* examines the prospects for the left today.

MARY READ

bureaucracy on the constitutional gains made in the early 1980s, on the women's organizations and on the youth wing of the party. But it would be wrong to see the Labour Party conference as a debacle for the left. There were signs of the continued

strength of the left, despite several years of isolation and diminishing size.

Firstly, there were some significant votes. Although it was defeated, the NUM resolution on nationalization received over two and a half million votes, revealing a significant number of trade unions still backing a fundamental position of the left. Once again, the women at the conference expressed more visibly than anyone dissent against the manipulations of the leadership. They organized a demonstration in support of their demands. Lastly, the left fringe meetings were bigger than in the previous two or three years, with left leaders such as Tony Benn capable of attracting enthusiastic audiences of several hundred.

Unfortunately, what these audiences heard was completely inadequate in the face of impending Tory legislation and the Labour leadership's capitulation to Thatcher's ideology. Rhetoric calling on people to fight harder, but without offering any leadership to such fights, was hopelessly inadequate and the frustration was visible on peoples' faces. The inability or refusal of the left leadership to provide a way forward reveals another level of the crisis of leadership in the labour movement. The strategy of winning the party bit by bit, for socialism, has been shown to be the pipe-dream it always was, but nothing has been put in its place.

Workers still ready to fight

The continued existence of the Bennite left as shown at the Labour Party conference should not be a complete surprise for it is based on the resistance of the working class to the Tories' policies. Despite the major defeat of the miners' strike, followed by further defeats of the printers and several smaller battles, the working class is still capable of fighting back and has not been overwhelmingly defeated. Indeed, over the last 18 months there has been an increase of combativity among the most militant sections.

Earlier this year the Yorkshire miners struck against the harsh disciplinary code imposed by British Coal and there followed a huge majority in a ballot for an overtime ban.³ The CPSA held a series of one-day stoppages over their pay and conditions. The teachers also held one-day strikes for over a year and now local government workers are taking action against cuts in public services.⁴ What is emerging is a regroupment and recomposition of the left, not so much in the constituency Labour Parties, as in the previous period, but among trade-union and campaign activists.

1. See also *IV* 121, June 1 and 124, 13 July, 1987.

2. On the BP share sale see Ernest Mandel's article in *IV* 130, November 23, 1987.

3. See *IV* 126, 28 September, 1987.

4. On the teachers' actions, see *IV* 113, February 9 and 122, June 15, 1987; see also the article in this issue on page 12.



Tony Benn: playing back-seat role (DR)

The combination of a renewed offensive by the Tory government with the redundancy of the labour bureaucracy's slogan to "wait for a Labour government" is leading to the conditions for struggle. Workers under attack, particularly in the public sector, have little choice in the matter.

The financial and political crisis in Labour-led local councils is symptomatic of the situation. Some councils face huge gaps in their budgets this year. Next year it looks even worse, with deficits of up to £60 million in the London borough of Lambeth (just one of around 30 London boroughs) for example. The response of the Labour council leaderships in London and other big cities, such as Manchester, has been to carry out the Tory policy of making cuts in expenditure, despite having been elected on "No Cuts" manifestos. In Manchester a deficit of £110 million is leading to 4,000 "voluntary" redundancies. In several London boroughs rent rises for council tenants are being combined with a freeze on filling job vacancies — with further cuts to come.

In the face of this capitulation to Tory attack there is nonetheless a minority of Labour councillors who have taken a principled stand against any cuts in jobs and services and who, along with trade-union members, tenants and community organizations, are mounting fight-back campaigns. These are being led in London and elsewhere by supporters of the newspaper *Labour Briefing*.

The conference at Chesterfield was therefore timely. The large attendance of 2,000, and the political make-up of those who were there, was important. Attending the conference were the left wing of the Campaign Group of Labour MPs (a grouping to the left of the Tribune Group in par-

liament, which has historically represented the left), and the left wing of the NUM leadership (Scargill and Peter Heathfield, with Betty Heathfield from Women Against Pit Closures). In addition there were quite large numbers of rank and file miners and women from the mining communities. No other prominent trade-union leaders were there. Sections of the Labour left came, but nobody from the so-called "soft left" — the Labour Coordinating Committee (LCC, formerly part of the Bennite left, now increasingly within Kinno's orbit). Also attending were some members of the *Morning Star* wing of the Communist Party, but no Eurocommunists (for whom it would have been far too radical!); and members of the Socialist Society, an organization of non-aligned socialist intellectuals, who were joint organizers of the Chesterfield conference.

Of the two large left groups in Britain, *Militant* supporters boycotted the weekend, preferring instead to organize a London-based meeting on local government cuts. The Socialist Workers Party (SWP) had about 100 members present, but made a very sectarian intervention, speaking at every opportunity on the redundancy of the Labour Party and the need to build an alternative — the SWP. Such an approach went down like a lead balloon.

SWP and *Militant* hostile to the event

But the hostility of these two groups to the event can be easily explained. Both the *Militant* and the SWP, having no real conception of the united front, have used the Labour left over the past few years as possible recruits, with some success. If the left starts to get organized again that process will go into reverse, such is their narrow approach. Chesterfield was not therefore in the interests of their narrow, sectarian approach to the political recomposition in Britain.

Significantly absent from the weekend were the forces of Labour Left Liaison (the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy,

Labour Women's Action Committee and Black Section). The recently fused supporters of *Socialist Outlook* were well represented, as was the current around *Labour Briefing* (a class-struggle coordination within the left), who had 150 supporters there. Other small currents were also present. But, in the main, the conference was made up from rank and file Labour Party and trade-union members, across a wide age range. Women were reasonably well represented, although the participation of Black people was low.

Agreement on key policies

The organizers of the conference were somewhat overwhelmed by the size and success of the weekend, and it was at times disorganized. Nevertheless, it was a revitalizing event. There was political agreement on a number of key policies — support for unilateral nuclear disarmament and opposition to NATO; support for public ownership and nationalization (this now effectively dropped from LP policy); and support for the setting up of a new organization, "Women for Socialism", supporter by Betty Heathfield and Women Against Pit Closures, significant Black women activists, women MPs and so on. *Labour Briefing* Women helped organize the meeting of about 200 women to discuss setting up this new organization. There is clearly a groundswell of feeling among women, many previously involved in the socialist feminist current in the 1970s, who now see the need to organize again, but this time in direct relation to the labour movement. One of the central campaigns that Women for Socialism will get involved in is the Fight the Alton Bill, set up to defeat an attempt to restrict abortion to the first 18 weeks.

There was also support for the fight in local government, although this was a point of contention with some platform speakers, notably Bernie Grant who is a new Black MP and councillor in a London borough that has been implementing cuts.

Possibly the most significant contribution

of the weekend came from Ken Livingstone, former leader of the Greater London Council (GLC) and now MP for Brent East constituency. After the defeat of the miners' strike and the simultaneous collapse of the fight against



Ken Livingstone: a bid for the leadership of the left (DR)

Tory abolition of the GLC, Livingstone moved to the right. After being elected MP in June this year, he spent much of his time attempting to put together an alliance between the Campaign and Tribune groups in parliament, along with an agreement between Labour Left Liaison and the LCC outside. Such an alliance between the two wings of the old Bennite current was based on an explicit exclusion of the hard left, including supporters of *Labour Briefing*. This impossible task had, by the time of Chesterfield, clearly failed, and Livingstone's speech during the Saturday evening rally marked a significant move back to the left, along with an explicit bid for the leadership of the left and, even more importantly, for the leadership of the LP as a whole.

His speech, on the effects of the crash and its political implications, was explicitly anti-capitalist. He showed how the strength of the right in Britain had been dramatically overestimated, based as it was on the shifting sands of capitalism. He argued that the Labour leadership's capitulation to the Tories' economic framework was based on this misassessment. He said that the crash put the question of socialism right back on the agenda; that the failures of previous Labour governments were based on their refusal to take control of capital, and that this generation of socialists must not let such a thing happen again.

"We have seen too many failures in the past to say we can go round the route of Wilson and Callaghan again ... but ... we can only win when we convince the tens of millions that we know what we want to do with the British economy and we have the political will to take control of it and use it in the common good, and not just for the greed of the few who dominate the City of London."

Livingstone's speech internationalist

His speech was also internationalist. He argued that it was impossible to create socialism in Britain while propping up an America that "butchers its way around the world in order to shore up its economic gains and immediate military and economic interests". Subsequently, in the national press, he has developed these themes, in particular the role of Europe and its relation to America after the crash.

This speech was not just left rhetoric. Livingstone is clearly making his bid for the leadership on the basis that the crash opens up the political scene in a dramatic way. He openly opposed one of the tenets

of Chesterfield, that "we should not blame our leaders for what has happened". As he correctly asked, "How long would the miners' strike have lasted if Joe Gornley (previous right wing NUM president) instead of Arthur Scargill had been leading it?"

But there are those who remember Livingstone's recent past and who are wary of his sudden return to the left. Even *The Guardian* diarist calls him "the political version of Access [credit card] — our flexible friend". And in his speech after Livingstone,



Scargill warned him that he had heard such rhetoric on taking over the commanding heights of capital before. Clearly trying to outdo him, Scargill said:

"I don't want to win electoral power, I want to win political power to smash the capitalist system. What's wrong with the demand for the common ownership of production, distribution and exchange? It's not just the commanding heights we want, but the whole system under which we live."

While there was no doubt at Chesterfield of the impact of Livingstone's speech, there is also no doubt that Scargill, although beleaguered within his own executive, has a strong rank and file base, plus the credibility of having led a strike to try to win it. As such he commands a trust that Livingstone has yet to earn. Further, Livingstone's experiences have been entirely within the Labour Party. He does not have

much knowledge about the trade-union movement and speaks little about it. His record as an employer when leader of the GLC was not a very commendable one.

After two and a half years of increasing isolation for the left, the Chesterfield conference came as a breath of fresh air, and coinciding with the crash it does open up the political agenda in Britain. But there are a number of problems associated with the project of "building a socialist movement".

Firstly, the idea of developing socialist policy is vacuous if struggles are not supported and led now. The local government fight is a point in question. The leadership of the conference didn't want to take a position on this key line of divide, because their own ranks are divided on it! The left should not seek to make unnecessary or premature divisions, but the question of cuts is one of principle. Some Labour councillors are carrying out Tory cuts and making the working class pay for the economic crisis. There is a struggle to support and a lead to give. By refusing to take a position, they are refusing to lead.

Secondly, both the papers for the conference and the conference itself were very weak on the situation in the trade unions. There was no discussion on the reason for the defeats we have suffered; no discussion on the role of Willis, the TUC and "new realism", all of which are here to stay; no proposals on how to build the left in the unions. Part of the reason for this is that Benn has traditionally relied on Communist Party leaders in the trade unions to organize his trade-union base. But there is

increasing conflict as even the *Morning Star* wing opposes Scargill in the NUM and has no more adequate answers to Thatcher's offensive than the coalitionist policies of the Eurocommunists.

Urgent need for discussion on the unions

There is an urgent need for serious discussion on the way forward for the left in the unions, the need for organized solidarity and the need to build a cross-union organization that is genuinely democratic. This did not take place.

There was also a reluctance among the organizers to make the movement democratic and the leadership accountable. Supporters of *Socialist Outlook* and *Labour Briefing* argued that it will be impossible to

build a large, effective left movement if deals are being cobbled together in back rooms, as has been the practice in the past. No left will build lasting roots in the rank and file if its functions by exclusion and lack of democracy. If the left is to overcome its isolation, if the left is to rebuild and grow again, if the right wing course of Kinnock and the leadership is to be rolled back, then more than a good, anti-capitalist programme is needed — we also need democratic organization.

Lines of divide already being drawn

Labour Briefing's leaflet for the conference proposed six points as the political basis for left organization, six points that coincide with the objective situation and where the lines of divide are already being drawn:

- Fight against the massive cuts in local government, education and the health service, and against the proposed poll tax;
- fight against the Alton Bill, and for the rights of women, Black people, lesbian women and gay men;
- solidarity with trade unionists in struggle;
- fight for an anti-capitalist programme in the Labour Party and the trade unions;
- fight any moves towards coalitionism;
- fight to build anti-imperialist solidarity with the struggles in Ireland and South Africa. Against NATO and for unilateral disarmament.

The conference agreed to organize a series of mini-Chesterfields in the regions; to set up policy working groups which will continue to work on the three main areas of policy — the economy, international relations and disarmament, and democratic rights; to draw up a socialist register; and to organize a recall conference next May.

Labour Briefing supported the proposal to organize regional conferences around the country (in some areas this is already underway), and also the idea of a recall conference.

There is little doubt that the economic and political situation opened up by the crash will lead to further big struggles in Britain, and it is out of these struggles that the left will be reinvigorated and built.

The crisis of leadership of social democracy, both in the Labour Party and the trade unions, is posed very starkly for the working class. How far and how effectively the left seen in embryo at Chesterfield, will be capable of challenging that leadership is yet to be seen.

What is clear is that the Bennite current active from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s is recomposing once more. With Benn himself playing an increasingly back-seat role, the question of who succeeds him is posed. Livingstone clearly wants that mantle. Whether he manages it is only partly dependent on his political will as he is tested in the battles to come. ★

A Tory curriculum for education

BRITISH EDUCATION has always remained peculiar when compared to Europe or North America. It retains many archaic institutions. Nevertheless, it has usually changed in accordance with the needs of British capitalism. The post-war era saw expansion and many radical changes, not least the changing of secondary education (11 to 19 years) into a supposedly "classless" comprehensive system replacing, among other things, the old selective grammar schools.

With the deepening economic and social crisis affecting British society at all levels, Margaret Thatcher's Tory government, and in particular the Education Secretary Kenneth Baker, have decided on a clear reactionary course that means taking on the educational interests of the working class and teacher's trade unions.

PATRICK FIELD

WHEN THE TORIES sought re-election for a third term in June this year, they chose to make education a major issue. Tragically, the general response of the Labour Party (LP) and the broad labour movement was inadequate. In the mid-1970s, Labour prime minister James Callaghan set the tone of future national debates by giving credence to reactionary ideas about "standards" in education.

During the recent pay dispute (see IV 122), there was a certain amount of challenge to these assumptions, but as the fundamental issue of the teacher's struggle was pay, it was easy for the Tories to dominate the issues once the National Union of Teachers (NUT) leadership and the other unions involved abandoned any challenge to Baker.

Baker's proposals are wide-ranging, including curriculum and school re-organization. During the last three decades a lot has changed both in teaching content and the methods used. Out went traditional selection, learning by rote. In some more advanced areas, especially where there was a left wing-led local education authority (LEA), curricula were designed to challenge racism and sexism. Schools could take a liberal attitude to course content. For example, sex education could now include a positive attitude to sexuality.

Throughout this period, the right wing of the Conservative Party found these trends unacceptable. On almost every issue — be it discipline, the banning of corporal punishment (caning), anti-racist education, mixed ability teaching or morals and the family — this right wing have been at the forefront of an ideological offensive.

The centre of Baker's present proposals is for a national curriculum. This would result in at least 60 per cent of school timetables being devoted to mathematics, English, science technology and modern languages. A similar core programme has been outlined for primary schools (5-11 years). Subjects such as history and art would be marginalized, and subjects the Tories associate with left wing views, such as sociology, would be outlawed. Until now, basic subjects have been taught in all schools, with the schools themselves deciding on their own emphasis with guidance from the LEA. Now the existence and role of the LEAs are also under threat.

"Opting out" of the state system

Another central plank of Baker's programme is the notion of "opting out" — parents voting to run a school themselves. The rationale behind this is the free market, or what has been termed "open enrollment". It has been the LEAs that until now have apportioned places in any given school, attempting to ensure a balance of abilities and other factors. Baker aims to change this. These opting out proposals will cause chaos, with "popular" schools being oversubscribed and overcrowded while others are forced to close. They will also foster racism, witnessed recently in Yorkshire in the north of England, where a group of racist parents campaigned against their children going to a predominantly Asian school.

The financial implications of all this are still not clear, including how much parents



who choose to run their own schools will have to contribute. Baker intends to introduce regressive tax measures for such parents and provide money directly to these schools.

This method of enforcing selection in areas where the Tories haven't a hope of gaining popular support is also applied where several boroughs combine, notably Inner London where the largest education authority of all exists — the ILEA. Partly because the ILEA has been notorious for initiating progressive educational ideas in the past, the Tories have singled it out for particular attack. Their new legislation will allow boroughs to withdraw from ILEA, thus breaking it up. Apart from the loss of economies of scale, the withdrawal of the Cities of Westminster and London, the two richest boroughs, would remove a major proportion of ILEA's budget.

In essence, the Tories are trying to change education from being a public service, nominally freely available to all, into a commodity that can be purchased. To enforce selection, blanket national testing will be introduced for youngsters at the ages of 7, 11 and 14 years. Results will be announced publicly. Education will be geared to commodity production, and arbitrary "standards" set by the Tories will be pursued to the exclusion of innovative teaching techniques and collective working.

Labour leader supports selection

But what of the Labour Party and the NUT? Unfortunately, leading Labour spokespeople have not been exactly helpful. The most disgraceful example to date has been Neil Fletcher, Labour leader of ILEA, who made a speech to the Socialist Education Association supporting "excellence" (in other words, selection) in response to Baker's proposals. He was so

wrapped up in Baker's framework that he actually referred to "education authorities treating parents as customers and the people who pay teachers' salaries". (*The Guardian*, October 13).

On the other hand, the NUT leadership — still recovering from Baker clubbing them over pay and conditions — are unable to muster an alliance to oppose the Tories that can organize serious action. Instead of building support throughout the labour movement on the basis of an attack on the rights of the working class, they have in essence prepared a popular front approach aimed at the Liberal Party and Tory "wets". Another traditional approach of the union leaderships is a retreat into "professionalism": teachers are experts, they know best, so leave it all to us.

But this approach is no way to mobilize the sort of forces needed to fight the Tories. In reality, the left in the NUT — particularly the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) — are not able at the moment to force the union leadership to lead a genuine mass campaign in defence of education rights, although STA supporters are clearly making this an objective. The fact that the NUT is not affiliated to the Labour Party as a union is a barrier to the development of a class-wide response.

However, the Tories can expect tremendous problems in carrying through these changes. Whereas they are well-equipped ideologically, economically they can expect big difficulties. Coventry LEA, for example, have calculated that Baker's proposed national curriculum would require 12 extra laboratories, 18 technology rooms, 25 science staff, 30 modern language teachers and 35 technology teachers — at a cost of an extra £1 million per year. (*The Guardian*, October 10.)

National spending on books is thought to be £120 million below minimum requirements. (*Independent*, October 22.) Baker's own department, the Department of Educa-

tion and Science, has stated that £2,000 million is needed to bring schools up to an acceptable state of repair as laid down by government building regulations. Baker is only prepared to allow for half of that. (*The Teacher*, NUT paper, November 9.)

Extent of proposals not yet widely appreciated

Even some Tories have their doubts. Leaders of Tory-run LEAs, such as Solihull in Warwickshire, do not see "opting out" as a viable proposition, given the demands made on running educational institutions. They recognize that the volatility of the free market — particularly at present — may not provide the bedrock from which young Tories of the future may sprout.

But the Tories will not worry too much about these difficulties as long as there is no serious response that challenges their assumptions. The labour movement has yet to understand the extent of the proposals and may respond as their effects become more evident. Unrest will occur due to the contradiction between ideology and economics underlying many of the proposals. For example, bringing technology education into the latter part of the twentieth century may be desirable, but it isn't as cheap as sociology, art or drama.

Of course, throughout this process there will be moves to considerably trim down the workforce — driving teachers out, dismissing so-called "poor" teachers and so on. In effect this means rationalizing school economies along business principles. School managements will be transformed from being educators to being bosses of small enterprises. Thatcher's monetarism knows no bounds! Where LEAs remain in control of schools, the funding will be severely reduced by central government.

The Tories are being allowed to make all the running. At present, there are local conferences discussing strategy involving wider forces than just teachers. As yet there is no serious mass national response. The class-wide character of this assault demands that the Labour Party and the TUC mount the sort of challenge necessary to defeat the Tories on a key part of their strategy. The NUT leadership must demand that the Labour Party and TUC organize the necessary response, winning support from the organized labour movement, parents' groups, students, the oppressed and others who would suffer from Baker's proposals.

The labour movement will also have to deal with the Fletchers of this world who are a major obstacle to a fightback. Baker is intent on turning the clock back 50 years on the working class's rights to education and the working conditions of teachers. The Tories, despite some obvious local opposition, are also intent on education becoming a highly centralized institution, removing most of the rights of local government. Whether the opposition to this will prove adequate remains to be seen. ★

THE YEAR 1987 will be remembered in Yugoslavia as the year in which the systemic character of the crisis was made so evident that any hope of a partial solution to the country's troubles has been buried for good.

The debates over the distribution of power among the republics and provinces that have been taking place during the past year, in preparation for possible changes to the 1974 Constitution, have been unable to conceal the true problem: the gravely eroded legitimacy of the party/state apparatus in the eyes of the population at large — and above all in the eyes of the working class.¹

Yugoslavia's press highlighted this problem in its detailed coverage of last April's strike by miners at Labin in north-west Croatia, the longest strike in Yugoslavia's post-war history. The miners stayed out for two months, braving a concerted barrage of hostility from managerial, trade-union and party/state functionaries at the regional level, struggling to provide their families with the bare necessities of life (attempts by Slovenian miners to collect aid were blocked). Deserted by their own Workers' Council, the Labin miners showed that self-organization, discipline and solidarity could prevent the imposition of a quick solution at the workers' expense.

The very length of the strike and unanimity of officialdom's attitude to it produced a new awareness of how inadequate the existing system of self-management is in representing and defending the interests of the self-managers. (In spite of the official attitude, the strike did enjoy a largely sympathetic press coverage, with reporters clearly shocked by the conditions in which the miners were supposed to live and work and by the gulf between the miners and local functionaries.)

Self-management used to exploit workers

The system was challenged at all levels: the power of workers to decide on their own living and working conditions; investment policy; control by managers, officials and party or trade-union bodies. Always presented as expressing the socialist essence of the Yugoslav state, in the light of this strike self-management was shown to its opposite: an instrument for exploiting the workers. This is not, of course, to say that self-management could not be given a different content. But in an overall situation in which emphasis is increasingly laid on the right of the market to determine the mode of operation — and indeed viability — of an enterprise, the question is automatically posed as to whether the workers too should not be free to determine the price of their labour power in the market place, by their self-organization and using all the traditional means of working-class struggle.²

Srdja Vrcan, a sociologist of national re-

pute, has expressed this plainly: "I must admit I have always been suspicious of the idea that true self-management, which ought to mean more than complete autonomy of economic management, can be harmonized with the treatment of workers as wage labour, as a commodity. It seems to me now [after the strike] that refusal to recognize the status of workers as labour power is only too easily translated into denial of their right to influence independently the price of their labour."

The Labin miners' strike

The Labin miners' grievances were not just the abysmal level of their wages or the arduous conditions in which they lived and worked, they were also the fact that recent unprofitable investment by the republican government in two new pits had had to be paid for largely out of their own pockets. The unequal distribution of this burden was registered graphically by the media, which contrasted the comfortable life-style of the local functionaries with the dire poverty of the workers, one of whom told a reporter: "I work in a pit and live in a hovel." Many of the pit workers in fact come from Bosnia-Herzegovina and remain totally unintegrated into the local community. This latter is based on tourism, where life is geared to making a quick buck out of this particular exchange with the wealthier West.

The workers had no difficulty in calculating the difference between their wages and the price that coal fetches on the market. But no republican politician came to explain to them how the surplus was being used. Energy prices are a matter of increasingly heated dispute between producers and consumers, and the final settlement is left to the powerful chamber of republics and provinces within the Federal assembly. The remoteness of the republican government from the men who actually dig the coal was pointed up sharply by the strike. Indeed, the miners asked for a member of the Federal government to visit Labin, to see how they lived.

In 1986, in fact, all Yugoslav wages had actually been allowed to rise, after a four-year decline. This was due to the thirteenth party congress which took place that year. In 1987, however, the rise of inflation to a new high of 120 per cent was used as a pretext to claw back some of this gain (a reduction in the value of their work norms provided the immediate motive for the Labin miners to come out on strike), and the Federal government imposed an all-round wage cut excepting only administrative workers. Throughout the country, industrial workers responded by taking strike action, in the most extensive wage of strike since the war.

The republican and Federal governments chose to treat the strikes as problems of local self-management. What was particularly conspicuous was the total abstention of

A new state Yugoslavia

ECONOMIC CRISIS has been accelerating already 150%, and at least before the mid-November threatened to hit 220 million inhabitants, the country's 23 million inhabitants, the country's 23 million, and the International Monetary Fund government of Branko Miculic press a condition for restructuring payments to begin a visit to the country.

Under these pressures, the government measures November 14-15. One was an effective 10% cut in wages of workers. (Overall, real wages are to drop 10%.) A rebellion in Macedonia, the poorest state. More than 5,000 foundry workers gathered in parliament in Skopje on November 14, protesting against the government.

After an emergency session of the republics, promised workers that their wages would be raised at foundries throughout Yugoslavia. The government the red. Moreover, it recently announced putting 1,000 jobs in jeopardy. Unemployment found particularly in the historical region of Macedonia.

On November 18, 1,500 workers from the republic through the town of Prilep demanded a month of October. They were estimated that 1.5 million Yugoslav workers under bankruptcy laws were strictly enforced. Unprofitable enterprises were adopted. Wages and other prices had already fallen.

In mid-November, the government announced a republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Yugoslav authorities say that it issued uncovered bills of exchange since the war. Tanjug, said that the government would give more in the company to keep it from bankruptcy. It has no funds for "uncertainty."

On November 15 price rises of 30% were announced including necessities (bread, sugar, etc.) with effect. These measures were followed by the national currency, the dinar.

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MICHELE

ge in the crisis

ating in Yugoslavia. Inflation is
austerity measures adopted in
at the start of the new year. With
s a foreign debt of nearly \$20,000
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wed a major food company in the
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983. The official news agency,
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going bankrupt, and that it now
ain" investments.

69% for a series of commodities,
cooking oil, and milk) went into
up with a 24.6% devaluation of
wave of panic buying ensued.

pear in the forthcoming issue of
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nission of *LFE*'s editors.]

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the party from any involvement at that level. Indeed, in the case of the Labin strike, the party quite simply attempted to break it, by calling upon its members to return to work, provoking many bitter comments on the new role of the party as strike-breaker. Threats to dismiss the striking miners prompted the press to quote Brecht: since the people do not have confidence in the government, then the people should be dismissed.

Workers promoted democracy in strike

The Bosnian miners digging coal in Croatia did not feel that their problem had to do with their national origin, for they knew that the local bureaucracy had used similar methods to break the strike by largely Croatian dock-workers in the nearby port of Rijeka, following which all the strike leaders were sacked. The Labin miners ensured that the same thing would not happen to them by insisting on total democracy and the participation of all in the conduct of the strike. Similarly, in the second wave of strikes which took place over the summer, Serb and Albanian workers in Kosovo struck together, giving the lie to the daily propaganda in the Belgrade press about the supposedly unbridgeable ethnic tensions in the province.

The very durability of the Labin strike allowed a sustained press coverage that gave the Yugoslav public a glimpse into the organization of power at the local level. But the enormous clout possessed by local government bodies was most graphically illustrated at the beginning of August, in the Macedonian village of Vevcani in the commune of Struga. The cause of the conflict that arose there was the decision of the commune authorities to tap into Vevcani's water system, installed by the village's own efforts, in order to supply a neighbour-

ing cluster of new dashas [villas] built by Macedonian republican functionaries.

Worried that there might not be enough water to irrigate their own fields, the villagers organized an effective civil resistance and prevented the new pipes from being laid on their land. The authorities responded by sending in a squad of specially trained riot police. Armed with dogs and electric cattle prods, they attacked the inhabitants, including small children in their mothers' arms. Several ended up in hospital. While the pipes were then being laid, the youth of Vevcani organized a hunger strike.

Thanks to the press in other republics, the enormity of what had happened at Vevcani was made public. And the intervention of a Slovene delegate to the Federal assembly ensured that the Federal government's responsibility could not be passed over in silence.³ Slovene writers, moreover, attending the yearly poetry festival at Struga, used that forum to register their strong condemnation of the police brutality at Vevca-

1. Working class membership of the League of Yugoslav Communists (LCY) continues to decline. The Belgrade party lost 4,389 members during the last year, most of whom were workers. The rate at which workers are leaving the party trebled over the last year. There are also fewer peasants. The Belgrade youth organization, moreover, registered a loss of 10,601 members during this period. (*Politika*, October 15, 1987.) Only in Macedonia, Montenegro and Kosovo has the party membership grown over the past year.

2. Since 1980, the number of strikes in Yugoslavia has been doubling every year. In the course of 1987 alone there were over 900 strikes, involving 150,000 workers. Strikes increasingly involve whole enterprises. Although most of them are aimed at gaining higher wages, an ever larger number demand the replacement of managers and functionaries, and take up wider issues of economic policy and declining living standards. See *IV* 118, April 20 and *IV* 123, 23, June 29, 1987.

3. Vika Potocnjak asked for the formation of a commission of enquiry to establish what happened in Vevcani. The assembly's Committee for Internal Policy decided against this. Instead, the commune of Struga and the Macedonia republican assembly will be asked for additional information. In the meantime, Vevcani holds daily public meetings.

ni, and they were subsequently joined in this by their Serbian counterparts. But the total absence of any comparable protest from within Macedonia itself allowed the authorities there to brush off the writers' protest as merely an example of "intolerance towards the Macedonian nation" — a perfect vindication of the charge commonly heard among left intellectuals that the main purveyor of nationalism in Yugoslavia is the bureaucracy.

The vital need to stand up to the nationalism of one's own bureaucracy was stressed in a recent interview carried by the Zagreb weekly, *Danas*, with Vladimir Milcin, one of the most talented young Macedonian theatrical directors.

"For us in Macedonia, the present moment opens a perspective of decline into barbarism... we are gathering the fruit of a situation in which part of the intelligentsia has been richly rewarded for its silence and for its applause... part of the Macedonian intelligentsia has played the role of a shock-absorber, silencing possible incidents which could have caused it to raise its voice and ask: what are these politicians doing to our country? The economic situation is inevitably going to radicalize society, and the idyll — which has even been theorized — that the intelligentsia and the political establishment cannot come into conflict because of the external danger [to the nation] will no longer be able to function effectively."

"Intelligentsia applauded those who lie"

Commenting on the silence of most Macedonian intellectuals following the police assault on the people of Vevcani, Milcin went on to say: "The intelligentsia believes that the repression is directed against specific individuals and that it will stop there. But, in fact, repression never stops there, it is increasing, both in terms of the number affected by it and in terms of the range of measures employed. The more silence and collaboration there is, the more it gathers momentum.

"The silence of the Macedonian intellectuals in the case of Vevcani gives the political establishment, the bureaucracy, the right to use equally drastic measures against all protests, in all parts of Yugoslavia.... Things went so far that people made statements saying that nobody had been injured there, that women had gone into hospital just to have a good time. Macedonian participants at the Struga poetry festival never contemplated boycotting it. They all agreed to the official blasphemy. The Macedonian intelligentsia agreed to applaud those who lie, persisting in their hope that all would end there, that they themselves would not fall victim....

"Something terribly important happened there [in Vevcani]. It showed above all that the Macedonian bureaucracy can with impunity raise a truncheon against the Mace-

donian people. The people of Vevcani have taken away from it the right to speak on behalf of the Macedonian nation.... We are in a situation in which everybody is trying to save their soul... I mean, all of us have to find individual answers, though the space for such expression is narrow. So we are left with the necessity of taking risks as individuals, reacting as individuals — which is more difficult and dangerous than speaking through a collective. But it seems that there is no other way."⁴

Political in-fighting in Serbian party

Milcin's words do not merely show the specific predicament of a Macedonian intellectual, they also express a general need for Yugoslav intellectuals to transcend the confines of their national cultures and to end collaboration with republican and provincial bureaucracies that try to present their own interests as "national interests". A new awareness of Yugoslav solidarity in the face of a common threat of bureaucratic reaction has been one important contribution of this troubled year.

Instructive in this respect has been the reaction to the political in-fighting in the Serbian party, which erupted into the open in dramatic fashion at the end of September. In an unprecedented move Dragisa Pavlovic, head of the Belgrade party — the largest party organization in the country, numbering almost a quarter of a million members — was dismissed overnight. This followed a talk he held with the editors of the newspapers and journals published by the Politika publishing house, in which he criticized the nationalist tone that had been present in several of their journals (notably *Politika*, *Politika Ekspres*, *Duga* and *Intervju*), and emphasized the danger presented by the growth of Serb nationalism.

The difference between the two wings of the Serbian party — that led by republican prime minister Ivan Stambolic, to which Pavlovic belonged and whose principal journal recently has been the weekly *NIN*; and that led by Serbian party leader Slobodan Milosevic, whose flagship in the past months has been the daily *Politika* — has most evidently centred round their different approaches to national problems in the Autonomous Province of Kosovo. That is, whether these should be tackled with or without the collaboration of the Kosovo provincial leadership, consensually or by more drastic means, including reliance on Serb nationalism.

The print runs of the papers criticized by Pavlovic, which have increasingly been specializing in the exposure of supposed instances of Albanian nationalism and irredentism (often through the pens of discredited former policemen from the Rankovic era before 1966, who seem to be in possession of many secret party and administrative files), have been rising vertiginously, making them a powerful and independent

instrument of policy-making vis-à-vis Kosovo.

When in early September a young Albanian recruit called Aziz Kelmendi went berserk in a barracks at the Serbian town of Paracin, killing five of his fellow-soldiers (one Serb, one Croat, two Bosnian Muslims and one Slovene) and wounding a dozen more, the door was opened for an orgiastic assault in sections of the Belgrade press on the Albanian population as a whole. This spilled over into actual (and, in places, seemingly coordinated) violence against Albanian citizens and their property in towns throughout Serbia (similar incidents also occurred in Macedonia and Montenegro). A dangerous link was emerging between militant nationalism and the "firm hand" ideology associated with Rankovic's period. The no-nonsense approach of the authorities at the time is increasingly being contrasted with the supposedly soft policy of today towards the Albanian population in Kosovo. Resurgent Serb nationalism was thus carrying in its wake the danger of a slide into undemocratic methods of political rule.

Kosovo used as pretext to settle differences

It seems likely that the differences between the two wings of the Serbian party in reality go well beyond the issue of Kosovo. Yet it is characteristic of the present climate that Kosovo was used as the pretext to settle differences. It did not matter that Pavlovic, in drawing attention to the danger of Serb nationalism, in fact said nothing contrary to the proclaimed position of the Yugoslav party. Nor that the methods used to remove him and a number of his co-thinkers (including two leading functionaries of the Politika publishing house) were openly undemocratic. At the end of a two-day public debate, the central committee of the Serbian party voted overwhelmingly for the dismissals, in the full knowledge that this was only the first stage of an extensive purge. Only a handful of contrary votes were cast, while a small number of dele-

4. *Danas*, September 22, 1987. Milcin could have taken up the question of the Macedonian republic's attitude towards its Albanian minority. In a letter to Mladina on September 9 this year, a number of Albanian intellectuals drew attention to attempts by the Macedonian authorities to reduce educational opportunities for the Albanian population. It seems that the commune of Struga is once again taking a leading role here. "In recent years, the number of Albanian children attending secondary schools has been decreasing, as has the number of secondary school children receiving education in their own language. Silently, through a system of unspoken quotas, closure of Albanian classes and reallocation of Albanian children to mixed classes, educational discrimination is being practised against Albanians. In Skopje, where 3,000 children finished primary school, only 140 of them were enrolled in the erstwhile Albanian 'Zef Lush Marku' gymnasium. If this trend continues, we can expect that in the near future secondary school education in the Albanian language will practically disappear in Macedonia." Albanians form some 17% of the population of Macedonia.

gates, mainly from the Provinces, abstained.

Milosevic in reality won his massive victory on the promise of strong leadership, at a time of mounting economic difficulties and growing social unrest. The precarious state of the Serbian economy, which is officially admitted to be on the point of collapse, had produced a fear of popular demonstrations in a city which concentrates one quarter of the republic's industry. Yet Milosevic offered no alternative programme for solving either the national problem in Kosovo or the perilous state of the Serbian economy — nothing other than insistence on "unity" and unquestioning respect for the authority of the party leadership. He has now gained the reputation of being the country's leading neo-Stalinist (an honour once coveted by the Croatian politician Stipe Suvar).

The bulk of the Yugoslav press published in the north has registered its concern at events in Serbia with unwonted unanimity. The Slovene youth weekly *Mladina* denounced the particular marriage of nationalism and neo-Stalinism that brought Milosevic his victory. In more measured tones, the Zagreb weekly *Danas* expressed similar anxieties. In Belgrade, the weekly *NIN* — which had been among the first in the capital to draw attention to the increasingly unacceptable face of Serb nationalism, and whose editors will for that reason soon be replaced — has, together with *Danas*, provided the best coverage of the Serbian party's new course.

Fear of mass demonstrations

Party leaders in other republics, however, have for their part remained silent. Public comment would have broken the accepted norm according to which politics within the different republics is the prerogative of the local party leadership. But, perhaps more importantly, they had nothing to say on the key nexus of problems: the state of the Serbian economy, the plight of its people and the fear of mass demonstrations in the country's capital city. Their silence points to the missing centre of the country's politics: the central committee of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) and its "executive" officers. The authority once enjoyed by Tito was never transferred to the Federal party organs, and this provides an important clue to Yugoslavia's current political disarray.

It is not just Serbia's economy, of course, which is in a critical state. Most recently, the precarious economy of the entire country was given a massive jolt by the Agrokomerc affair. Agrokomerc, based at Velika Kladusa in north-west Bosnia, was until August of this year considered to be one of the most successful of Yugoslav enterprises, having grown from a small chicken farm to an agro-industrial unit employing 13,000 people. In August, however, it be-

gan to emerge that much of its phenomenal expansion was due to the extensive issuing of false promissory notes, costing unwitting creditors across the country as much as \$500 million.

The rise and fall of Agrokomerc

The rise and fall of Agrokomerc cannot be explained simply in terms of economic crime, though it was also that. In many ways it was Yugoslavia in miniature, combining such elements as: shortage of liquidity, which is strangling the economy; desire to escape from backwardness and underdevelopment; integration of party chiefs, state functionaries and managers into a form of concentrated power specific to Yugoslavia's decentralized system; development as a springboard into prestigious public offices; localized Stalinism, in the sense of both total control over economy and men and loyalty of a population lifted out of traditional backwardness; as well as a degree of national pride, in this case linked to Bosnia's two-million strong Moslem people. One dramatic outcome of the affair was the resignation of Federal vice-president Hamdija Pozderac — a tactic of damage-limitation so far as the high functionaries of Bosnia-Herzegovina were concerned.

The big holes which have emerged in the capital of many banks and enterprises (some of which could not pay their workers in August or September) have caused consternation throughout the country, and there has been a concentrated attempt to present Agrokomerc as the sole responsibility of the Bosnian republican government. Yet it is in fact clear that the responsibility for this greatest of post-war financial scandals rests with the entire Yugoslav political establishment, since Agrokomerc simply behaved in a manner which has become the norm in the country as a whole.

"Fikret Abdic [director of Agrokomerc] made only one mistake: he overreached himself. Otherwise, Fikret's innovation is not new in the Yugoslav economy as a whole: whenever somebody issues a false promissory note, the officials of the commune, the republic or the Federation — depending on the importance of the Potemkin village in question — come to his aid and cover the losses. This time there is no power in Yugoslavia which could cover this up, quite simply because Abdic inscribed the whole of Yugoslavia on his promissory note. That Agrokomerc was a motley lie was known by all. Those who did not know did not wish to know."⁵

The fall of Agrokomerc exposed a fundamental truth of the state and organization of the Yugoslav economy. In the interview quoted above, Milcin spoke of a vista of barbarism opening up. For the population of Velika Kladusa, the bankruptcy of Agrokomerc brought barbarism to their doorstep. As creditors sought to make good

their losses, the entire regional economy simply closed down. The empty vaults of the local bank meant that 13,000 workers — as well as many others in the area — could not be paid. Shops were closed since there were no goods in them: they simply had no money to buy stock. At the extensive Agrokomerc farms, millions of turkeys and chickens, left without food, have turned to cannibalism. Local rivers are full of dead birds, and the army has been called in to plough up a square mile of land to bury the victims.

Sixty thousand inhabitants of Velika Kladusa and its surroundings have been suddenly abstracted from the rest of Yugoslavia and left in limbo. The republic authorities did provide some money to prevent actual mass starvation, but they have not dared send any representative to talk to the local population. Nobody in the end has taken responsibility for remedying the catastrophe that has hit the area.

Practically overnight, a large part of north-west Bosnia was thrown back into its age-old existence of poverty and unemployment. The traditional exodus of local men to the industrial centres of the north has been resumed.

Concern over situation in Yugoslav army

The rapid deterioration of the country's overall political and economic situation has been becoming a matter of public concern for the Yugoslav army. Back in 1981, the army was called in to put down mass demonstrations in Kosovo, making it clear that it did not like the task. Defence minister Admiral Branko Mamula warned in September that Yugoslavia's friends abroad were becoming increasingly concerned about the fact that "our country's problems are growing in an unbridled manner, to a level which exceeds any possibility of control by the leadership". He criticized the League of Communists for remaining at the margins of social reality, devoid of the necessary unity on the basic question of how to tackle the crisis, and with any secure basis on which reform and organize.

The army has declined any autonomous role for itself in resolving the country's problems. Yet the possibility cannot be excluded that it may feel obliged to assume such a role, if only on behalf of the beleaguered party. There are certainly signs that the army is quietly beginning to organize the necessary infrastructure within civil society, in order to facilitate the imposition of law and order if and when it feels that this has become imperative.

One medium of the army's presence within civil society is provided by the peculiar structure of Committees of General People's Defence and of Social Self-Protection. These were established by deci-

5. Alexander Singer, in an interview in *NIN*, October 4, 1987.

sion of the eleventh party congress in 1978, when it had already become clear that the crisis was there to stay.

Committees are formed at all enterprises, and at all levels of the state administration. They are composed of party and trade-union leaders, representatives of the state administration, army and police commanders. Thus they concentrate political and state power at the different levels of society, though it is not at all clear to whom they are responsible.

Last September, Nenad Bucin, a member of the Federal conference of the Socialist Alliance, called for outright abolition of the Committees on the grounds that they not only act outside the norms of the system, but are also deeply unconstitutional. "Not a self-managing and socio-political mechanism, but their members also feel themselves to be free, under no obligation to integrate themselves into or act within that system.

"With the exception of the highest party bodies, socio-political organizations [party and state organs] have practically ceased to follow and analyze in depth the political situation, not to speak of what should follow from such an analysis — for example, action, influence, leadership.... It is open to dispute whether these committees have assumed non-transferable rights and obligations; I personally believe that they have. The important thing is that state, enterprise, political and other social bodies are no longer concerned with this delicate and important work."⁶

Bureaucracy presents two faces

The editor of *Danas* commented pertinently:

"The essential truth contained in this proposal [of Bucin's] begins to shine forth once one understands that a whole series of the 'black spots' in Yugoslavia's current reality are due not to any nefarious activities by some internal enemy, but to the suspension of the system's legitimate institutions and to the exercise of political power by way of silent prohibitions, through which an increasing number of political decisions are being taken with ever-decreasing responsibility."

The bureaucracy is increasingly engaged in a kind of double-talk: what individual state and party leaders cannot do in public, because it may be unpopular or open to question, they do under a different hat through the Committees, which are not susceptible to outside control.

This question, together with others, is likely to be discussed at the forthcoming party conference, scheduled for 1988. Whether this conference will be productive remains to be seen. ★

Dragisa Pavlovic's address to the editors of the *Politika* publishing house

IN implementing our policy of intra-national relations and equality among nations and nationalities, communists and all progressive people in the Socialist Republic of Serbia today find themselves confronted by probably the most difficult, most complex and most demanding set of tasks in our post-war history. The situation in Kosovo, which is not improving with the necessary, the desirable or the seemingly lightly promised speed, is creating a dangerous atmosphere in which every word spoken against Serb nationalism is taken as surrender to Albanian separatist nationalism.

In this atmosphere, with signs of growing political tensions in evidence, it is easy to lose one's orientation. Positions become confused and the line which one should not cross grows indistinct. Resignation on the one side and passion or hysteria on the other have entrenched themselves in some circles and in some of our press organs. Resignation weakens our struggle, while passion and hysteria turn it against ourselves.

But communists are communists precisely because they do not yield to such moods; rather, they try to alter them. The question before us is not just "Are we united in the struggle against Albanian nationalism and separatism?", but also, "Are we united in the conviction that this struggle should be waged only with a policy based on the programme and statutes of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), through existing institutions, on the basis of self-managing, democratic socialism?"

Anything which seeks to divert our struggle against Albanian nationalism along other paths is deeply anti-Serb, anti-Yugoslav and anti-democratic. Recently, in relation to Kosovo, in certain public organs and proclamations, we find people of openly anti-communist orientation hiding behind a supposed popular contribution to implementing the conclusions of the ninth session of the LCY's central committee.

The Serb nation has its historic obligation to solve the problem of Kosovo together with other nations and nationalities. It cannot and should not allow itself, by choosing wrong methods of struggle, to be pushed along a wild path, which would alter its historic character and freedom-loving tradition.

In the sharp struggle against Albanian separatism, which is yet to acquire an agreed and finalized programme, and is being replaced by intemperate and inflammable words, our essential task is to safeguard the dignity of the Serb nation and its historic character.... The space for solving the Kosovo problem is now so narrow that the least mistake in our tactics, however well-intentioned it may be, can only lead to a tragic outcome for the Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo, for the Serb people and for the stability of Yugoslavia.

The message that, given the situation in Kosovo, one must do everything and that even if mistakes are made they can be corrected later, is a classic example of pragmatic and bureaucratic logic, which may collect applause today but which breeds only trouble for tomorrow. The hands of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo are turning from applause into clenched fists, and this is the point beyond which only tragedy can follow. Who today needs blood — for what imagined solutions? This frightening word is being publicly spoken with increasing frequency, without political or legal response or even human concern at its presence.

What has to happen for us to understand that the trigger on the gun is pulled by intemperate and hysterical words spoken in public, sometimes just by a line in a newspaper? How many Albanian shop windows must be broken before we become convinced that anti-Albanian sentiment is to be found not just in the warnings of the highest organs of the LCY, but also on our streets?

The struggle against Albanian nationalism is a task in the execution of which we cannot show the least hesitation or indulgence. Every such hesitation or indulgence carries a high price. However, if the struggle against Albanian nationalism is accompanied by intolerance and hatred towards the Albanian nationality, which is what we find in some of our press, then the struggle departs from socialist principles and comes close to nationalism itself. All those who today are ready to give up democratic and socialist principles, the road of self-management, in the name of some more effective solution to national problems and conflicts, is close to nationalism or deep within it — whatever protection he may find for his actions.

International relations can be ruined by force, but force cannot improve them or build them. Serb nationalism is no longer being fed just by what is happening in Kosovo, but also by the lack of balance over Kosovo present in some journals, certain public utterances and some institutions. It appears that in certain of these cases we have crossed the danger-line, in that Serb nationalists find encouragement in our behaviour and activity, in texts written by communist journalists.

History has known instances of struggle for national interest that have culminated in national betrayal. This happens when national interests are interpreted in a certain



Yugoslavia's army is concerned about the increasing instability (DR)

way; when the national struggle is waged in certain ways and in certain company. The Serb nation too has had experiences of this kind. The position of Serbs and Montenegrins in Kosovo can be solved successfully only in a strong, stable, self-managing and socialist Serbia, within a strong, self-managing and socialist Yugoslavia....

As of today we must criticize Serb nationalism on a daily basis. For the Serb nationalists are presenting themselves as the saviours of the Serb cause in Kosovo, when in fact they cannot solve a single social problem and are unable to offer any resolution of intra-national relations that would be socially acceptable. ★

Mladina editorial

JUST one year ago, certain organs of the press, most of them Serbian, launched a campaign for the political rehabilitation of Milos Zanko, a one-time prominent Croatian political figure who at the start of the seventies warned against the growth of national chauvinism in Croatia and against the Croatian party's passive attitude to manifestations of national intolerance. This warning cost Zanko dearly: he was forced to resign from all his official functions and not until sixteen years later, well after time had proved him right, did he receive public recognition for his act.

In the middle of September, at a meeting with Serbian newspaper editors, Dragisa Pavlovic, president of the city committee of the Belgrade party, said that unrestrained and hysterical public pronouncements were legitimizing revanchism, often a single word in a newspaper being enough.

"How many Albanian shop windows must be broken", he asked, "for us to be convinced that anti-Albanian sentiment does not exist only in the warnings of the highest party organs, but lives on the streets too"....

These events signalled the beginning of a merciless political struggle in Serbia, which soon moved from behind the scenes into full public view. Slobodan Milosevic, pres-

ident of the central committee of the Serbian party, who had already shown himself to be an advocate of the use of repression against political "ideological" opponents, here too was not choosy about his methods. Breaking all the statutory rules, at a central committee meeting chaired by himself he secured the removal of Dragisa Pavlovic from the party presidency, "since his act was an expression of disunity, obstructing the implementation of resolutions adopted with a view to overcoming the most difficult social problems, especially in the resolute execution of our political tasks in Kosovo."

The platform of "unity" formulated in this manner is simply a call for a settling of accounts, and for the application of all the methods to be found in the arsenal of Yugoslavia's neo-Stalinists. It is evidently a platform of open Serb nationalism. If this platform is acted upon and emotions overcome reason, this would undoubtedly lead to a return to the nineteenth century on Serbia's part. Yugoslavia would then enter upon its greatest political crisis since the war.

The settlement of accounts with Dragisa Pavlovic will undoubtedly lead to a settlement of accounts with all democratically and internationally minded intellectuals. Milos Zanko is past. Dragisa Pavlovic, however, is our today. It is important that we do not remain silent. ★

(October 2, 1987.)

Letter from 70 Slovene intellectuals published in Mladina

THE PARACIN tragedy has been described in a whole series of Yugoslav newspapers as a "blow against Yugoslavia". The innuendo was clear: Albanians are a constant danger and threat to the integrity

and security of the state.

The officials of the Yugoslav Peoples' Army (YPA) have made their own contribution. Although the investigation into the Paracin tragedy has not yet been completed, organs of the Ministry of Peoples' Defence have proclaimed it to be a crime motivated by nationalist and separatist intent. Behind Kelmendi's bullets, indeed, there apparently stood organized enemy forces.

The consequence of this campaign followed promptly. "In accordance with ancient Albanian tradition", Kelmendi's funeral was boycotted, his family was isolated and its expulsion from Dusanovo prepared, his relatives were interrogated by the police, his 16-year-old sister was expelled from her youth organization and is now also threatened with expulsion from school. At the same time, the number of attacks on Albanians and their property in Serbia, Vojvodina, Montenegro and Macedonia grows by the day.

This atmosphere of pogrom and lynch has acquired such dreadful proportions in the past few days that voices are being raised from many quarters calling for reason and tolerance. The subsequent dousing of the flames by the press, which ignited them in the first place, does not however deal with the real causes of this pogrom.

Inevitably, the first question must be addressed to the army. Despite a whole series of reasoned demands that the YPA should open itself to society, it shows no intention of informing the public about the figures for suicides, accidents, homicides or mental disturbances among its recruits. The public is given a short statement only when some border guard kills a foreigner trying to cross the frontier (though the penalty for illegal entry is only three months in prison!); or when a guard takes a shot at a civilian (the child riding his motorbike on his family field in Strumica, near Postojna); or when a civilian is actually shot (as happened to an old man who strayed onto a parade ground at Radovica); or when armed YPA personnel frighten the local population (as happened recently at Glinica). On no such occasion has there been an investigation.

This suppression of information, fostering the notion of the army's immaculate condition, does not contribute to the democratization of our society. Is the Paracin tragedy not further proof of the need to conduct a rational and dispassionate discussion about the introduction of civilian service in the YPA? Would this option not help to lessen frustrations and to prevent traumas, mental tensions, suicides and so on?

Indignation at the lynch atmosphere against Albanians sounds unconvincing, and is above all ineffective, when we see the Federal Secretariat for Defence blowing up this tragedy to an intolerable degree, underlining the national origin of the perpetrator, even though the available information provides not a shred of proof that one is dealing here with any deliberate or pre-planned

action, that it was carried out for nationalist reasons, or that there was anybody behind it.

By adopting this attitude, the YPA has joined the anti-Albanian campaign that has been going on for many years in Yugoslavia. One example of this was (among thousands) the petition of 2,016 inhabitants of Kosovo Polje, written less than two years ago, supported by the flower of the Serb intelligentsia and signed by as many as 60,000 people. The reaction to this petition in the highest political circles was lukewarm, despite the fact that the petition

called for the expulsion of 260,000 Albanians and their families from Kosovo and Yugoslavia and demanded that all land transactions between Serbs and Albanians concluded since the war be annulled, that Serbo-Croat be introduced as the sole official language in Kosovo and so on.

The systematic inflaming of national hatred could not but bring forth its poisoned fruit. We therefore call once more for reason and tolerance. The division of Albanians into "good" and "bad", when in practice only the "bad" are then spoken about, does not lead anywhere. As the na-

tional situation in Kosovo and elsewhere is made to appear hopeless and intractable, political, economic and democratic problems grow worse. Unfounded and irresponsible talk of counter-revolution, or of genocide of Serb and Montenegrin inhabitants of Kosovo, merely encourage the atmosphere of pogrom and do not offer any concrete solutions.

Our humanity should make us strenuously resist all attempts to make political capital out of the personal tragedy of the five soldiers and their families. ★

(September 25, 1987.)

4 NEWS FROM THE FOURTH INTERNATIONAL

FRANCE

LCR special congress

THE LIGUE Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR, French section of the Fourth International) held a special national conference on the weekend November 21/22. The meeting was to ratify the Central Committee's decision to withdraw the LCR's own presidential candidate, Alain Krivine, and participate fully in the campaign of Pierre Juquin, leading figure of the *renouvateur* current that has recently left the Communist Party [see IV 128].

This proposal was in line with the decision of the LCR's national congress in May. At that time it was decided to present Krivine as a candidate, but to be prepared to withdraw if a candidature emerged that would be able to mobilize broader support on a clear basis of fighting the right, defending the demands of workers and students and not repeating the experience of the left government of 1981-86.

Although many delegates at the special conference felt that the Krivine campaign had not been launched forcefully enough (with a majority voting for a balance sheet motion in this sense), most of the organization enthusiastically endorsed the decision to participate in the Juquin campaign.

The conference demonstrated an evolution in the discussion since the Central Committee meeting in October. Although there were eight different positions presented in the local general assemblies that elected delegates, at the conference itself a commission including representatives from all the currents in general agreement with the decision of the CC, worked to produce a unified resolution. This reaffirmed the decision and laid out how the LCR would both participate in the Juquin campaign, including in the support committees that are beginning to spring

up, and also put forward its own positions.

This resolution was supported by 78% of the delegates. Only one current, representing around 10% of the organization, opposed participation in the Juquin campaign. Differences on how to participate in the campaign, and at what speed it could provoke a recomposition in the French workers' movement — going as far as the emergence of a new organized revolutionary force — led one grouping to abstain in the vote.

The resolution adopted by the national conference affirmed:

— The positive nature of the Juquin campaign and its possibilities of creating a dynamic of unity and recomposition within the workers' movement. It noted the clear differentiation from the CP and SP and the defence of the demands raised by workers, student and other social movements, in the struggles of last winter for example.

— The LCR would devote all its forces to the success of the campaign and would try to ensure its success as a militant and activist campaign around three major themes:

- supporting demands such as defence of wages and of the social security system; immigrants' right to vote and to choose French nationality; independence for Kanaky; for disarmament;

- preventing the candidate of the right from being elected; calling on all the left candidates to be committed to stand down in the second round in favour of the best placed; for a workers' government;

- not to have the same experience as in 1981-86 (the period of the CP/SP government); for a real change and not management of austerity; no coalition with the

bourgeoisie; for a policy that breaks with capitalism and opens the road to socialism.

— The debate on this balance sheet of the left government is continuing and will continue during the campaign.

— A broad support movement should be built through pluralist, open, activist committees in localities and workplaces. Members of the LCR will contribute to launching such committees using methods such as local appeals — as has already been done among railway workers and among government employees. The purpose of these committees is not to start building a new organization, but to build a campaign.

— Presidential campaigns tend to be very personalized. This obviously leads to particular problems. The Juquin campaign was not launched on the basis of a clear platform, as the LCR would have wished, and so it is necessary to continue open and democratic discussions with all the forces involved in order to ensure that a clear statement of position is issued: either as the candidate's manifesto or on another occasion.

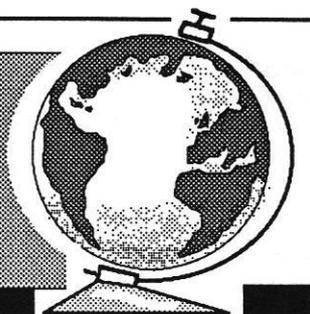
— This campaign will be the occasion for testing out the possibility for building a new revolutionary force in France. This is a debate that is bound to occur in the committees. This discussion should not be a main theme of the campaign, because this would put off independent activists attracted to it. But insofar as this debate arises, members of the LCR will participate in it, explaining that our objective is a new revolutionary party with a mass influence.

— The LCR will wage a campaign on the same themes as it proposes for the Juquin campaign, with its own propaganda material, fundraising and public meetings with Alain Krivine. It will discuss with the other organized political forces involved in the election campaign on questions of joint activity and the possibilities for building a new organized revolutionary force.

A high point of the national conference was the address from Pierre Juquin, accompanied by two members of his national campaign committee. ★

Philomena O'Malley



AROUND
THE
WORLD

INTERNATIONAL

**Moscow Trials
Campaign**

THE CAMPAIGN to clear the names of the accused in the Moscow Trials has been collecting signatories from all over the world (see IV 129 for full appeal and list of signatories). In each issue we are publishing the names of further supporters. You can contact the campaign c/o Michael Löwy, 34 rue des Lyonnais, 75005, Paris, France.

Latest signatories:

Australia: Nick Balkus, MP; Dennis Freaney, ed. board *Tribune*; Peter Murphy, nat. cttee. CP.

Belgium: Guy Coeme, dep. nat. sec. PS; Roger Callemand, MP.

Canada: Rick Salutin, editor *This Magazine*; GS Kealey, editor *Labour*.

Finland: JP Roos, Helsinki Uni.

France: Paul Vie, instituteur; Marcel Gontier; Prof. Eric Fray; Jean-François Vilar, author; Jean Vilanova, ex-regional sec. CP; Alain Dem; Jean-Bernard Lemoine; Jean-Pierre Magnant, Bordeaux Uni.

[Errata: The listing in the last issue of IV of Prof. Yves Sertel was incorrect, and should read Prof. Yildiz Sertel.]

Holland: Titia Van Leeuwen, MP.

India: Datta Samant, MP and union leader.

Italy: Sergio Falcone; Anna Maria Siccardi; Andrea Polcri; Constanzo Preve,

Marxist philosopher.

New Zealand: Dr John Freeman-Moir; Dr Geof Pearce; Dr Charles Sedgwick; Rick Hill, historian; Keith Locke, Philippines Solidarity Network; Dr Colin Lank-shear; Elsie Locke, author; Dr Chris Connolly; Hector MacNeill, LP Wellington; Herbert O Roth, historian; John Colquhoun, Auckland WEA; David Small, Aotearoa Kanak Solidarity; Dr John Davies; Bill Logan, Wellington Socialist Alliance; Dr William Sutherland, head of PM's department in deposed Labour government in Fiji; Dr Barry Reay, historian.

USA: Prof. V Maghadam; Morris U Schappes, ed. *Jewish Currents*.

West Germany: Günter Wallraf, author. ★

CANADA

**Thousands
demonstrate for
abortion rights**

ON A COLD and windy Sunday, October 18, a thousand people gathered in Quebec city at a lively demonstration for the right to abortion, widely available and free. They came from all regions of Quebec, and represented the wide range of groups that make up the Quebec Coalition for Free Abortion on Demand. While the majority of demonstrators were young women (and men) from the student and youth movements, people from all three labour centrals

were present — 100 marched with the Quebec Federation of Labor (FTQ) contingent. Women from Quebec feminist organizations and members of Gauche Socialiste, a Fourth Internationalist organization, also participated.

The demonstration was held in the context of decreasing services for women who seek abortions in Quebec and Canada as a whole. In the first coordinated actions since 1983, demonstrations were held on the weekend of October 18/19 in Quebec (nearly 1,000 people), Toronto (500), Edmonton (100) and Vancouver (300). The central demands were:

- to repeal the articles of the criminal code making abortion illegal;
- to drop charges against doctors providing safe abortions;
- to end cuts in health care and facilities;
- to accredit and fund existing clinics providing abortion services, currently operating outside the law.

The central debate in the Coalition is around forms of action and what demands should be raised (dissatisfaction was expressed with the demands focusing just on government ministers).

The demonstration was a shot in the arm for abortion activists and gave rise to increased optimism about organizing future actions. ★

BRITAIN

**Renewed attack on
right to choose**

DAVID ALTON, a Liberal MP, is proposing a Private Member's Bill to reduce the upper time limits for legal abortions by 10 weeks, from the present 28 weeks down to 18. It is the most serious attack yet on women's access to safe abortion under the 1967 Act. If passed, his proposal would hit abortion rights for up to 23,000 women each year, and indirectly threaten many more.

Alton has chosen his ground carefully. Previous anti-abortion bills were head-on attacks on women's access to abortion, and all were defeated. Alton, however, has avoided this direct ideological confrontation over women's access to abortion. He has put stopping late abortions at the centre of his fight — making the issue one of lowering time limits in line with foetal viability. He has added to this an apparent concern for those with disabilities, attacking pro-choice campaigners for wanting to "abort deformity".

There is no logical reason for a time limit of 18 weeks, as even with the most advanced technology a foetus cannot survive outside the mother until at least 22 weeks.

Alton says, correctly, that Britain is one of the few countries allowing abortions so late. Most countries in Europe however, and many outside with legal abortion, have more liberal laws, which means that women can get earlier abortions. Moreover, cuts in health service facilities mean it is becoming harder for women to get abortions



earlier.

The labour movement must be involved in defeating this anti-abortion, anti-woman Bill, defend the 1967 Act and support the right of women to decide. Both the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress have clear policy on this issue.

A campaign has been established nationally — Fight Alton's Bill (FAB) — and already many local FAB groups are active. A regional day of action is planned for January 16, and a national day of protest for January 21, the day before Alton's Bill is due for its second reading in parliament. ★

[FAB can be contacted at Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU, GB.]

SOUTH AFRICA

Cosatu conference on education



TWO WOMEN unionists were detained this week, days after a Congress of South African Trade Unions (Cosatu) conference on education. Nonceba Dube, vice chairperson of the Cosatu Women's Forum, and shop steward Lindiwe Mvube, were picked up from their Soweto homes on Wednesday morning, three days after the conference committed itself "to women's participation and leadership in the federation".

The Cosatu Education Conference, held in Johannesburg on the weekend of October 24/25, resolved to "launch a concerted drive to mobilize and educate around the issues of women."

A planning committee was elected as a first step towards "promoting women's leadership and education around the discrimination against women". Made up of delegates from affiliated unions, it will "coordinate a campaign that will lay the basis for more decisive steps in the near future". Shop stewards councils have also been urged to launch women's forums in preparation for a women's conference next year.

In adopting guidelines for "people's education", the conference stressed that "education must assist in the process of liberation through exposing the structures that exploit people in all aspects of their lives — schools, work, home and so on.

"Education must be linked to production, but in creative, liberating ways. Under cap-

italism, education is also linked to production, but in such a way as to entrench exploitation", a conference statement noted. The education curriculum should be planned by the educator and those to be educated — "not knowledge pouring into empty vessels, but knowledge arising out of their own realities and experiences".

In his opening address, Cosatu general secretary Jay Naidoo slated Bantu education because it was "designed to keep people in ideological bondage and enslave the

working class to the cheap labour system". Naidoo said Cosatu rejects the idea of educators lecturing workers. "The role of the educator is not to make high-powered political interventions. It is to facilitate and coordinate," he said.

The conference is also seen as a first step in Cosatu's policy to decentralize its education programme and thereby reach as many people as possible. ★

[From the Weekly Mail, October 30, 1987.]

OBITUARY

Icelandic communist dies

SVAVA GUDMUNDSDOTTIR, a member of the Militant Socialist Organization, Icelandic section of the Fourth International, died on October 20 of a cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 32.

From the mid-1970s Svava was a leading activist in the radical women's liberation movement in Iceland, the Red Stockings Movement. Apart from helping organize the movement, she wrote numerous articles and played an important role in formulating its position on a number of questions.

Among the questions debated in the 1970s were equal rights for men and women workers. While explaining the necessity that they stand together against the exploiting class, she put forward the perspective that men and women should be organized in the same unions. This corresponded to the Icelandic reality where unskilled men and women in the more populated areas of the country are organized separately. On many occasions Svava also discussed and explained women's right to decide over their reproductive functions.

In the early 1980s a majority of the leadership of the Red Stockings Movement abandoned a militant orientation for the women's struggle and adapted to liberal parliamentary activities. As an excuse for this new approach, an ideology was introduced which claimed the existence of a particular "women's culture" and a "women's world of experience". Men were said to be the main obstacle to women seizing important positions in society. The Red Stockings Movement was described as being too "frightening", scaring ordinary women away.

A small part of the leadership of the movement, among them Svava Gudmundsdottir, defended the idea that women should organize their own independent movement based on the real needs of women. In an article she wrote that the rightist propaganda against the Red Stockings Movement had affected its leadership. The leaders wanted to reach wider groups of women, even those who were prejudiced against the movement. So they dropped their positions instead of correcting and explaining the prejudices. And they blamed the movement for the lies of the rightist press. They had become tired of swimming against the tide.

Svava explained that what these former activists said about the problems of mobilizing women was contrary to the facts, because the Red Stockings Movement had several times mobilized thousands of women. The lack of influence of women in society, she said, was not an easy question to solve, it was an expression of the oppression of women. She also explained the incorrectness of the statement that if women held important positions in society, more women would become active. She said that a small group of intellectuals and students cannot make women act or arouse a movement. Their role in a progressive women's liberation struggle is to seek to develop the consciousness of women. In order to do so, they have to describe reality as it is, and not as their ideologists think suits the consciousness of women. When they say that women can be united on the basis of "their own specific culture", they arouse a false idea that the situation of women is independent of their class position and of the class struggle. She thought this would lead to the depoliticization and demobilization of women.

As a member of the Militant Socialist Organization (MSO), Svava played an important role in building a communist party in Iceland. She set an example to other comrades through her loyalty and endurance. She displayed a great capacity to approach issues in an objective manner and view them according to an historical principle which takes as its point of departure the interests of the working masses and the oppressed peoples of the world. As an internationalist she tirelessly studied the revolutions in Cuba and Nicaragua. At the time of her death, she was participating in a project of translating and publishing writings and speeches by leaders of the Nicaraguan revolution.

The MSO has decided to honour the memory of Svava Gudmundsdottir by publishing in Iceland a new edition of *Women's Liberation and Socialism*, a resolution adopted at the 1979 World Congress of the Fourth International. Members of the MSO's sister organization in Sweden, the Socialist Party, who knew Svava during her stay there in 1978-81, have initiated a fund drive in Sweden to support this project. ★

Gretar Kristjansson and Sigurlaug Gunnlaugsdottir

What was involved in the Indo-Sri Lankan peace accord

LEADER of the Ceylon Mercantile Union, Bala Tampo gave the following interview to Gerry Foley in Paris in September before the outbreak of the fighting between the Indian Peacekeeping Force and the Tamil Tigers.

Tampo is also a leader of the Workers' Party, a group formed to advance independent working-class political action; and of a Sri Lankan sympathizing section of the Fourth International. This interview provides background information on the clashes in Sri Lanka, as well as on the peace accord and the opposition to it, both within the Sinhalese majority and the Tamil minority.



HOW MUCH resistance is there to an accord imposed by India?

I don't think that it would be correct to say that it has been imposed by India. On the Sri Lanka side, President Jayawardene in fact stood to gain more immediately from the agreement than India. For India, it is a more long-term gain, essentially in the foreign policy field. For Jayawardene, the agreement provided for him to call in Indian troops, and he called them in immediately after the accord was signed. As soon as the Indian troops landed, the armed conflict that was taking place in the North and the East came to a dead stop.

What has supervened is something quite different. That is conflicts between the Tamil groups, a most unfortunate aspect of the situation. This has resulted in Indian troops having to intervene to stop that conflict, and even to some extent, apparently, in some of them turning on the Indian troops. But there is no question that only the arrival of Indian troops could have ended the conflict between the Sri Lanka state forces and the Tamil armed forces or groups that had been going on with increasing devastation and destruction and loss of life for four years.

■ This conflict among the Tamil groups is not new, is it?

No. My own view is that they are very sectarian. The main group, called the Tamil Tigers, had a policy which in my view was not at all really that of achieving the right of self-determination in the democratic sense for the Tamil-speaking people of the

North and East. Their aim was to establish a separate state called Tamil Eelam, which as far as they were concerned, would have meant their setting up a new state with themselves constituting the sole armed power, and thereby establishing a complete military dictatorship over the Tamil people themselves, but separate from the Sri Lankan state.

Among the masses of the Tamil-speaking people these armed groups were originally regarded with sympathy. They called them "The Boys" to begin with, and The Boys were fighting the occupying Sri Lankan state forces, which were definitely carrying out a policy of terror.

Such state terror involved search and destroy missions into the villages, raping and robbing women, arresting large numbers of youths purely on suspicion and sending them down to the south, economic sanctions, cutting off telecommunications, cutting off the fishing population from the sea and so on. It meant the Sri Lankan state forces and the Sri Lankan government were definitely carrying out a policy aimed at intimidating the whole mass of the Tamil people in the North and the East and the Tamil-speaking people, including Muslims, in the East.

So the fight of these armed groups against the state forces was welcomed and gained a lot of mass sympathy. But later the Tamil armed groups, particularly the Tigers, also started killing their political opponents and even dissidents. These so-called lamp post killings and just plain shootings and killings, even of hostages at certain stages, not only alienated sympathy from outside for them, but alienated sym-

pathy among the Tamil people themselves.

■ This sectarian fighting goes back a way, doesn't it?

It goes back over a year. But there was a time up to the first massacre of Sinhala civilians in Anuradhapura in 1986 when the Tamil groups were essentially fighting the armed forces. Then they had a lot of sympathy. Even among the Sinhala people, there was no great hostility towards them, and in fact their propaganda was to some extent finding a response even among thinking Sinhala people. We, the Workers' Party and my union, helped to contribute to that. But then our fight took the form of defending the right of self-determination.

■ How long did that stage last?

The real armed struggle developed after the July 1983 pogrom when Tamils were killed and an organized drive took place to terrorize Tamils in the south and drive them out of business, drive them out of their homes. Then a very large number became refugees and fled to the North and into the East, and others even fled to other countries, such as India and so on. These refugees provided the first real broad recruiting base for the armed groups, which up till then did not even number a few hundred. They were probably a few scores.

But from being a few scores, in a relatively short time, the armed groups grew to at least two to three thousand. Then they acquired arms on a bigger scale also from outside, as a result of the international reaction essentially among expatriate Tamil groups and others to the July 1983

pogrom.

■ **What specifically did the Workers' Party and your union do?**

We put out a statement on January 1, 1985, in the name of the Workers' Party on the situation in the North and East, upholding the right of self-determination. Then the CMU adopted a very important resolution on this issue of the North and East at our last delegate conference in October 1986.

To test opinion in our own union we decided to have a secret ballot at the delegates' conference. The delegates' conference covers the entire union, and the delegates are freely elected. We had a clear 70% vote for a resolution presented by the executive supporting the right of self-determination of the Tamil-speaking people and also calling for the withdrawal of troops from the North and East. That was the demand that our own branches in the North had put forward.

Of the remaining 30%, only about 12% voted against the resolution. The others either abstained or were neutral. That was a very significant vote because our union at that delegates' conference had at least 95% Sinhala-speaking delegates. There were only 4% from the North and East. So it was clearly a stand taken on a working-class position by a majority of Sinhala-speaking delegates.

Our union is exceptional in that context. I wouldn't say that you could get that kind of vote in any other union that has a majority of Sinhala members. But, by and large, there was no ethnic conflict between the Sinhala and Tamil people. That was clear. And that was one of the things stated in the resolution, that there was no ethnic conflict, that is, no conflict between the people as such.

The July 1983 pogrom also created a situation in which the armed struggle now became an important factor among the Tamil-speaking people, and the armed Tamil groups gained increasing credibility in struggle with the armed forces, and victories of a limited type, at least in holding the armed forces at bay. That was the period when they won a lot of sympathy, from 1983 to 1984.

Then as they gained in strength, the rivalries emerged. At first they combined in keeping guard around the Jaffna fort; there was a certain degree of loose collaboration. But each group always maintained its own separate forces. I would say that period continued for more than a year.

But then came a change, when the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) definitely began to exert itself to knock out the other groups.

I think it was also to some extent related to the peace moves that were being mediated by India, and the attempts to bring the different groups together to bring about some kind of consensus for a political settlement with the Ceylon government.

Now, any kind of political settlement with the Ceylon government had necessarily to exclude the setting up of a separate state. But the Tamil Tiger slogan was, and remained until the very end, "Tamil Eelam," a separate state in the North and East. That was not something that could really be negotiated. But I think that some of the other groups were willing to come to some negotiated settlement, following the lead of the Tamil United Liberation Front (TULF), that is the parliamentary

first group that the LTTE set about to liquidate.

That happened just at the time when an accord was being pushed by the Indian government, and there was every reason for us to believe that the TELO group were inclined to go along with the Indian government on that question. That was the first time a political settlement mediated by India emerged as a possibility.

■ **What role was played by the Tamil Nadu state government?**

Many people in Ceylon and outside have tended to equate Tamil Nadu with India. That is not so. The Indian government's position was in relation to overall Indian policy. The Tamil Nadu position was much more specifically in relation to the Tamils of Ceylon, Tamil Nadu being the only state in the world, even on a federal basis, with a predominantly Tamil population.

Moreover, Tamil Nadu had a much more direct connection with the armed struggle in the North. A tradition of smuggling between the coastal villages of the North of Ceylon and the south of India for smuggling goes back generations. This has also involved conflict with the state forces, customs, navy and so on, for smuggling. It is in that traditional context that the real armed struggle developed.

The first leaders of the Tigers were all from that main coastal town called Valvettithurai. It is a town that from British times has produced seafarers and smugglers, as distinct from fisher folk. In ancient times, they were seafarers. When the British came, they stopped seafarers as much. Then, they took to smuggling. They were closely linked with, but not

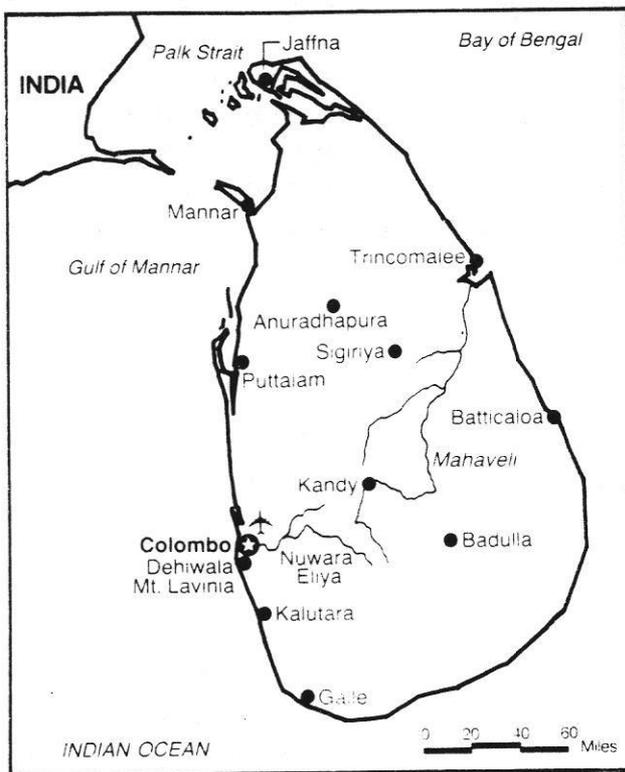
identical with, the fisher folk, who also belong to a separate caste in Jaffna.

■ **All are Hindus?**

They are predominantly Hindus. But the Catholic Church, as in many countries, had carried out conversions in the coastal area. And the influence of Catholic priests in those coastal areas was significant.

And it is significant that the Tigers' leader, Prabhakaran, it is alleged, turned to a Catholic priest for advice and assistance. That is what brought this Catholic priest whom I defended in a big trial, Father Singarayer, to the attention of the authorities. Prabhakaran calls himself the Supreme Commander of the Tamil Tigers. He belongs to that caste of seafarers in the coastal area.

In south India, there was mass sympathy amongst the Tamil people as such for the Tamil-speaking people in the North and East for what they were suffering under the Jayawardene regime. The south Indian



political group that existed previously and still exists in exile in south India, and no doubt still has a base the North and East of Sri Lanka.

■ **So, in your opinion that is basically what the fighting was about, that the Tigers were firm on a separate state and the others were soft?**

That's right. The other groups were ready to look to some kind of an accommodation on the basis of a degree of regional autonomy, short of a separate state. Then the Tigers started to knock them out. First, they started to denounce them. They broke with the common front that had been set up in south India. And then later came armed liquidation.

The other main armed group at the time was the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organization (TELO). They were a breakaway group from the original Tigers. They had also become relatively strong, and had carried out some armed attacks. They were the

coast is a very long coast. All along that coast, there were large numbers of people, particularly fisher folk and others completely in sympathy with their Tamil brothers across the Palk Strait. So, the arms smuggling could continue without any difficulty. And considerable supplies of arms did come in, including modern weapons — mortars, things like that.

■ **How is the accord being implemented now?**

The Indian troops are preoccupied with bringing the Tamil armed groups under the accord. These groups have not surrendered all their arms. But they have surrendered substantial quantities, more than some people expected that they even had. But they obviously have more. And it is very clear from Prabhakaran's own statements, as well as from those of the others, that they fear each other, and therefore don't want to disarm completely. The Indian troops are being very, very tactful about it. They understand that position. But at the same time they cannot allow these people to continue armed conflicts with each other.

■ **I would think that if the masses of the Tamil people see what looks like a solution that these armed groups could lose their support very quickly.**

Definitely. I can tell you from all that I have gathered that after the accord mass sympathy such as had existed for the Tigers has fallen away. The arrival of Indian troops was greeted with widespread sympathy, if not outright expressions of joy, because the Tamil people had suffered for four years, and the economic situation had been very bad because of the government sanctions. All that has changed with the accord. Now the government is at least ostensibly pursuing a policy of reconciliation. The finance minister has spoken publicly of the "three r's," that is, rehabilitation, reconstruction and reconciliation. The line of his wing of the government, backed by the president of course, is to try to reconstruct — to get foreign aid for that purpose. Furthermore, India has for the first time given 500 million rupees economic assistance for rehabilitation in the North.

■ **In this situation, don't the armed groups risk being isolated and smashed?**

If the Indian troops decide to smash them, in my view they can be smashed without much difficulty. There is no question that there is enough cooperation from the public for this and also enough providing of information by the rival groups.

■ **They inform on each other?**

Exactly.

■ **In this situation, have the contradictions between the Indian government and the Tamil Nadu state government**

disappeared?

Yes. That was the big achievement of Rajiv Gandhi. He managed to persuade even the Tamil Nadu prime minister, Ramachandran, to look at the issue from an all-Indian standpoint. He got Jayawardene to accept an Indo-Sri Lanka accord, leaving out the Tamil Tigers, who could not be brought into any accord on any basis acceptable to India. India was never going to support the formation of a separate state for one million Tamils in the North and East of Sri Lanka when in Tamil Nadu there are 55 million Tamils.

Secondly, India's main concern has been its own strategic-defence interests. And the last thing it would want would be a little fragment of a state left on its own.

That might open the door to any imperialist power. As it is, it is the weakness of the Sri Lankan state that caused concern to India, because the Sri Lankan government was leaning over more and more to the imperialists and to Israel, Pakistan and other states hostile to India.

On the other hand, India intervened to win the Sri Lankan government and Jayawardene to the acceptance of some degree of real autonomy for the Tamil-speaking people in the North and East. The Indians were prepared to go as far as setting up a separate federal type of state within a federal constitution.

Of course, Jayawardene was not going to accept this. In the first place it is fundamentally contrary to the provisions of the existing constitution, and would have required a referendum. He is never going to go to a referendum on an explosive issue like that. The autonomy offered does not go beyond administrative devolution.

■ **Is there any possibility that the Tigers will change their policy?**

Well, I am told that the possibility of some kind of dialogue with them is now possible, and I understand that Prabhakaran says that he is open to political discussion.

But, unfortunately for him and his group, they have drawn a line of blood between themselves and the kinsfolk and comrades of the people they killed. And I know for a fact that there are literally hundreds of people in the North who will not rest until they have taken revenge and bumped off Prabhakaran and his close lieutenants.

So, it is very difficult for them even if they wanted now to turn to the Tamil-speaking masses, to turn to what is called the political process.

■ **If it is too late for them now to become a political leadership for the Tamil people, who is going to take the leadership?**

I would think that if peace were restored in the North and East among the Tamils themselves, at the beginning it is possible that the TULF itself can again emerge — that is, enter an electoral process, if one can be got going.



President Junius Jayawardene (DR)

■ **By the TULF, do you mean the former Tamil members of parliament?**

Maybe not them. They have been discredited even among their own following, as having run away and left them to their fate.

■ **So, the TULF in this case would be what was left of their old electoral organization?**

Yes. In the absence of any new political formation, I would think that they can still get going, maybe with some new faces.

■ **There is nothing else in the Tamil area, any sort of Marxist organization?**

The TULF is the only group that has a base in every electoral district. It has the advantage of not having been involved in these internecine conflicts and of having always been in favor of an accord. The TULF did not have an armed force of its own, but preached unity to the other groups, and took an active part in the mediation process of the Indians, advising the Indian government.

I think that most of the proposals that ultimately came into the accord were put forward in consultation with the TULF, who were able to assess how far they could go.

■ **And the Tamil Nadu government now is also behind the pact?**

Ramachandran tried to persuade Prabhakaran to accept the settlement, but the Tiger leader responded by saying "I must consult my people." Then Prabhakaran came back and said this accord has been imposed on us. So, this talk of imposition of an accord strangely enough on the one hand emanates from the Tiger group and certain oth-

er of the groups in the North. But it also emanates from the Sinhala groups, including the prime minister and others within the government who are opposed to the accord, saying that it has been imposed by India on the Sri Lankan government and is a blow to Sri Lankan sovereignty.

The prime minister is taking the position that the accord must be tested constitutionally before the people, hoping that the constitutional court might say there should be a referendum. If there is to be a referendum, of course, then the whole issue will be thrown open among the Sinhala masses, and those opposed to the accord will go all out on an out and out Sinhala racist anti-Indian, anti-Tamil basis against it. But Jayawardene is obviously not going to allow it, nor will the Indians.

■ **In these circumstances, is there a possibility of civil war?**

Not really. But as the Indian high commissioner said, when he was asked why there were Indian frigates in Colombo harbor, he admitted that there were rapid-deployment troops there. He said that that was because there was a danger of assassination of the president, which fortunately did not take place. But, he said, had it taken place and should it still take place there would be chaos and anarchy. I think that he is quite correct in that estimate.

■ **The Indians are prepared to send troops into the Sinhala areas?**

Yes, to try to keep the situation relatively stabilized. If the president is assassinated, and that can still happen. The attempt on August 18 was a very serious attempt. He was extremely lucky to escape it. Had he been killed, nobody could say what would happen. Even though the prime minister would have had to succeed him, he would have faced very strong opposition from other groups. There is no other man to step into the shoes of President Jayawardene.

■ **Is the Sinhala bourgeoisie united behind the accord?**

No. But I would say that a very substantial section of opinion today recognizes that the accord was probably the only way out of an impossible situation. I wouldn't say that they hail the accord. That was quite an exaggeration of some of the national and international press. But there is a feeling of relief. There is a feeling in the business world that they can have better prospects for business, even in the North and East.

To give you a concrete illustration, I met the negotiating committee of the Employers' Federation of Ceylon at the beginning of September. They accepted at the very beginning that we could make some headway on issues where we were deadlocked earlier because of the accord and the changed situation for business in the North and East. Because the North and East are very important, even from the point of view of marketing of goods. The East is probably the best granary and rice paddy

surplus in the region. Now there is also to be rehabilitation and reconstruction with foreign aid. That means also business opportunities. Then the tourist industry shows signs of revival. Hotel shares rose with the accord.

■ **What about the Sinhala masses?**

Among the Sinhala masses once immediate propaganda that the accord was a sell-out to India, that it was a sell-out to Prabhakaran and Eelam was shown to be false, when they saw that in fact the immediate outcome of the accord was the ending of the armed conflict in the North and East and the Tigers and others were going to surrender their arms, they immediately felt that this was a change for the better. Moreover, the government has said that it can save billions that it would otherwise have had to spend on defence. They have promised a substantial pay increase for the public sector which has been denied for three years on the ground of the defence expenditure. So, there is a feeling of expectancy of better economic conditions as a result of the ending of the conflict. There is also the ending of the feeling of tension, of the danger of bomb explosions and Tamil terrorist activity in the South, and of Sinhala soldiers going to the North and being killed.

■ **So the opposition is in the Sinhala petty bourgeoisie?**

Sections undoubtedly of the Sinhala Buddhist petty-bourgeoisie are directly opposed to the accord. This is merely on the basis that it brings the Indians into Sri Lanka, and that is against the interest of the Sinhalese and that they have come for the benefit of the Tamils. That very simplistic attitude is a basis for a hostility. But I would say that the opposition is much more opportunist. Even Mrs Bandaranaike's party and the other Sinhala political parties and groups that have come out against the accord are saying that with their tongue in their cheek. They are saying it because they believe that they must play on what they believe is Sinhala nationalist sentiment against the Tamils and against the Indians.

■ **Do you see this as a continuation of their practice of basing themselves on Sinhala chauvinism?**

Definitely. Mrs Bandaranaike made an absolutely disgraceful statement saying that she has to look after the interests of "her people," meaning the Sinhala people, even though she has been the prime minister of a multi-ethnic country.

At least the accord recognizes Sri Lanka as being multi-ethnic and multi-religious, along with recognizing the need for preserving the unity of the country. Furthermore, it recognizes for the first time that Tamil and English should also become official languages, ending a thirty-year grievance of the Tamils since Sinhala was made the only official language in

1956.

■ **To what extent is the Buddhist clergy an obstacle to the accord?**

There are different types of Buddhist clergy. For instance, I have had some direct contacts with two Buddhist high priests who are organizers and leaders of a movement called the Movement for the Defence of the Motherland. Now, they are quite radical, militant. They organized a May Day meeting, and the government sent the police there and attacked them inside the temple premises when they tried to come out, and shot and killed two people there.

In that connection, I have come into contact with them. As a result, I have had the opportunity at first hand to question them about their own concepts. One of these high priests mentioned to me that they wanted a national figure for their movement. So, they turned to the SLFP and Mrs Bandaranaike. In consultation with them they set up a section in the movement called by a very similar name, the Organization for the Protection of the Motherland, and made Mrs Bandaranaike the president. Now, when this May Day shooting incident took place, Mrs Bandaranaike issued a statement saying that the Organization for the Protection of the Motherland, of which she was patron, had nothing to do with it.

So, I asked this priest to explain the difference. And then, speaking in Sinhala, he made a very significant remark: "We turned to Mrs Bandaranaike because she was a national leader and set up this other organization, but unfortunately the SLFP wing of this movement tried to turn it in a Sinhala Buddhist racist direction. We were concerned to try to create a movement among the Sinhalese for the preservation of the unity of the country on the basis of bringing the peoples of the country together and preventing a separation."

I would say that among these Sinhala Buddhist priests there are different trends. You can't generalize for the Buddhist priesthood even, and certainly not for the Buddhist public.

■ **But where does the Sinhala opposition come from?**

The SLFP, Mrs Bandaranaike and her son are publicly opposed to the accord on a completely racist premise. But in fact they oppose it absolutely opportunistically, thinking that it is the best plank for them. Politically they are bankrupt. They have nothing to offer as an alternative to the Jayawardene regime.

The main open political opposition is from Mrs Bandaranaike's party. In addition, there is undoubtedly opposition to the accord within the government, by a group including the prime minister, in the context of a power struggle to succeed or replace President Jayawardene in the all important post of president. Outside the government, but probably having links with people in the government, are the proscribed Janatha



Tamil Tigers in training (DR)

more obviously Sinhala racist group that is anonymous. It has put out illegal publications under the name "People's Patriotic Front" (FPF). President Jayawardene has attributed robberies and acts of violence in the South, including armed robberies of weapons and explosives from police and military units, to "Southern terrorists." Frequent reference has also been made by him and by the police to the "JVP" in that connection.

Whether the organization that was headed by Rohana Wijeweera and proscribed since July 1983 is the same as the "JVP" now given publicity in relation to "terrorists" or "subversives" in the South, it is difficult to say. It may well be that both the "JVP" and the "PPF," are fronts for right-wing reactionary groups in and outside the government that could emerge in an open power struggle later on.

■ **Can you say what percentage of the Buddhist priests are opposed to the accord?**

No. But I would say that those who would be actively opposed would be a minority. The influence of the Buddhist priests today in Sri Lanka is not so great among the ordinary Sinhala population.

■ **You made a distinction at one point between Tamil-speaking Muslims and others.**

The Muslims in the Eastern province are a distinct entity. They include a large proportion of peasants, as distinct from Muslims in the rest of the country, who are essentially in business and trade and, to a limited extent, in the working class. So, you have in the Eastern province a minority, something like 30% of the population, of land-based Muslims. Tamil is their language. So, they have a link with the Tamil-speaking people linguistically in the Eastern province and through that to the Northern province. But at the same time, they might not like to come under a Tamil-dominated, Tamil-speaking administration in the North and East. They would certainly

have no truck with sections like the Tamil Tigers and others that are out-and-out Tamil racists. But they might go along with more moderate Tamil groups. At one time, for instance, the TULF had Muslim Tamil-speaking MPs from the Eastern province.

If there is a referendum — as is envisaged under this accord — in the Eastern province after a year or so, a very interesting question will be whether the Muslim section of the population swings en bloc with the Sinhala minority of about 25% against the main group of Tamils, who constitute over 42% of the population, or whether they will split, with at least a substantial section joining with other Tamils for a single Tamil-speaking administration for the North and the East.

■ **What is the policy of the Workers' Party toward the accord?**

Well, both the Workers' Party and the CMU, from a working-class standpoint, take the view that the accord does provide a new situation that, in relation to the previously existing situation, is more favorable for political activity, for a lessening of the repression — even though the Emergency has not been ended — and for an opening of something like more peaceful conditions for political struggle.

From that point of view, the accord in the immediate situation is certainly something that we would say we cannot possibly oppose. But of course it carries potential risks from the presence of Indian troops. But the accord itself cannot be criticized on that basis, insofar as it provides for the Indian troops to be there only as long as the president asks that they be there.

■ **What position would you take in the Eastern province itself on the question of whether it should be included in a Tamil autonomous area?**

We would support that. We would support that for the reason that having a single Tamil speaking administration in the North and East — I don't say for the North and East — would bring the largest body of land settled by indigenous Tamil-speaking people together under something like an autonomous administration, which would help to develop them and help them to develop on a basis of accord with the rest of the Sinhala population in the rest of the country. ★

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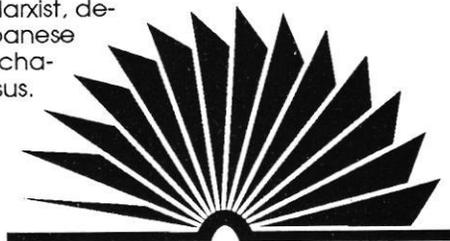
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After the general strike: union bureaucrats running scared

THE GENERAL STRIKE of November 15 was an overall success. Participation was particularly high among industrial workers, but smaller in the public services — especially in education (no more than 40 per cent of teachers joined the strike). In the main cities, there were mass demonstrations of tens of thousands of working people. The last general strike of this sort in Italy was in 1981.

LIVIO MAITAN

TWO ELEMENTS helped to impel the leaderships of the three union confederations (CGIL, CISL and the UIL) to take this initiative. On the one hand, the government showed that it had little inclination to make even minimal concessions in matters of economic policy (the so-called Finance Law). The straw that broke the camel's back was the government's retreat on the proposed reduction of taxes on wages.

At the same time, the government had put forward a bill for regulating the right to strike, a measure designed to blunt this basic weapon of the workers. It was hard for the unions to accept such a decision, although there are divisions among them over it. The UIL is rather favorable to legal regulation, and the union leaders themselves have largely lined up with the government and the big bourgeois press in criticizing the rank-and-file committees (COBAS) for the repeated strikes in transport. [See articles on pages 6 and 7.]

Countering union leadership's passivity

On the other hand, the union leaders could not be unaware of the fact that broad sections of workers were determined not sit back and take the blows inflicted by the austerity policy of the government and the employers, and the attacks on the level of employment. Major struggles had resumed in industry (at Alfa Romeo, for example), as well as in education and transport.

Since last spring, the phenomenon of the COBAS has taken form. These rank-and-file committees have taken the initiative in waging struggles of various kinds, countering the passivity of the union leaderships.

The union bureaucracies faced a clear danger of losing more ground and seeing their role decline. They could not accept the government ignoring their demands, and they could not resign themselves either to be more widely outflanked by the COBAS, or by individual unions or sections of the union movement that had slipped out of their control (as have the unions in the airports and air transport).

So, the leaderships set a demonstration for November 17 in Rome of pensioners and a general strike for November 25. The latter form of struggle has a tradition in the Italian trade-union movement. It is a form of mobilization that has at most very vague objectives. Most times, it involves

work stoppages for a limited time (four hours at most), not providing for new initiatives and a stepping up of the struggle if the objectives are not won. In other words, it is conceived solely as a limited means of pressure.

This time the accounts of the strike and the comments about it in the bourgeois mass media have been different from on previous occasions. In general, they have played up the successes of the strike, without overemphasizing the lack of support in some important factories (Fiat in Turin, for example). They have accepted with much less reservations the unions' own figures on the demonstrations, which are almost always greatly exaggerated. (In Milan, for example, they talked about 70,000 people, while the real number was about a third of that).

A test for rank-and-file committees

The reason for all this is obvious. The government and the bosses want the unions on their knees, but they have no interest in seeing the union bureaucracies outflanked by rank-and-file initiatives, and still less when they come from instruments of struggle more effective than the ossified union structures.

The trade-union bureaucrats, like the Communist Party press, did not hesitate to present the success of the strike as a victory by the unions over the COBAS. This was a very premature judgment. On the eve of the strike itself, union leaders had to register a new loss of prestige in air transport. Rank-and-file bodies carried off a fully successful strike at Rome airport, the country's largest, ignoring a united appeal from the three union confederations. Two days after the general strike, the train drivers' COBAS launched a strike that almost totally paralyzed the railroads.

Still more important, the COBAS in various sectors (education, rail, postal service, subways) have called a demonstration for December 12 in Rome against any restriction of the right to strike. This action will be an important test of the influence of the COBAS and of the weight of the more militant sectors today in the Italian trade union movement. ★

