

International VIEWPOINT

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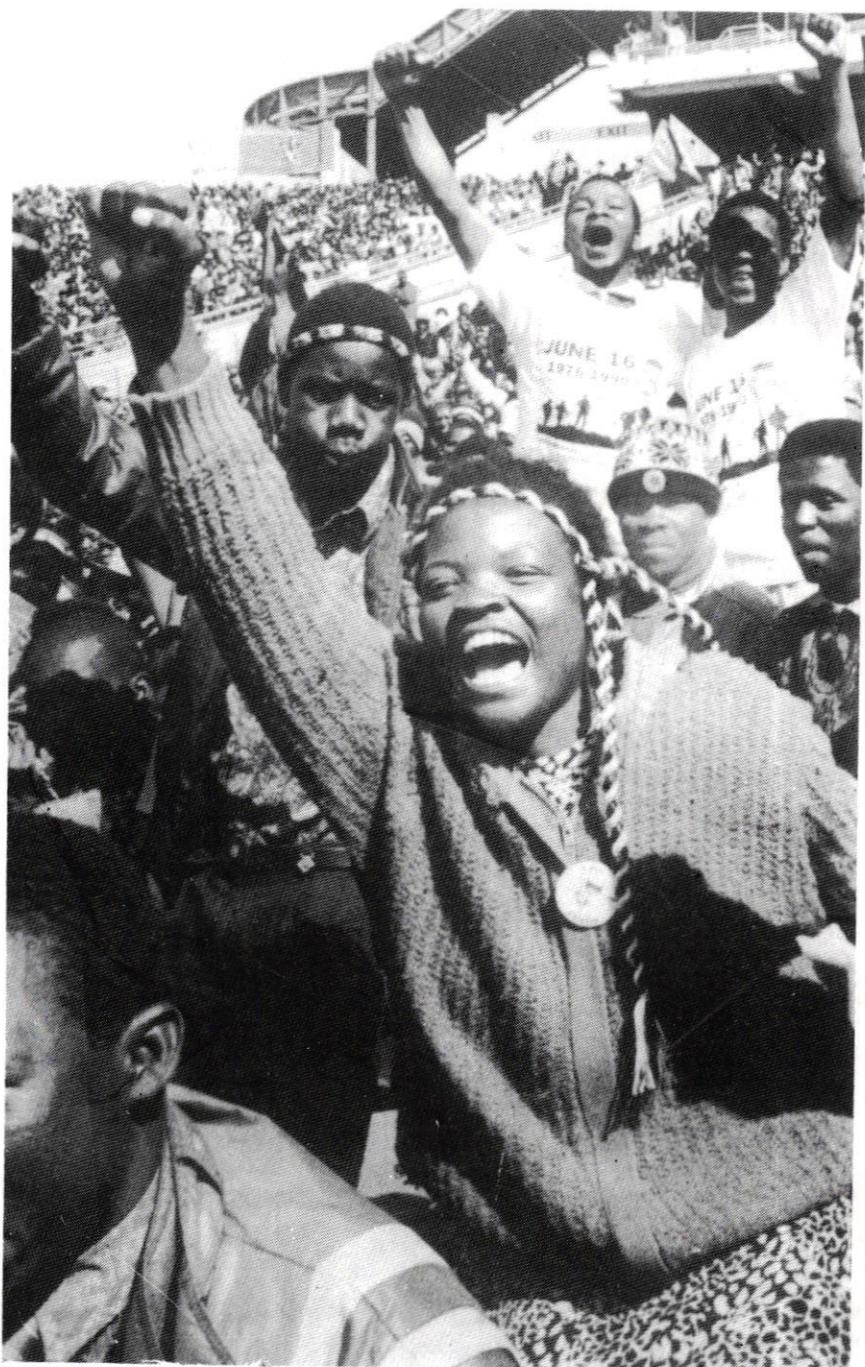
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International VIEWPOINT

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Massacre in Jerusalem

ON October 8, 1990, the Israeli government perpetrated outside Jerusalem's Al-Aqsa mosque the biggest massacre committed since the invasion of the Occupied Territories in 1967. The murderous rage of the Zionist forces led to more than 20 deaths and a hundred wounded.

THIS massacre was no accident. According to the Jerusalem Alternative Information Centre, "There is no doubt that the shots fired at the crowd on the hill of the Dome of the Rock did not result, as Police Minister Ronnie Milo has claimed, from the purported need of the police to defend themselves and to protect Jewish worshippers assembled before the Western Wall. It was, in fact, a premeditated attack by the police, with the intention of killing. It was a response to the continued pressure of the right, which calls for the brutal elimination of the *intifada* in a bloodbath and the deportation of thousands of activists".

Like the preceding slaughter at Rishon-le-Zion on May 20, 1990 (see *IV* 186), the new massacre — more serious still, not just because of the much greater number of victims but also because it has been committed by the forces of "order" and not by a "maniac" — has inflamed the entire Palestinian people, on both banks of the Jordan. On the West Bank and in the Gaza Strip, the *intifada* was in full flood at the time of this massacre (this was not the case on May 20), stimulated notably by the solidarity of the Palestinians with Iraq and by their indignation at the hypocrisy of the United States and its allies appealing to "international law" in the case of Kuwait. In Jordan also, and for the same reasons, the Palestinian and Jordanian populations were in a state of mobilization.

The immediate consequence of the October 8 massacre has been an upsurge of the mass movement throughout these territories, confirming the growing synchronization, since Rishon-le-Zion, between the popular struggles in Jordan and Palestine.

The new slaughter will also contribute to the radicalization of public opinion throughout the Arab region, which will not fail to make the obvious link with the imperialist strangulation of Iraq. We have

already witnessed the evident embarrassment of the Arab governments engaged in the Western war effort — including the Kuwaiti government in exile — who feel themselves obliged to demand strongly that Washington for once does not show its usual complicity with Israel. For them, such a distancing is necessary if they are to continue to participate in the war effort against Iraq.

In any case, this massacre greatly complicates the tasks of the US administration in relation to Iraq. It puts a question mark over the military option prepared by the Pentagon, which the White House has been waiting for the right moment to implement.

Bush faced with political dilemma

Despite the efforts of the anti-Iraqi hawks to deny that there is any connection between what is happening over Kuwait and the massacre in Jerusalem, in fact, the overlapping of the problems is such that Washington has been obliged to react vigorously to this massacre, lest it compromise gravely its possibilities of action in the Gulf. Bush faces a difficult dilemma — to offend the powerful pro-Israeli lobby in the United States, a month before the legislative elections, is a perilous enterprise, above all in the midst of the current budget crisis.

This raises the question of why the the present rightist Israeli government has committed this massacre. For everything seems to indicate that, as our correspondents in Jerusalem maintain, this was a premeditated act. The only possible explanation — which conforms moreover to the thinking of the Israeli far right — is the politics of doing the worst.

Since the beginning of the crisis in the Gulf, the Israeli leaders have watched with growing apprehension as they have begun to be viewed as a political handicap to the strategy of the imperialist West in the Middle East. It has been spelled out to them from many directions that after Iraq has been dealt with they will be

brought to heel in their turn, albeit in a much more gentle manner. Mitterand has floated the idea of an international conference for a comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Arab conflict. The nadir, for the Shamir government, was to see Bush himself, in his October 1 speech before the UN General Assembly, following the French president's lead, saying that an unconditional Iraqi retreat from Kuwait would permit the "settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict".

There can be no doubt that the slaughter in Jerusalem is directly related to these declarations, which are very displeasing for the Zionist leaders. These latter feel obliged to convince the US godfather that the Palestinians are in the same trench as Saddam Hussein, thus cutting short any parallel established between their occupation and annexation of Arab territories and that of Iraq against Kuwait.

In fact, the Zionist leaders hope in this way to turn the confrontation they desire between Iraq and the imperialist camp to their own advantage. Their aim would thus be to launch a general assault against the Palestinians and provoke their exodus en masse ("transfer", according to the preferred euphemism in Israel). They would profit thus both from the unprecedented security which a massive US presence in the area would offer them, and the neutralization of the enemy they fear the most today, Iraq.

The imperialist intervention in the Middle East is a reactionary offensive against the Arab peoples. Today genuine solidarity with the Palestinian people is inseparable from the struggle for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of imperialist forces from the entire region. ★



Kurdistan and the Gulf crisis



KURDISTAN is a country the size of France with 25 million inhabitants and a centuries long history. The great majority of the Kurdish nation however is divided between Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria. The struggle of the Kurdish people for their national self-determination has been violently repressed in all these countries. This denial of Kurdish identity and nationhood has been backed up by the big powers who arm these states and by the international institutions. What has been the Kurdish reaction to the Gulf crisis? The French Trotskyist paper *Rouge* interviewed representatives of five Kurdish parties in Paris for its issue of October 11, 1990. The interviewer was Michel Morel.

ROUGE

“NOBODY could wish for a war today” says Ahmad from the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) from Iraq. “That would mean the deaths of thousands of civilians. But can the Saddam problem be resolved without war? If yes, then nobody is opposed, but personally I do not believe that. The embargo will not make the dictator see reason. We are ready to ally with the devil to get rid of Saddam.”

Iraqi Kurdistan has been destroyed. Thousands of villages have been razed to the ground and a million and a half Kurds live in camps surrounded by police. There is no family which has not seen at least two children tortured or killed in the fighting. “The invasion of Kuwait gives the Kurdish people an opportunity. If Saddam Hussein is overthrown then everything is possible.”

“Saddam Hussein will be even more dangerous in five years if he is allowed to continue” explains Bayar who represents the Iraqi Democratic Party of Kurdistan. “The DPK is a peaceful party which defines itself between socialism and communism, but we are defending the rights of the Kurdish people. We did not choose to take up arms, we have been forced to do it.”

In 1970, Saddam Hussein signed an agreement with Mustafa Barzani, “historic” leader of the Iraqi Kurds. Saddam recognized thereby the autonomy of Kurdistan, promising that regional institutions would be established within four years.

In 1974 Saddam reneged on these promises, following a friendship treaty with the Soviet Union, which had before then been favourable to the Kurds. After that the Shah of Iran supported the

Kurds, with the agreement of the USA. However the Shah also signed a treaty with Iraq, in 1975 in Algiers, and dropped the Kurds. In 1983, Turkish elite troops moved in to clean up the Kurdish frontier regions, with the agreement of the Iraqi regime. At the same time eight thousand of Barzani’s troops were arrested and taken by the Iraqi army to an unknown destination. Their fate remains undiscovered. In 1988, some 5,000 men, women and children were gassed.

Military scenario cannot be rejected

“There are only two solutions for getting rid of Saddam Hussein. The regime could be overthrown from within or the issue can be resolved by military intervention.” Bayar insists “one cannot reject this last scenario.” At the same time he is against the permanent presence of foreign troops in the region and states that he has no illusions in the imperialist powers. The Kurdish people have been among their primary victims.

And when, for the first time, he was received by the French president François Mitterrand recently, he stressed that a real change of attitude would only be credible on condition that the Kurdish question and its peaceful solution was recognized as an issue.

Since the defeat of Barzani in 1975 the Kurds of Iraq and Turkey have been separated by thirty kilometres of no man’s land where the villages have been destroyed, the trees cut down and the water supplies blocked up. Troops have orders to fire on anything that moves.

Azad Hogueir, an official of the Nation-

al Liberation Front of Kurdistan (NLFK) in Turkey, condemns Saddam’s invasion of Kuwait. But he believes that this is merely a pretext for the imperialist powers, whose intervention has nothing to do with international law. “When Baghdad attacked Kurdistan with chemical weapons in recent years there was no protest. Today, the region’s problems cannot be resolved by military intervention. On this level, the imperialists will do not better than the Iraqi regime.”

Only the progressive forces of the region itself can contribute to resolving the Palestinian question, the Lebanese dilemma or the Kurdish problem, according to Azad Hogueir. But these forces are too weak and are unable to offer an alternative to the governments that presently exist.

Popular protests coincide with Saddam’s policy

The popular protest movements in countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Syria, or Palestine against the intervention of foreign troops in the Gulf tend therefore to coincide with Saddam’s policy. “They nonetheless express a legitimate anti-imperialist desire and must be supported.” The occupation of Kuwait may create favourable conditions for the Kurdish struggle. If Saddam falls for example, the Intifada in Turkish Kurdistan (see *IV* 184) led by militants of the NLFK might find support from the Kurds of Iraq.

In Turkey, the front has been supporting the movement against the military intervention, and it has taken part in demonstrations to this end organized in Europe. “The Turkish state is preparing for war. It

hopes to profit from the deployment of Western troops to strengthen its ties with the West, get new credits and justify its own state-fascist policy in Kurdistan."

Last April the Turkish government introduced decrees censoring the press, and restricting the right to strike. Some 250 villages have been destroyed by fire. Fighters, men, women and children have been killed and the inhabitants deported. On August 23 this year Turkey sent a letter to the General Council of Europe, in which it made it clear that these decrees "should be considered exempt from the obligations regarding human rights and basic liberties in the European Convention, because Turkey is involved in a war in South Eastern Anatolia." Use of the word Kurdistan is forbidden in Turkey. The Turkish regime, furthermore, wants to get its hands on the oil-producing Mosul region in Iraq — a Kurdish region.

The Kurdish Workers' Party (KWP) which leads the NLFK, fights for the independence of Kurdistan. It is a young party, founded at the start of the 1980s, which took up arms in 1984.

For Abdullah, an official of the Association of Kurdish Workers in France, Saddam's invasion of Kuwait cannot be justified. "We must force Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait by means of the embargo. If not, his regime will be strengthened. But as far as I know", says Abdullah, "the United Nations has not supported the sending of troops in the region. The USA has taken the initiative at each stage."

He underlines the hypocrisy of the Western countries who have financed and armed Saddam's regime for years, and supported him in the war with Iran. Hussein has spent these years torturing, hanging and smashing all democratic forces in Iraq, apart from his murderous war on the Kurds.

Negotiations, not armed confrontation

"It is impossible either to be at Saddam's side or agree with the policy of the USA." Abdullah supports negotiations to resolve the region's conflicts, since armed confrontation solves nothing. But the people talking about a negotiated solution are completely ignoring the Kurdish question. This includes the UN which is meant to uphold the right of peoples to self-determination. "This is quite surprising."

"The outbreak of war in the Middle East would have very serious consequences for the peoples of the region and others." The Association has taken part in demonstrations organized in France against the war.

At the same time Abdullah insists on the responsibility of the left and of democrats: they must make the Kurdish question known. A flag of the Socialist Party of Kurdistan in Turkey (SPKT) adorns one of the office's rooms. Some members

Some Kurdish organizations

Political Union of Kurdistan (Iraq): A coalition of two currents, a more traditionalist current associated with the party leader Jalal Talabani, the other, the Komala, formally adhering to "Marxism-Leninism". Claimed to have 15,000 guerillas before the 1985 offensive by Saddam Hussein. Supported by Syria, the PUK demands democracy for Iraq and autonomy for Kurdistan.

Democratic Party of Kurdistan (Iraq): The organization of the historic Kurdish leader Mustafa Barzani, and now led by his son Mashud Barzani. Allied with Iran during the Iran/Iraq war. The party is based on traditional village structures, with the Barzanis being also religious leaders.

Kurdish Workers Party/ National Liberation Front of Kurdistan (Turkey): According to Fuat Orçun in *IV* #184, "Before the 1980 coup the KWP (PKK) was very isolated, owing to its authoritarian methods and its recourse to political violence as a way of dealing with political differences.... The violence was also directed at its own militants and sectors of the population that opposed it." Nonetheless, the PKK is the main Kurdish protagonist in the anti-government fighting in Turkish Kurdistan. A "Marxist-Leninist" organization with a pragmatic international line.

The Democratic party of Iranian Kurdistan: The largest Kurdish party in Iran, supported by Iraq during the Iran/Iraq war. Calls for autonomy for Iranian Kurdistan within the framework of a democratic Iran.

As is apparent from the accompanying article, Kurdish organizations are divided by the borders of the states they operate within — and are oppressed by. Often they apply the principle of "my enemy's enemy is my friend", making alliances with regimes hostile to the one they are directly fighting. Nonetheless, the struggle for Kurdish self-determination, aside from its self-evident justice, presents a strategic challenge to the prevailing order in the Middle East. ★

of the Association are supporters of this party, some of the Communist party of Turkish Kurdistan.

The Kurds of Iran have not stopped fighting the Tehran government for ten years. Some 5,000 guerilla fighters (peshmergas) have been killed in battle and 50,000 civilians have died. Iranian Kurdistan is the last bastion of liberty in the Islamic republic. But the media suppresses the information. "The European public has not had the right to know about the struggle of the Kurdish people", explains Azad, an official of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (DPIK).

Mobilizing to save a family of emirs

"In principle, we condemn any annexation, but how can the world mobilize for a family of emirs? If there is really this desire to defend human rights, there are 25 million Kurds to think about. We have been the first to be affected by Saddam Hussein's policies.

"The rapprochement between Iran and Iraq is worrying for us. The West is on the way to making a big mistake." That is, out of hatred towards Iraq to normalize relations with Iran. It has also allowed the Tehran regime to do what it likes against the Kurds in Iran. "The

West is now ready to forget all (Iran's) crimes, its political prisoners and massacre of opposition." According to Azad, the Iranian regime is the worst in the region, and worse today than ten years ago.

The massive deployment of Western troops "is a very dangerous game. All the peoples of the region will pay the price for it. War would bring the absolute ruin of Iraq."

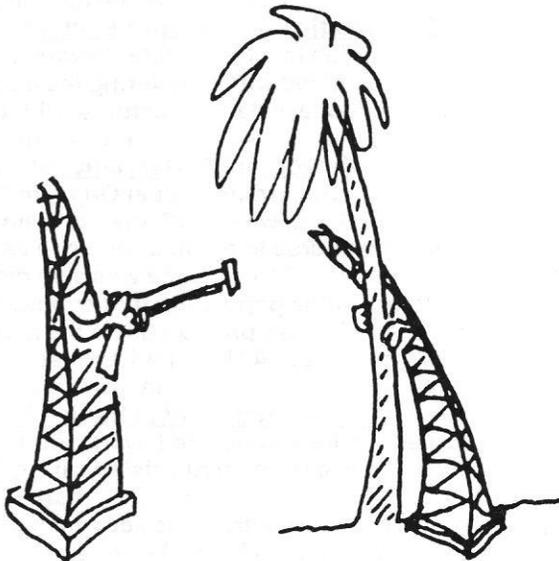
Personalizing a political problem

To eliminate Saddam is not the solution according to Azad. "This is not the first time that a political problem has been personalized in this way, as if the problem will go away if the individual concerned is ousted. It is almost impossible to imagine what the consequences of a concerted attack including the Islamic Republic of Iran would be. After such a war, Islamic fundamentalism would appear everywhere, like mushrooms."

The DPIK has not taken part in the recent peace demonstrations. "The solution to the Kurdish question is inseparable for us from condemnation of the war. If the demonstrations pose the problem of international negotiation to solve the problems of the Gulf region, then we would support them." ★

Oil and solidarity

THE GULF CRISIS is affecting the whole Arab world. Algerian society has been profoundly shaken. We interviewed Saïd, a militant of the Algerian Socialist Workers Party, an organization in political sympathy with the Fourth International in Algeria. The interview was conducted on October 8, 1990 by Cecilia Garmendia.



WHAT stand has the Algerian government taken over the Gulf crisis?

Their position has been extremely cautious. They have wrapped themselves in the flag of "international law". They have demanded both the withdrawal of the Iraqi troops from Kuwait and of the United States' military forces. Officially, Algeria has supported the United Nations sanctions against Iraq. In such forums as the Arab League and the Maghreb Union, Algeria has not made much noise, even abstaining on the vote in the first of these bodies.

In the framework of the Rabat Triangle, which brings together Algeria, Morocco and Jordan, a declaration was worked out and proposed to the other Arab countries, without great success. This text looked both ways, demanding Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait, but also calling for Iraq to be given control of an oil field and coming out against the return to power of the Kuwaiti emir.

■ **Does the ruling party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), with its nationalist traditions, have a position distinguishable from the government?**

The FLN is much more clearly in favour of Iraq. Arab nationalist sentiment has been revived by Saddam Hussein's attitude. The FLN leadership puts pre-conditions on the withdrawal of imperialist troops, but the rank-and file militants are simply in favour of Saddam.

6 ■ **Meanwhile the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) seems torn between the feelings of its rank and file and its**

Saudi paymasters.

The base of the FIS clearly supports Saddam Hussein, but the leadership has indeed found itself in a cleft stick. To give an example, during an FIS meeting on the future of the Arab nation, it was possible to see banners supporting Saddam as well as banners more critical of him.

The FIS needs the support of regimes such as those in Kuwait and Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, it hopes to play a leading political role and thus likes to put itself forward as a useful go-between, capable of dealing with the situation in the Arab countries.

■ **And Ben Bella 1?**

Back now in Algeria he has developed a position of very bold support for Iraq, even calling on the population to go to fight on the side of Iraq. Ben Bella is aiming at the same popular base as the Islamic fundamentalists, and he is going in for demagoguery on the grand scale.

■ **How has the Algerian population reacted to the situation?**

Anti-imperialist feeling predominates; throughout Algeria people support Saddam. But there have also been changes of mood. Up until the beginning of September, Saddam was glorified, in the football stadiums and so on. He looked like someone who had stood up to imperialism.

In the Berber-speaking regions, which certainly cannot be suspected of pan-Arabism, the Iraqi head of state was also seen as a great man. Saddam was raising his head when the whole world was knuckling under.

A lot of Algerians watch French television and the "Western" presentation of the Gulf events has only stirred up Arab nationalist sentiment further.

The Gulf Crisis is a frequent subject of conversation in the streets. It has clearly struck the base of the fundamentalists, who have finally found a hero to replace the meanderings of their leaders' positions.

However, feeling and interest have now fallen. The situation here is in many respects catastrophic: the cost of living has gone up dramatically, and the Gulf crisis has become a matter of secondary interest for Algerians.

■ **Have there been any actions around the Gulf crisis?**

The FLN organized a demonstration that only attracted around a hundred people. The Workers Party [a Trotskyist organization sympathetic to the current led by Pierre Lambert] got 200 people outside the US Embassy. Finally, the PST held a meeting with 300 to 400 people with participation by the Communist League of Tunisia, Palestinians, Lebanese and so on.

There is a Committee in Support of the Iraqi People, in which the PST participates, which is based on forces involved over the years in work in solidarity with Palestine.

The Committee brings together the nationalist left which is above all motivated by pan-Arabism. But the Committee's line has been very pro-Iraq; it is hard work in this context reminding people of the brutal nature of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship.

■ **What has been the impact of the Gulf crisis on the Algerian internal situation?**

It is still premature to talk about that, but the rise in petrol prices has already been felt. It is manna from heaven for the managers and those who are in on the oil business in Algeria. There is a huge amount of money on the move. This explains the caution of the Algerian government, who are profiting from the threat of war in the Gulf. ★



1. Ahmed Ben Bella was a leader of the FLN during the war of independence. He was president of Algeria from 1963-65 when he was overthrown by the head of the army, Houari Boumedienne. After imprisonment in Algeria, Ben Bella lived in exile in France for many years, until his recent return to Algeria.

Right to asylum for Jose Maria Sison

ON JULY 13, 1990, the Dutch Justice Ministry announced that it had rejected the demand for political asylum of Jose Maria Sison — "Joma" — one of the historic figures of the Communist Party of the Philippines.

PAUL PETITJEAN

JOSE MARIA SISON was the Chairman of the Communist Party of the Philippines (PCP) between its foundation in 1968 and 1977, when he was arrested by the army. He was severely tortured, and held incommunicado and without trial until the overthrow of the regime of Ferdinand Marcos in 1986. He was freed after the "February revolution" in that year with many other prisoners on the orders of the new head of state Corazon Aquino.

After his release, Joma Sison did not return to clandestinity, although he did not renounce his revolutionary opinions. He became a public activist, contributing notably to the formation of the Partido ng Bayan, (the People's Party), which is a legal organization. Attached to the University of the Philippines, and involved in university activities, Sison gave conferences for which he travelled abroad, both to Australia and Europe. It was on one of these trips, in 1988, that the Filipino government took away his passport. At the same time a violent poster and press campaign was launched against him. Under these circumstances, he decided to apply for political asylum in The Netherlands.

The rejection of this application is a serious matter, for a number of reasons:

The Dutch ministry claims that Jose Maria Sison is at risk only of being *prosecuted*, and not *persecuted* if he returns to his country. In fact, a price of a million pesos (about US\$50,000) has been put on his head. His wife has been assessed at half that sum. This means, concretely, that anybody in the Philippines can kill them to get these rewards. Several leaders of the Partido ng Bayan have been assassinated, even though they were not facing legal proceedings. The former head of the PCP would obviously be a prize target for all the death squads and vigilante groups that haunt the country¹. Once back in the Philippines both Julieta and Joma Sison would be in immediate danger of death.

The Ministry also produced another, especially dangerous, argument to justify its decision. It is employing the notion of the "intellectual author" — "auctor intellectualis" — to claim that Jose Maria Sison, even while residing in The Netherlands, can be held responsible before Filipino law for the actions of the Communist guerillas of the New People's Army. This idea of "intellectual authorship" can obviously be extended to cover anything. It can, notably, be used against any revolutionary militant on account of their convictions alone, whatever they may do.

The Dutch Ministry's decision calls into question traditional European law concerning political asylum. It has a directly international dimension. It comes at a moment when a number of European governments, via the secret Schengen negotiations, have been elaborating new repressive measures under the pretext of harmonizing "reception policies" in the run up to 1992².

This decision therefore sets a precedent with implications for other European Community countries. It is all the more significant from this point of view that the Ministry's letter bears the signature of Secretary of State Aad Kosto, who belongs to the PVdA, the Dutch social democratic party who is a member of the coalition government rather than that of a figure from the CDA, the Christian democratic partner in the coalition.

It is, furthermore, clear that the Filipino and US governments have put considerable pressure on their Dutch counterparts to ensure that asylum is refused to Jose Maria Sison.

Sison has appealed against the Ministry's decision, and the decision can still be changed. It is thus essential to act quickly. Numerous personalities and organizations in the Netherlands have supported the demand for asylum from this Filipino militant. The Dutch section of Amnesty International had taken up Sison's case even before the Ministry's decision, calling for Sison to be granted Refugee status A — the category which ensures the most protection.³

The significance of the case of Jose Maria Sison goes far beyond the Netherlands, given the process of unification of EC rules and the pressures applied by the governments of the Philippines and the

Worsening crisis

THE DUTCH GOVERNMENT has refused to grant political asylum to Jose Maria Sison, although the situation in the Philippines has continued to deteriorate. A new military rebellion took place on October 4 on the Southern island of Mindanao. The government's air force intervened to crush the rebellion, but this has not changed the underlying problem of discontent in the armed forces. The social crisis is getting worse, aggravated by the rise in the price of oil and the collapse of the immigrant labour market in the Middle East.

Under pressure from all sides, the Aquino government has proposed the opening of new peace negotiations with the military extreme right as well as with the National Democratic Front (NDF) and Communist Party. A government spokesperson, Jose Yap, has gone to the Netherlands to meet the NDF's representatives, among them Luis Jalandoni, the Front's vice-president for international affairs. Jose Sison has also been consulted. ★

United States. The defence campaign must also be international in its scope. ★

LETTERS and messages of protest against the rejection of Jose Maria Sison's application for political asylum should be sent to the Dutch Ministry of Justice at the following address:

Minister of Justice of the Netherlands

**Postbus 20301
2500 EH Den Haag
The Netherlands**

A committee in defence of Filipino political refugees in the Netherlands has been set up following the decision. Copies of letters and messages to the Ministry should be sent to the following address:

**Steucomite Filippijnse Vluchtelingen
Postbus 9376
3506 GJ Utrecht
The Netherlands**

1. In 1987 Amnesty International published an alarming report on the proliferation of para-military groups of all sorts in the Philippines and their actions (see IV 141).

2. See on this subject, Michael Hainz: "La politique européenne d'accueil des réfugiés" *Etudes*, May 1990 and Béatrice Rayman, "The Schengen Wall" in IV 189.

3. Letter from Amnesty International (Nederland) to J. M. Sison, dated July 3, 1990.

Latin American Communist Parties:

The impact of perestroika

WE PUBLISH BELOW extracts of a document issued in March 1990 by the Communist Parties of Costa Rica, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Argentina, which deals with the recent events in Eastern Europe and appeals for revolutionary unity. The text is taken from *Quetzal*, March 1990.

INTRODUCTION

THE OPEN LETTER of the Communist Parties of Costa Rica, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador and Argentina published below is a sign of the rethinking going on among revolutionary and progressive forces — whether of Christian or Communist inspiration — since the collapse of the bureaucratic dictatorships in Eastern Europe. A central theme of these reflections is the concern of revolutionary movements in the Third World over the risk of a “peace of the mighty” limited to the North, and cutting out the two thirds of the planet which remains plunged in misery and under-development. The implicit criticism of the present international course of Soviet policy is all the more significant in that it is coming from parties that have until now been completely subordinate to Moscow.

Whatever our disagreements with some of the political judgements expressed in the document, they open up debates which are needed for the renewal of Marxist thought, debates which cannot be dissociated from defence of the Cuban revolution, and of the FSLN and FMLN, who are caught in the vice of East/West negotiations. — *Janette Habel*

IN THESE times of crisis, of intense capitalist offensive and great revolutionary possibilities, we have decided to make public our problems and perspectives. This is not the time to keep silent, for we have reached a vital stage for the revolutions and for the patriotic and popular struggles in America and throughout the Third World.

Our continent, along with the rest of the Third World, has never known such a crisis. United States imperialism has met great difficulties and risks as a result of its aggressive policies. The possibilities for development in Latin America and the Third World have been stifled. This has rebounded on imperialism through massive emigration which menaces its internal social stability, bringing the problems it has helped to create onto its own door-

step.

Instability and pressure for social change are growing in the dependent countries. Our peoples' deepest aspirations have not been satisfied by limited democratic regimes which refuse all real popular participation in decision-making.

The US imperialists remain arrogant, despite the deep crisis which is afflicting the system of domination and the decomposition of their society. This arrogance is reinforced by the crisis of certain models of socialism afflicted by bureaucracy, super-centralism, dogmatism as well as structural and conjunctural factors. These regimes have become authoritarian and repressive in the highest degree, and are far away from the initial ideals of social justice and democracy.

The arms build up is the main cause of the crisis of North American imperialism. The same is true for the USSR — for different reasons and on a different economic base — which is faced with economic stagnation and crisis. The *perestroika* reform programme has been born from the need to confront this crisis and renew socialism. After being limited for a period to economic acceleration and intensive development, these reforms have been carried through on the level of political democratization and openness with regard to information.

This necessary change has provoked new and unforeseen problems and is evidence of big ideological weaknesses in the absence of a coherent strategy for socialist renewal and a force capable of leading it successfully. The Bush administration's arrogance is fed by the big weaknesses of the socialist camp, which has known crises, deviations and theoretical deficiencies, which have provoked a worrying decline in anti-imperialism and revolutionary positions.

Some people, indeed, have gone so far as to claim that imperialism “no longer exists”, that it is no longer “hostile” and that it can even become an “ally” in the framework of a convergence between systems and forces that are really antagonistic. Imperialism remains the main enemy of the peoples; it is responsible for the dramatic misery and sufferings that afflict humanity. Imperialism cannot be judged solely from the point of view of its super-developed poles — those capitalist countries that have reached the maximum of social and economic well-being, building themselves on the exploitation, and pillage of the Third World.

The obverse side of the system

The Third World is the obverse side of this system made up of injustices, discriminations, insecurity, unemployment; there forms of alienation that no longer exist in the developed countries continue to flourish.

We find the new thesis, according to which anti-imperialism is out of date along with popular revolutions in the oppressed, super-exploited and impoverished regions, disturbing and disgraceful. This theory is finding, unfortunately, a certain echo in the new thinking and the new mentality present in *perestroika*.

However we judge positively the efforts made by the USSR and other countries, obliged to reach governmental accords with capitalist power, to avoid the big tragedies which menace humanity. We understand the preoccupation that may be felt in Europe over nuclear war and the dramatic ecological disequilibria provoked by industrial civilization.

We rejoice as well that aspirations for change, democratization and self-determination have been strengthened in

Eastern Europe, where the bureaucratic models are in crisis and agony.

Dogmatism, arbitrariness and faith in sterile old schemas are no longer the guidelines for our thinking.

Democratization should not be limited to the Eastern European countries and should not copy the schemas and models of representative democracy — which have shown their crisis and their limits in the Western world — for they are too formal and do not guarantee popular participation in decision-making.

We do not believe in the proclamations about liberty and democracy from the capitalist countries which oppress millions of people and condemn them to hunger, illiteracy and disease.

We are in solidarity with the forces that are fighting in these countries to defend the interests of everyone.

We do not believe in the virtues of peace between the Great of the world nor in a humanism which is limited to Northern Europe or the Common European Home, ignoring the two thirds of the planet that lives and suffers in the Third World.

Imperialism — enemy of the peoples

We do not believe that the United States or the other imperialist countries are going to cease to be the enemies of the people or of socialism. We do not believe in the unilateral disarmament of socialism and the revolutionary forces at a moment when the US is stepping up its strategy of low intensity war and their projects for the militarization of space to carry their hegemony to its height.

No general interest can cancel out the need for the emancipation of the oppressed peoples of the Third World and the struggles for democracy, peace, justice and self-determination which are continuing in Central America, Palestine, South Africa and in all the down-trodden countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. We are outraged by the attempts at imposing a dubious "ideal" democracy, which is in fact limited and made up of discriminations and manipulations.

The weakening of internationalism in the Soviet Union reinforces the counter-revolutionary chauvinism which is menacing the unity of the country. The political weakness weighs on the USSR and still more on the Eastern European countries — due to the crisis and the absence of vanguards with the confidence of the people, capable of giving a socialist direction to these events.

The efforts of those who are trying to renovate socialism, without at the same time allowing it to be denatured by capitalist influences, deserve our admiration.

The weakening of socialism facilitated the military intervention in Panama, the right's counter-offensive in Nicaragua, the US's freedom of action and that of the

genocidal regime in El Salvador, the grave threats to the Cuban revolution and the imperialist escalation throughout the region.

We believe in socialist renewal.

We believe in a democracy where popular power allows the increased participation of new organizations and new social and political actors.

We believe in the necessity of re-establishing the original socialist ideal, involving both social and democratic changes.

We believe in peace, which goes together with liberation.

We believe in the necessity and possibility of popular revolutions to achieve democracy, social justice and sovereignty.

We believe in revolutionary internationalism and anti-imperialism. Our peoples are victims of imperialism and we cannot renounce the revolutionary struggle for popular emancipation and a new democracy.

In the Third World, the situation is terrible. Capitalist models and structures offer no solution; on the contrary, they make the problems worse. The institutions are corrupt, democracy is mutilated and restricted, sovereignty is scoffed at and social and political tensions are mounting. The revolution is a historic challenge. It preserves all its actuality and gains historic legitimacy, and, furthermore, it is indispensable for dealing with the Third World's problems.

It is necessary to create and encourage the revolutionary vanguards through a unitary policy, through struggle and through close links with the popular masses. It is necessary to build a big alliance for democracy and self-determination.

Intransigent defence of Cuba needed

This implies intransigent defence of Cuba, for this country is the pioneer of the revolutionary transition in Latin America and the symbol of anti-imperialism and internationalism in the region. It is necessary to strengthen solidarity with the Sandinista people's revolution in Nicaragua, represented by the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN), and with the organs of popular power which continue to function after the election defeat.

It is necessary to reflect on the causes of that defeat in order to go beyond the errors that were committed. It is also necessary to continue solidarity with the fight of the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) and with all the patriotic and democratic forces in El Salvador, and with the fight of the Revolutionary National Union of Guatemala (URNG) and the democratic struggles in Haiti, Colombia, Brazil, Peru, Argentina,

Mexico, Honduras and elsewhere.

It is impossible to overlook the impact of the events in Eastern Europe in Latin America. The effects on the revolutionary and progressive forces is contradictory. Sometimes it has led to demoralization and stimulated the appearance of ideas foreign to our reality; in other sectors it has reinforced profound revolutionary anti-imperialist and socialist convictions. We are of the second category and we will employ all our forces to think for ourselves and develop our positions in the framework of the enormous revolutionary potential of our continent.

Our revolutionary renewal must take into account everything that is positive in the innovative currents and advance towards worldwide democratization, adapting it to our conditions.

The East European events, with all that they represent in a positive sense for democratization and self-determination, are in sharp contrast with the oppression that rules in Latin America and the Third World.

Let us unite our forces.

Let us open up to reflection on everything that is new. Let us not permit dispersal and demoralization to become irreversible.

Unite the fronts of struggle beyond dogmatism

Let us unite all the fronts of struggle to relaunch the revolutionary ideal, to go beyond all dogmatism and confront the rightist deviations, to fight our enemies, to rectify and innovate in a revolutionary fashion, to reinforce anti-imperialism and give a popular direction to the struggle for democracy, to advance towards democratic and patriotic revolutions and develop concrete struggles which reinforce the morale and potential for the liberation forces in the periphery and in the centre of the world capitalist system.

Let us unite in order to struggle to show that the forces of change can and must recover from the impact of these negative phenomena, that these defeats are temporary, that the present crisis can be overcome, and that the crisis of the capitalist system and our opponents is an enormous point of support. In the Third World, in this crushed continent, new revolutionary hopes must find their expression.

● Let this revolutionary unity be manifest throughout the world.

● For the broadest unity of all forces and sectors bearing the idea of justice, independence, democracy and peace.

● A more vigorous anti-imperialist firmness.

● More revolutionary creativity.

● For revolutionary internationalism

● In the continuity of the Latin American ideas of Bolivar, Sucre, San Martin, Morelos, Santa Maria, Morazan and Marti. ★

A first step towards defeat

THE SOUTH African situation has never been more paradoxical than at present. The process of negotiations is continuing and everything indicates that the ruling class is definitively engaged in a radical reform of society. At the same time the contradictions of a society modelled by decades of racial discrimination are exacerbating.

PETER BLUMER

THE proposed institutional reforms can only open up a broad "social consensus" and new stable forms of regulation if the political leaderships which are dominant in the liberation movement are ready to make this compromise. For, beyond the reformist will of de Klerk and the big employers, South African society remains a society of poverty and distress for millions of black people.

Racial oppression will not disappear so quickly, the question of land and the Bantustans will remain a running sore and the renewal of South African capitalism, which remains the principal objective of the regime, can only take place through the rationalization and reinforcement of the exploitation of the workers. A new period could rapidly open up in the country — but it will not mean that the consequences of apartheid will have disappeared¹.

On May 4 1990 the meeting at Groote Schuur between the government and the African National Congress (ANC) ended with a joint communiqué recommending the establishment of a "working group" of which "the proceedings...will be confidential". This commitment has been met until now despite some apparent tensions of short duration. Whereas constitutional negotiations in the strict sense of the term have apparently not been opened, the official meetings between the government and the ANC have set themselves the general objective of influencing the social and political situation and maintaining the conditions for dialogue.

The ANC has had to announce the suspension of the "armed struggle", it has played a moderating and negotiating role in several social conflicts, and above all it has accepted a fundamental review of

its historic programme without the government ceding anything beyond its own agenda of reforms². Although nothing has changed for the oppressed of the country, de Klerk has just been the first South African head of state to pay an official visit to the United States for 45 years. And in September, for the first time since 1964, the Pretoria government was present at a meeting of the International Labour Office! In one year, trade with the countries of southern Africa and with the Ivory Coast has grown by

40%; some 32% of South Africa's exports now go to the other African states.

The end of economic isolation

It was disclosed fairly recently that a consortium of South African financial institutions had bought 10% of Lonhro, a British multinational which plays a considerable role in the African economies. Thus we are witnessing a revival of the old imperialist project of using the South African economy as a base for a better circulation of capital throughout the sub-continent.

De Klerk appears to dominate the political landscape, giving more and more interviews and showing that he has the initiative. Such is the preliminary balance sheet that must be drawn of the new situation. How has this situation been arrived at?

The confrontations in Natal and the violence in the townships of the Transvaal have played a major role in this process. Still the situation must not be misunderstood.

The media have for the main part presented this as a conflict "between blacks" or even between Xhosas and Zulus, whereas in reality many other political factors have intervened in these events. It is pertinent to recall that both sides in the fighting in Natal for the past four years have been from the Zulu population. The violence involves forces supporting on the one hand the Inkatha party of Buthelezi and on the other people sympathetic to the ANC³. It confirms moreover a tendency to chaos and social decomposition in certain townships.

The confrontations in the Transvaal in

the course of the last few months have to some extent represented a transfer of the conflicts from Natal to the heart of the migrant workers' hostels. There is clear evidence of external manipulations, and of connections with sectors of the employers, the extreme right and the police.

Finally and above all the blind and murderous attacks on black people in stations, trains and taxi queues in mid-September, carried out this time by commandos, have confirmed that at least a part of the state apparatus is pulling the strings. Several dozen people were murdered during the rush hours, in the course of a few days, without ethnic distinction. It is no longer a "blacks against blacks" conflict but a strategy of tension, directly linked to the negotiation process.

Massive police apparatus does nothing

Whether the de Klerk government closes its eyes to these attempts or manipulates them directly is irrelevant — it is the first beneficiary of the violence. It is astonishing that in such a well-policed country, it has not been possible to find the slightest clue to the identity of commandos attacking in broad daylight and in the heart of the city. It is also astonishing that all the information supplied by witnesses has been treated lightly and cynically⁴.

The regime has done its utmost to guide public opinion towards the simplistic idea that the violence is simply a conflict between the ANC and Inkatha. To this end a round table has been held, chaired by Pik Botha, minister of Foreign Affairs, between the president of Transkei (where the Xhosa populations live) and the King of the Zulus.

Communiqués, commitments to good behaviour, a "peace conference" style atmosphere, all under the television cameras! There followed two big separate

1. The comparison with desegregation in the United States is often made. The analogy falls short in that black people were never in the majority in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s, and the land question was not posed as in South Africa.

2. 1990 has seen the laying off of 25,000 miners. Redundancies are continuing but the trade union leadership appears to be seeking a compromise with the Mining Chamber. In September the rent boycott was ended in Soweto through an agreement between the administration and a self-appointed committee of ANC personalities. Whereas the segregation of living areas has not been modified in the least, ANC supporters plan to enter the regional chamber of Greater Johannesburg. One of its members declared that this was equivalent to the creation of a "local constituent assembly" (*Sunday Star*, September 23, 1990).

3. See *IV* 191.

4. The *Weekly Mail* of September 21 revealed that a base in Namibia had been used by the South African army for the training of Inkatha supporters. The rest of the press has studiously ignored this enquiry. The possibility has also been invoked that the commandos have been constituted from supporters of Renamo, the armed Mozambiquan organization sponsored by the South Africans. Finally it has been said on several occasions that whites with blackened faces have been seen in the mini-buses of the commandos.

assemblies at the stadiums of Tokoza and Soweto where the two men turned out some tens of thousand of their, respectively, Zulu and Xhosa partisans.

The stadiums were under the surveillance of the army, the police were everywhere. Thus, the plan takes shape — the ethnic question is being pushed to the forefront, right in the industrial centre of the country, at the heart of the black working class. Then, the South African government appeals to the international community to put pressure on the two parties (ANC and Inkatha) to end their conflict. On September 18 de Klerk explained: "I have been constantly involved in preparing the ground for multiparty discussions and for promoting bilateral discussions between leaders of those who are violently opposing each other"⁵.

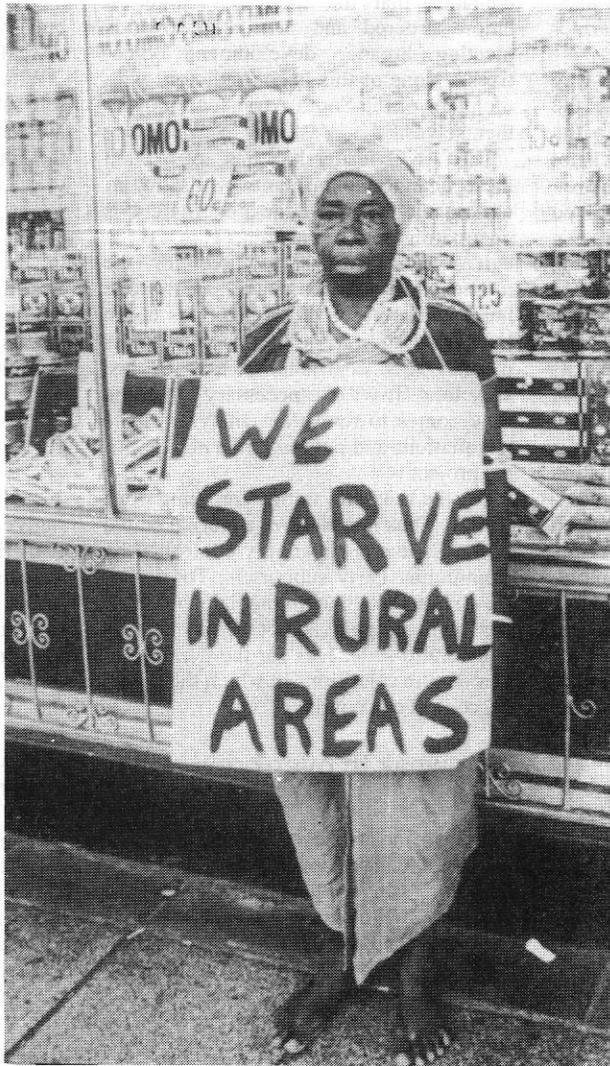
Mandela-de Klerk special relationship

The ANC has multiplied its political errors in responding to the situation. It entered into the negotiations with the intention of reinforcing its legitimacy as the sole representative of the oppressed. They wanted a kind of Mandela-de Klerk special relationship which would confirm the ANC in its leading role, despite the inevitable compromises.

This was evidently a sectarian operation, one largely in the tradition of this organization. But now this strategy is in an impasse. The famous Groote Schuur communiqué commits the ANC totally to a peaceful transition. It has therefore had to recognize the legitimacy of de Klerk and make him a confidential partner. Several declarations from ANC leaders or trade unionists linked to it have presented the ANC as already co-responsible for the affairs of the country. And Nelson Mandela's denunciation of a "third force" perpetuating the violence has allowed him to denounce a part of the state apparatus without directly accusing the government.

In this context it seems natural that the ANC turn towards de Klerk to end the violence. Mandela "urged the government to use the full force of its security apparatus to end the violence.... Mr. Mandela said the government has a very strong, effective and well-equipped army and police force and can easily use it. If it does, the violence will be something of the past"⁶. Armed with this appeal, the government engaged in the "Iron Fist" operation with the goal of pacifying the townships through the army.

Soldiers took up position in the heart of the black cities, encircling the hostels with razor wire, strengthening their control. A curfew was established on September 25 in the townships of Transvaal, obliging those who worked at night to carry a pass from their employer and freezing a great part of the political and social life of the neighbourhoods. Some hostels — mainly those where the workers were partisans of the ANC — have been searched for arms. At the end of the



day the ANC had to protest and explain that this was not the policy it proposed to stop the violence.

Consciously utilizing the panic of the population and its weariness, de Klerk has made the army appear as a lesser evil, indeed as a welcome protection. The youth expected a reaction from the ANC — they wished to see the men of Umkhonto, its armed wing, at last play a role. But nothing came. Mandela in the course of large public meetings threatened the government with arming the population but confirmed straight afterwards to the press that it was necessary to preserve the conditions of dialogue and negotiation. In the present conditions, the two things can only exclude each other.

In another context, without doubt, the ANC could have imposed on the government the maintenance of the negotiations at the same time as the entry on the scene of armed militias in charge of the protection of the workers in the stations and the black quarters. But the negotiations were undertaken from the beginning in a wholly different spirit — the ANC has accepted the negotiations as an end in themselves and not as a tactical means of allowing the mass movement to regather its strength. Because of this, de Klerk can manoeuvre freely.

The goal of the strategy of tension organized in the Transvaal is to increase the weariness of the population and thus reduce their readiness for spontaneous resistance to the compromise underway. The government is well aware that, although the ANC is a very centralized political force at the top, at the base it is on the contrary an extremely loose social movement. It has now been confirmed that it is having a great deal of trouble in constituting and stabilizing its local branches⁷. The government had to act rapidly to prevent the popular enthusiasm for the ANC taking on a more militant and structured form. In other words it was necessary to ensure that the legalization of the ANC and Communist Party for the purpose of negotiations, would not lead to the appearance of a vast political movement.

New forces to join negotiations

For the moment, this tactic is working. Worse, the ANC is seeing itself little by little deprived of its monopoly in the negotiations. The regime is putting pressure on the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) to join in also, but above all the "black on black" violence opens the door of the constitutional debates to all the ethnically based political entities spawned by apartheid — the "governments" of the Bantustans and diverse districts. And "Zulu chief" Buthelezi is at the centre of these.

Under the force of national and international pressure, the ANC finally recognized the necessity of a meeting between Mandela and the different heads of the

5. *The Argus*, Johannesburg, September 19, 1990.

6. *The Star*, Johannesburg, September 12, 1990. On September 11 the ANC demanded that the government take all power in Natal. It proposed moreover a committee of liaison between the armed forces and the ANC to deal with all problems of violence in the province. *The Citizen*, September 12, 1990.

7. See the article of Anton Harber in the *Johannesburg Weekly Mail* of September 21, 1990.

Bantustans (among them Buthelezi, for Kwazulu). This new compromise which confirmed, at the expense of the ANC and in a reactionary manner, the political and ethnic plurality of the negotiations process, was not enough — Buthelezi refused to attend the meeting and claimed that he wished to meet Mandela face to face as representative of the Inkatha party as the equal of the ANC.

Thus the final result of the violence, openly used and nourished by the regime, was to make the ANC an important partner in the negotiations.... but a partner amongst others.

The violence in the Transvaal in no way augured a turnabout on the part of the regime. It did not mean a return to the massive repression of the past. It does not represent resistance to the reforms, even if certain fascist sectors may be involved and may even be acting on their own account. On the contrary, the more the ruling class commits itself to the reforms the more it has need of a little finishing touch of this type to weaken the ANC and bring it to the negotiating table on its knees. The radical reformist strategy of de Klerk necessitates this portion of violence.

All this influences the basic orientation of the ANC. For it is impossible to understand the way things have developed without reference to the debates inside this organization. We have already in preceding articles shown that the programme of reference was no longer the Freedom Charter but a much diluted position combining the Constitutional Guidelines drawn up in 1989 and the so-called Harare declaration adopted by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in August 1989 on the proposal of the ANC.

Questioning of social radicalism

This shift implicitly opened a debate on the more radical clauses of the Freedom Charter, beginning with the question of nationalizations and the mechanisms for the reduction of social inequalities. The question of the revision of the programme imposed itself in any case from the time when negotiations with de Klerk brutally substituted themselves for the notion of the seizure of power.

This has become all the more true now that several leaders of the ANC, rather than pointlessly maintaining illusions on the project of nationalization of the monopolies envisaged by the Charter, have pre-

ferred to admit that their movement has in reality no settled economic programme⁸.

Very recently an official document of the movement abandoned the principle of nationalization in the name of a vague reference to the "mixed economy"⁹. The modesty of the project speaks volumes on the situation the ANC leadership finds itself in — on the question of the mining companies the document proposes a "state minerals marketing authority" and demands that the financial market is "more ordered and orientated towards meeting broader development objectives". None of this is contradictory with the plans of the South African employers themselves.

The ANC leadership has to explain these changes to militants whilst maintaining the idea that the government is negotiating under constraint. It is a difficult exercise which requires for the moment a double language, on the one hand for the needs of the meetings in the townships and on the other for the mass media. This contradiction cannot last very long. It will be necessary when the time comes to revise the analysis of the negotiations and put forward a new political project.

For the moment, things are being done slowly. Thus in *New Era*, a journal edited in the Cape and apparently controlled by Communist Party supporters, Tony Karon writes that "the immediate phase of our own struggle is not for a national democratic state. It is for the creation of democratic conditions in which the political contest can continue"¹⁰.

Too weak to overthrow racist power

In the same article, Albie Sachs, prominent in the development of the ANC's thinking on constitutional reform explains "we have to negotiate because we're just not strong enough to overthrow racist power — they've still got too

many guns. And possibly the very process of destroying racist power could be so calamitous for this country that all we could be inheriting would be a pile of ruins...So I think that if we (...) can develop a strategy that could save us years of uncertainty, sabotage, destabilization, and physical attacks, that's in the interest of the masses... The painful lesson learned by the Angolans is that a sharp, decisive and total victory (of which many of us have been dreaming for a long time) might solve some immediate problems, but gives rise to other problems that can be really terrible"¹¹.

When the degree of confidence and self-satisfaction that until recently permeated the press of the ANC is recalled, the importance of such changes can be grasped. This new realism is taking root under the joint pressure of the turn in the world situation and the political impasse on the ground. Faced with real difficulties, a solution is being sought in abandoning former radical positions and not in the establishment of a more long term revolutionary project.

Trade unionists join Communist Party

All this would not imply in itself a qualitative change in the relationship of forces if there still existed mass sectors capable of resisting this political and strategic turn of the ANC leadership. Although it is still too soon to know what will happen tomorrow in the CP and in certain sectors of the ANC, the evolution underway in the trade union movement augurs very badly for the future. The leadership of COSATU is now totally linked in with the strategy of the ANC. It is strongly controlled by the CP and has pursued an increasingly undemocratic internal regime. Political purges have started in the trade unions and in the regional structures — a climate of intolerance is taking hold¹².

The most striking feature of the situation here is the passage to the CP and the ANC of a whole generation of leaders who through the 1980s had symbolized the socialist trade union left. Around the leadership of the metalworkers' union (NUMSA) there was a whole network of anti-Stalinist trade union militants and socialist intellectuals. A good part of these people have now rallied to the majority current in the course of the last few months. Indeed this is symptomatic of the pressures felt today by the militant sectors in South Africa.

These people did not join the CP or ANC in 1985 or



Shadows over the ANC

SEVERAL affairs have recently tarnished the ANC's image. First, there has been the decision to prosecute Winnie Mandela for her alleged participation in the abduction of a youth subsequently killed by her bodyguards, the Mandela Football Club (see *IV* 159). This affair is obviously being used by the regime to put pressure on Nelson Mandela. Nonetheless, even inside the ANC, very many now make no secret of their hatred for Winnie Mandela.

There followed revelations of torture and execution in ANC disciplinary camps in Angola in 1984, following mutinies by members of its armed wing. The mutineers had refused to fight against Unita in Angola, and were demanding instead to be sent to fight in South Africa — they also called for greater democracy inside their movement. This at least is their story, published in London last July in the revue *Searchlight South Africa*. The ANC has given its version of the facts, without denying that the mutinies had happened (see the article of Shauna Westcott in *New Era*, Cape Town, Winter 1990). This affair sheds some light on the debate on the armed struggle which began from 1985 onwards in the ANC press, and the growth of doubts as to the real capacity of the ANC to successfully conduct a guerilla war. ★

1986, when the mobilizations reached their high point and when the ANC reinforced its positions in the movements of real struggle. At this time these militants explained how suspicious they remained of the CP's positions, its strategy of democratic and national revolution and its sectarian methods. This earned them in return some bitter polemics from the CP and the ANC. However, they have not now joined the CP maintaining their former democratic socialist positions — these have been totally abandoned. This has an obvious effect on the highest levels of the workers' movement and the entire socialist left. Alec Erwin of the NUMSA leadership, amongst the principal ideologues of this current, has passed in a few months from the position of supporting a mixed economy combined with some elements of workers' control to openly Keynesian positions of co-management and reinforcement of the industrial efficiency of the country¹³.

All this is accompanied by a debate on the Soviet experience, the defeat of the "command economy" and the impossibility of the revolutionary project, and so on. People who have been aware for some years that it was wrong to confuse socialism and Stalinism have suddenly drawn the lessons of the USSR in a way which omits to treat the bureaucratic phenomenon as a subject in itself.

The entry into the CP is being done under the pretext that it is a "broad party".

But it has been made perfectly plain by the leadership of the latter that the strategic line will remain that of the democratic revolution and that the right of tendency will not be possible¹⁴. The abandonment of the struggle for socialism is justified by the use of some old reformist arguments, for example by the use of formulae borrowed from the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci to evoke a necessary "war of position" faced with a state like that of South Africa¹⁵.

Finally this theory of "partial conquests", far from being a tactical position of withdrawal, will lead to the integration of these trade union leaderships inside the establishment by way of negotiations. And the state knows now that it can gain from a rapid bureaucratization of COSATU.

It is a grave defeat for the South African left, for this generation of trade

unionists originally had the means to give the working class an overall socialist perspective¹⁶. The great tragedy of the South African left has been that in the course of the 1980s these trade union leaders had a mass influence but no precise organizational political project, whereas on the other hand the independent political groups, who might have associated themselves in a fraternal way from the beginning with this mass trade union experience, took some years to understand that it was necessary to turn themselves towards the real mass movement and implement a united front poli-

cy towards it.

The trade union left slid little by little towards political inconsistency for want of constituting itself as a coherent political force¹⁷; the small socialist and independent political organizations were late to seize the opportunity which was open to them at least up until 1985-86. The convergence never really happened and the price to pay for this is now much higher.

On September 19 AZAPO¹⁸ called a meeting to discuss a united response to the violence of the preceding days, which clearly added up to more than a conflict with Inkatha. All the progressive movement was invited. But the ANC did not come and organizations like the PAC and AZAPO itself demonstrated their current disorientation. The PAC was in the throes of internal debates on whether or not to open discussions with the government. AZAPO debated whether it was necessary to meet Buthelezi to stop the inter-black violence²⁰.

A good opportunity was thus lost to at last establish a united front of all the liberation movement, supported by the trade union movement (COSATU and NACTU). What rules out the calling of unitary trade union meetings, with which each political force can declare itself in solidarity²¹? In this situation sectarianism and division constitute a deadly poison for the mass movement. Political disorientation reigns increasingly in the militant sectors, whilst the regime manoeuvres as it likes.

Specific weighting for white electorate

In such a context the government will attempt to obtain a constitutional reform by stages with a two chamber system which will preserve a specific weighting for white electors²². It will seek to electorally minimize the ANC through progressively integrating into the new political system the ethnic representatives of the various Bantustans. The path to such a

8. Thabo Mbeki in London, *The Citizen*, September 21, 1990.

9. *Sechaba*, October 90. See recent interview with Mandela in the *Financial Mail*, October 1990.

10. Tony Karon, *New Era*, Cape Town, Winter 1990.

11. Tony Karon became well known some years ago through a defence of the Freedom Charter as an instrument of the struggle for socialism. See *Work in Progress*, no. 42, May 1986, and our article on the debate on the Charter in *IV* 111, December 22, 1986.

12. *New Era*, *ibid*.

13. On the exclusions in the food trade union (FAWU) see the debate in *South African Labour Bulletin*, Johannesburg, vol. 15, numbers 2 and 3.

14. A. Erwin, *Weekly Mail*, March 30, 1990; *New Era*, Winter 1990.

15. COSATU leader Chris Dlamini, a member of the CP, explains in *Work in Progress* no. 68, "So we could see a situation in which workers in state controlled industries go on strike after apartheid. But they would not be striking politically against a democratically elected government. They'd be striking against an employer". See also Jeremy Cronin, another member of the CP, in *South African Labour Bulletin*, September 1990.

16. Karl Von Holdt, *South African Labour Bulletin*, September 1990.

17. This trade union left constituted itself notably around the old federation FOSATU, before forming the heart of the unitary federation COSATU in 1985.

18. Before 1985 the model of the Brazilian Workers Party had been sometimes evoked as a long term perspective.

19. Azanian People's Organization. Organization linked to the Black Consciousness current. It characterizes itself as socialist.

20. The economic positions of the PAC have remained extremely confused and their references to socialism very formal. See "An Africanist's view of economic emancipation", Siphoshe Shabalala, Skotaville Publishers, 1990.

21. *Cape Times*, September 18, 1990.

22. The only organization which has defended a line of unity and independence of the liberation movement has been WOSA, the Workers' Organization for Socialist Action.

23. A new plan for schools would allow some to remain "white", or otherwise, through a referendum of the parents.

The Star, September 11, 1990.

conclusion remains narrow and precarious because South Africa remains an apartheid society — if for the moment popular revolution is not on the agenda, there is the other possibility of chaos through the operations of the extreme fascist right and the simmering of ethnic prejudices. De Klerk knows very well that he must play it carefully. The editorial of *Business Day* of September 17 summed his situation up; "He will do these things or some reasonable variant of these things, or he will be thrown out of office. He must govern or abdicate".

What is going to happen then in the SACP and the ANC? The world situation and the internal situation both weigh heavily on the debates underway. In June, in the course of a conference for trades unionists, Jeremy Cronin, a member of the CP leadership, explained that there were two possibilities.

Either the ANC would move to the right under the pressure of non-proletarian classes and in this case it would be necessary to reinforce the strength of the party representing the working class. Or "after an earlier phase of national democratic transformation, there will be a fairly rapid progress towards socialism (...). In such a case one might find the evolution of the ANC into a broad mass socialist party, within which the party merges"²³.

Collapse of Stalinist world view

Things can no longer happen thus. But Jeremy Cronin indicates to us perhaps that two positions already exist within the SACP — one which wishes to take its distance from Mandela, and the other, following the evolution of numerous Communist Parties in the world, which would be ready to fuse with a "social democratic" project. The weeks to come will in any case confirm these tensions. The SACP will not escape the crisis of identity striking all the CPs of the entire world, in relation to their past and their national political project.

Whatever the future of relations between the SACP and the ANC, the current debate will give birth to tensions inside the Communist ranks. In this climate of setback and confusion it is not impossible that these militants will search for a different road — which is at least desirable.

The first elements of defeat have been put in place. How grave this is will depend on the eventual political recompositions which may result from the crisis of the majority forces. But for that to happen rapidly it is necessary that the revolutionary left presents itself as a credible pole of reference. Such is the challenge today if the memory of the tremendous struggles of the 1980s is not to be lost for a long time. ★

Bulgaria lurches into turmoil

UNTIL recently it seemed that Bulgaria's Communist Party, arguably the strongest and most popular in Eastern Europe, had successfully embraced *perestroika* and the demands of the Bulgarian democracy movement, while keeping its power and massive bureaucracy intact. In fact, after its re-launch as the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), it even managed to take some credit for the liberalization and won an overall majority in the country's free elections in June. Yet Bulgaria's Communists are now on borrowed time.

In August, the BSP headquarters in the heart of Sofia was set ablaze by demonstrators frustrated by the slow pace of reform. In September, the BSP Congress dismayed reformers by re-electing as leader Alexander Lilov, who had failed to break with the conservatives. In October the only thing still holding the faction-riven party together was its fear of the opposition coalition, the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF).

KATHY LOWE

THE country, meanwhile, lurches into ever deeper political and economic turmoil as the UDF employs its parliamentary weight to paralyze the BSP-led government in the hope of precipitating its final downfall.

In under a year the political face of Bulgaria has changed beyond recognition. In November 1989, amidst the clamour of the rising democracy movement, a Gorbachev-backed central committee coup led by the then-foreign minister Petar Mladenov ended the 35-year rule of veteran Stalinist Todor Zhivkov.

Decades of corruption and mismanagement were acknowledged for the first time as the country embarked on a transition from a totalitarian Communist state to a multi-part system. Since then, the CP, now the BSP, has been struggling to repair its tarnished image and to fend off internal splits while keeping at bay the dissident organizations of the Union of Democratic Forces.

In a country with extremely weak political traditions it proved possible for the BSP, pushed by its reformers, to keep an edge on the inexperienced opposition. The party emerged from the June elections with 211 out of 400 parliamentary seats. But political malanalysis was not far off. Within weeks Mladenov was forced to resign when it became public that he had muttered in front of a jeering crowd last December: "The best thing is to let the tanks come".

A long wrangle followed about who should be put forward for President and in a concession designed to achieve some unity, the BSP finally dropped its own candidate in favour of that of the UDF leader Zhelyu Zhelev. After Zhelev was

elected President in August, he invited the UDF to participate in a government of national consensus because of the crisis in the country. The UDF, however, refused. Says its new leader Petar Beron: "A majority of our coalition thinks we cannot trust the Communists — that they want to lure us into some trap."

After several attempts by Zhelev, a government was eventually formed in late September by the BSP aided by independents. But in reality the government is totally hamstrung as the UDF has used its 144 seats in the National Assembly to block all major decisions, which, under the Bulgarian system, require a two thirds majority.

Lukewarm reformists

Petar Beron accuses the BSP of lukewarm commitment to reform. He points to the Communists' failure to dismantle the giant *nomenklatura* [reserved jobs for approved appointees], 216,000 bureaucrats out of a population of 9 million who dominate every sphere of political, economic and social life in Bulgaria. "The BSP's first concern", Beron insists, "is to hold onto all these red capitalists who have grabbed money which they are now trying to put into private enterprise and private property."

The UDF's strategy, encouraged by the defeat of the reform wing at the recent BSP congress, is to let the BSP carry the can for the economic mess, to go all-out to win the local elections in November and then try to force another general election. The trouble is that the assortment of 16 political groups that make up the UDF — among them the revived Social Democratic Party, the Green Party, the Podkrepa

trade unions and the Ecoglasnost movement — appear to be united by little more than their hatred of the BSP. They offer no answers for the crisis and cannot agree on overall policies on which to campaign and give a lead, whether as part of an emergency coalition government or from outside.

The UDF's decision to use wrecking tactics and to restrict themselves to saying that the BSP has not really changed only serves to squander the possibilities for independent mobilization opened up by the democracy movement and the June elections.

The political stalemate is compounding the already monumental problems bequeathed by the old Zhivkov regime. The break-up of the Comecon trading bloc as well as the reduction of Soviet oil supplies has knocked Bulgaria sideways. The Gulf crisis, too, has had a profound impact, increasing energy costs and, most disastrously, freezing some \$1.3 billion owed to Bulgaria by Iraq.

In March the government took a step unique in the Eastern bloc countries, declaring a moratorium on repayments of principal on its huge \$12.5 billion foreign debt. But industrial productivity continued to fall as enterprises remained starved of capital investment due to the moratorium and the huge budget deficit. Now the International Monetary Fund (IMF) has given its blessing to Bulgaria's membership, opening the door for other Western institutions to offer loans and investment packages.

Forlorn queues for food

The people's high post-Zhivkov political expectations, have been rewarded with unemployment, galloping inflation and rationing of all basic foodstuffs. Forlorn queues outside Sofia's foodstores have begun to mirror those on the streets of Moscow. Youth, students and workers are increasingly venting their frustration on the streets — as on August 27, when the BSP offices were set alight.

The BSP-UDF power struggle presents a false political choice to the population at large. In fact, both see the free enterprise treatment as the only solution for the ailing Bulgarian economy, albeit with different emphases, modifications and attitudes to social safeguards. Both include groups of right-wingers who would be happy with a piece of the free market action and who are hostile to the independent organization of workers. The leaders of both, for fear of jeopardizing political popularity with the Bulgarian nationalists, have also been reluctant to publicly support the Turkish minority in its struggle to recover the rights it lost at the hands of the Zhivkov regime.



Turkish group demonstrating in Sofia, Bulgaria: Banner reads "Stop the 18 years of repression of ethnic Turks" — photo: Format

If there is a deadlock between the two political blocs on the parliamentary front, it is in the workers' movement where the fastest and most far-reaching changes are currently underway.

Following the fall of Zhivkov and the Bulgarian Communist Party's proposal to end its monopoly of power, a wave of strikes swept the country, many of them in pursuit of pay claims, many spontaneous and many demanding the removal of corrupt Communist officials. Between December 1989 and March 1990 alone there were some 300 strikes. One, at the Radomir steel plant, 25 miles from Sofia, was led by women who drove the cranes carrying molten steel rods. They were not asking for higher wages but for improvements in their unsafe working conditions — plus the sacking of the director who had ignored these dangers.

The new independent labour confederation, Podkrepa ("Support"), successfully supported and recruited from a number of these strikes. Founded in February 1989, before the liberalization, by a group of Sofia intellectuals, Podkrepa has enjoyed a meteoric growth, now organizing some 150,000 workers across the country. Podkrepa was also one of the founder organizations of the UDF where its leaders have established a reputation as the most staunchly anti-Communist, pro-free marketeers in the coalition.

Reform of official union

Meanwhile reformers from the ranks of the rapidly disintegrating official trade union federation astonished sceptics by voting out the old guard, breaking all links with the BSP and re-launching in February this year as the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB). Headed by former sociology professor and dissident Krustyo Petkov, the Confederation is unique in Eastern Europe in having severed all connections with the state and democratized its structures, at the same time holding on to some three million of the old federation's 3.5 million members — over 80% of Bulgar-

ia's waged workers.

Says Krustyo Petkov: "We are not revolutionaries. But we believe that organizations like the trade unions can be changed if you remove the top leadership, if you cut the links with the dictatorship of the Communists and if you get support from the base."

Under Petkov's leadership, the posts of 50% of the old union officials have been abolished. Gone, too, are the party-controlled regional and municipal trade union councils. Instead, local union branches have been formed on a trades, rather than geographical, basis, with CITUB representatives

acting as co-ordinators between the branches in a given area.

A recent innovation in 30 towns are the Confederation's Centres for Trade Union Protection. Each centre is staffed by a small team — a lawyer, sociologist, economist, health and safety officer — who advise individual workers and provide back-up for branches in their negotiations with the managers of their enterprises. Delegates to the Confederation's first annual conference at the end of this year will be elected directly from the local branches.

Bargaining agreement

Asked what concrete gains have been won, Krustyo Petkov points to a national collective bargaining agreement signed in March, followed by similar agreements in 20% of plants and factories. Although there are tensions between their leaderships, CITUB and Podkrepa jointly negotiated with the government and the Union of Economic Managers increases in minimum pensions (January) and in minimum wages (April), together with an indexation agreement due to be introduced this month which links levels of wages, pensions and unemployment benefit to inflation.

From the unions' standpoint, indexation still left a lot to be desired because it is graded to give those on higher incomes lower benefits. And even if the agreement is honoured by subsequent governments, it is questionable whether indexation will actually keep pace with soaring inflation. Nevertheless, all the accords represent a breakthrough for workers and show the growing strength of their independent union organizations.

In July the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions published its own Alternative Economic Programme. This rejects "total and rapid privatization" in favour of a transition to a mixed economy "in which a minimum state sector co-exists with other forms of property: cooperative, municipal and private." Other proposals in the programme include a special

Three faces of the Bulgarian opposition

Continued from previous page

state-controlled agency to supervise privatization and workers' share-ownership schemes. It also stresses the need for an action plan to create new employment for those rendered jobless by the restructuring of the economy and the closure of dangerous industries.

For Krustyo Petkov, the biggest immediate risks facing Bulgaria as it ventures into the world of free enterprise are the *nomenklatura* and the black market dealers who are already cashing in on the privatization of state property. Petkov adds: "We fear the economic colonization of the economy. Foreign investment will be welcome, but if, for example, multinational corporations and rich citizens start to buy their way in, it will be a very wrong step and against the interests of the country."

Significantly, Petkov is also talking about the Confederation being prepared to break the present political stalemate between the BSP and UDF by setting up a social democratic "Labour" party — perhaps along British lines. He undoubtedly commands the political authority in the country to carry off such a move. And if it materialized, a party of this kind could have a powerful popular appeal at this time.

Horrendous prospects

Although socialist forces exist in both the BSP and opposition camps, no current or organization has yet come to light which might be able to offer a lead to the Bulgarian left and argue for a socialized economy, centrally planned, under the democratic control of the workers themselves. Thus Bulgaria faces the prospect, whoever is in government, of horrendous austerity and unemployment. Even civil strife followed by military intervention to end "chaos" cannot be ruled out in the future.

Whatever happens, however, strong and tested opposition looks likely to come from three main quarters.

Bulgaria's million-strong Turkish minority has formed its own party, the

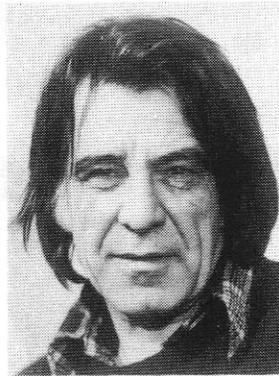


Photo: Zhivko Angelov

Movement for Rights and Freedom, which emerged as a significant force in the June elections with 23 seats in the National Assembly. The movement is not demanding autonomy for the two regions in the North East and South East of the country where the majority of Turkish Bulgarians live, but is opposing Bulgarian nationalism and fighting for the full restoration of its cultural and religious rights.

Zhivkov in his time played the nationalist card first by his persecution of the 200,000 ethnic Bulgarians who practise the Muslim religion (the Pomaks). Then came his "Bulgarization" campaign of 1985 aimed at the whole Turkish community. Many suffered acts of violence and some were killed. Such was the persecution that in June of that year, 300,000 fled Bulgarian for Turkey.

Turkish names permitted

After the liberalization, demonstrations and hunger strikes by Turkish human rights activists intensified until in March 1990 the National Assembly passed a law allowing Turks to re-adopt the Turkish names they had been forced to relinquish. However the community has yet to regain other major rights it lost — its schools and a university faculty among them — and remains bitterly resentful of continuing discrimination.

Many Turkish workers are members of the Bulgarian trade unions, especially of Podkrepa which is active in areas where a lot of Pomaks live. But Turkish leaders at local level say the Bulgarian unions are very much "on trial" as far as they are concerned. They are considering setting up their own union if Turkish workers' interests are not adequately represented.

Another formidable opposition group enjoying country-wide support (67% of the population according to a recent opinion poll) is the Ecoglasnost environmental movement. With 10,000 active members in Sofia alone, Ecoglasnost has focussed world attention on the catastrophic environmental destruction and hazardous industrial production that will

PETAR SLABAKOV, Bulgaria's best-known theatre and film actor is leader of the popular Ecoglasnost environment movement and one of the movement's 18 members in parliament. He was among the Ecoglasnost demonstrators who were savagely beaten and arrested in a now famous incident in October 1989, just before the fall of the Zhivkov regime.

"FROM 15.00 hours to midnight most days I'm in Parliament. But when I'm needed I immediately leave for Cherni Ossam where for five months we have been making a human chain to stop the dam project there..."

have to be tackled as part of any genuine restructuring of the Bulgarian economy.

Uranium mining has polluted parts of the water table. Giant petro-chemical plants have poisoned a number of workers and contaminated farm produce. Some 24 million square metres of forest have been cut down. The Black Sea is dead below 50 metres. No general warning or protection was given by the authorities as fall-out from the Chernobyl catastrophe began to reach Bulgaria. These are just a few of the problems that have turned the country into one of the worst damaged regions of Eastern Europe.

Direct action is the Ecoglasnost trademark — human chains, parliamentary lobbies, pickets and demonstrations. Since the elections, the organization has found a powerful voice in the National Assembly as well. Some 18 of the new opposition members of parliament belong to Ecoglasnost, including the movement's leader, Petar Slabakov, a well-known Bulgarian actor.

Ecoglasnost has consistently condemned the system under which workers doing dangerous jobs receive a wage bonus while no action is taken about the dangers themselves. In talks with the government and the trade unions, the movement's supporters have demanded that hazardous industries be shut down if they cannot be made safe, that schemes be set up to redeploy workers and that Western petro-chemical firms be stopped from establishing production plants in Bulgaria. Says Petar Slabakov: "Now Bulgaria has opened its borders, many foreign companies are going to come here. There is a danger that we will be forced to make concessions to them — that Bulgaria will become one big chemical factory!"

The most important body of opposition, the Bulgarian workers, are combative after decades of bureaucratic rule, with high expectations and organized in (so far) democratically run trade unions. There is good reason to hope, therefore, that they will be in a good position to defend themselves and fight back when the "red capitalists" at home and the free marketeers from abroad try to do their worst. ★

"In a huge petro-chemical plant at Burgas on the Black Sea, 20 workers have been poisoned and died. Others have been injured and we don't know if they will be saved..."

"We stopped a nuclear power plant in Prvomay from being built. Not only was it going to cost 44 billion levas, but the site was also in an earthquake zone, where the houses have been constructed with poor material to save money..."

"At the beginning of this year supplies ran out of powdered baby milk. Mothers were coming to us for help from all over the country. So we took immediate action. We gave the Ministry of Health an ultimatum that if they did not get hold of the baby food, we were going to call for a national strike. They managed to find the hard currency..."

"All kinds of industries are dangerous here because of the lack of safety installations. People working in these industries know their jobs are dangerous. If they accept higher wages as compensation it is only because they don't see any alternative sources of work..."

"We have many supporters, all volunteers. They include doctors, biologists, philosophers and sociologists — we are a real "academy of sciences" in Ecoglasnost!"

"We have declared our programme and we will fight for it no matter what kind of government we have in the future in this country."★



Photo: Georgy Kazakov

PETAR BERON, Bulgaria's leading zoologist and a founder member of Ecoglasnost, became President of the Union of Democratic Forces in August 1990.

"A MINORITY of the UDF, including myself, was inclined to support the proposal of forming a government (with the BSP), that would act along definite lines, within a definite framework, for a specific time to fulfill specific tasks. But the majority was against this joint venture

with the Communists..."

"The 36% we got in the (June) election is OK. We think we shall do better now in the local government polls in November. If we win, maybe the next parliamentary elections will not be very far off..."

"We are doing our best to keep all the parties in the UDF together and I think that we shall manage this for some time to come. All of them are well aware that they can't count on any success against the Communists on their own. They have to stay together..."

"Everything was controlled by the *nomenklatura* and now these same people, these red capitalists, want to get their hands on the private property. We are trying to prevent this..."

"We shall try to establish a sort of safety net for the poorest, most deprived strata of society, though whether it will be successful or not I can't say. We have very little experience..."

"Privatization should not be allowed, in my opinion, to permit the big capitalists and the monopolies to take the lion's share of everything. We would prefer to have small shareholding firms..."★



KRUSTYO PETKOV, a sociology professor, leads the three million members of the Confederation of Independent trade Unions in Bulgaria — founded in February this year in an attempt to transform the decaying official trade unions. He has supervised a drastic overhaul of the old state-dominated union structures and could soon be instrumental in setting up a social democratic 'Labour' party along British lines if the present political stalemate in Bulgaria continues.

"UNLESS our trade unions are really independent there is no point in us going on with our Confederation. Especially during this economic and political crisis, which I believe is going to continue, people need strong unions..."



BULGARIA

"We have had to set up a system of social partnership and to educate our members that the best instrument for defending their interests is collective bargaining; strikes too, though only in the future, I would say..."

"We lost some support from traditional party cadres who had infiltrated the trade unions, not because of our orientation, but because we removed the old union structures and reorganized on the trades and branch principle. Most of these people were old cadres from the (party-controlled) regional and municipal councils so when you touch their interests they begin to act against you..."

"We have heard that some in the Bulgarian Socialist Party are suggesting that the BSP needs its own unions in order to have an influence on the workplace. We decided to send a letter to the BSP congress in September arguing that this would indeed be a wrong step — that it would divide the trade unions and backfire on their party. I can't guarantee whether they will react positively to our letter. But we've decided that if the BSP does try to split off some of our union branches, we shall counter-attack straight away. And I believe we would take at least half of them back with us..."

"The Confederation thinks that privatization must be done with the participation of the workers. They can buy or be given shares in certain industries. In the modern industrial world you see a lot of examples..."

"I believe it is our role in the trade unions to push for a national jobs' creation programme. This was done for example in the Western world in the 1930s. It is not just an economic question, but a very important political question. If unemployed people here get no support, this will provide fertile ground for populist and extremist movements."★

Hungarian left faces identity crisis

THE POLITICAL MALAISE afflicting "post-socialist" Hungary became glaring in mid-October after the second round of the local elections. Only 27.4% of voters bothered to go to the polls. Of those, the majority favored the anti-Communist parties currently outside the government, the Free Democrats (SZDSz) and the Young Democrats (FiDeSZ). These parties have put forward proposals for more rapid privatization than the ideologically conservative coalition in power, dominated by the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), whose zeal for privatization has been somewhat overshadowed by its nationalism.

The old ruling Communist Party split into two successor parties, the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSzP) and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSzMP, the same name as the old united CP). The former got around 9% in the parliamentary elections, and is represented in parliament. The latter got a few percent, and fell below the threshold for representation. The MSzP pushed a referendum for direct election of the country's president, which was held on July 29, since some of the old CP state leaders, such as Imre Pozsgay, remain much more popular than their party. But 80 per cent of the voters stayed away from the polls.

The old organ of the Communist Party, *Népszabadság*, has changed its formula. It is now a stock company, in which a West German media trust holds a plurality of the shares. It presents itself as an independent pluralist newspaper controlled by its staff. Paradoxically, left-wing former CP journalists consider the participation of the West German trust as a guarantee against attacks by what they regard as a rightist, even ultrarightist, government. It has won the reputation of being the highest quality daily paper.

The following article on the prospects for the left in Hungary and the future of the MSzP was published in the August 22 issue of *Népszabadság*. Its author is a leader of the Left Alternative group and one of the country's most respected academics. Minor cuts have been made.

TAMAS KRAUSZ

NOW it is becoming clear that the Hungarian Socialist Party [MSzP] in its present state is simply not viable. A relatively large number of us have tried to breathe life into it, but it almost seems like wasted effort. This bitter truth is in no way altered by the fact that the same applies to the other parties claiming to be left. The caricature of a multi-party parliamentary system that has arisen as a product of the breakdown of the single party/ state and of the [old] Hungarian Socialist Workers Party [MSzMP], seems more credible than a left

discredited by state socialism. (I cannot go further into the causes of this here.)

The MSzP — just like the [present] MSzMP — is an anachronistic phenomenon. The former has embraced the "liberal" narodnik-socialist wing of the bankrupt elite; the latter, the conservative. The MSzP groups the remnants of the former "reform Communists", who recently took the right-sounding name "reformist socialists" and will soon change their name to the even more right-sounding "social liberals," if that is more

advantageous from the standpoint of "survival."

The MSzMP is an orthodox "Communist" group which calls itself a "workers" party. Both parties are the same in that their functioning is marked by the patterns of the old state-party, and they are paralyzed by that. The MSzP is stubborn. It has shed what it can of its past. But in its heroic isolation, it has not been able to come forward with any new ideas. Following its "the worse, the better" logic, it has increasingly turned inward. In the manner typical of small groups, its organizations waste their time in self-justification, repeating pointless elementary truths.

Younger force seeks way out

A younger and more united force does exist, which is seeking a way out of the impasse but which has not yet reached the point of breaking with the old dogmatism, which takes the form in the MSzP of a peculiar combination of Stalinism and liberalism.

The MSzP is undoubtedly in a disadvantageous position by comparison with the MSzMP, because the bankrupt economic and political elite is only using the Socialist Party as an instrument in pursuing its strategy for survival. The MSzP has in reality become a party of refuge, which has taken on a "salon socialist" appearance. It has forced a section of its membership, whose patience had reached its limits, to abandon the party. That is more comfortable for the party elite. At least these ex-members are not "making trouble."

The MSzP is also a gathering place for intellectual sects with social democratic-populist-liberal-christian socialist-etc. ideologies that have been unable to root themselves in broader sections of the society.

The third sect, the MSzDP, goes in for a nostalgia similar to that of the MSzMP, and since nostalgia can get results for any party except those whose names start with "socialist", it excluded itself from the political arena virtually from the outset¹. While the MSzP was able at least to arouse illusions, the MSzDP was not able to deceive anyone. Even its anti-Communism turned out to lack credibility.

MSzP moderates its anti-Communism

The MSzP leaders wanted to accomplish their "renewal" with a more peaceful form of anti-Communism. But that form of self-justification did not get a favorable

1. A Magyarországi Szocialdemokrata Párt, Social Democratic Party of Hungary. This party lays claim to the heritage of traditional social democracy. Its slogan is "Social democracy, the road to Europe." Cf. *Magyarország politikai évkönyve 1990*, Aula-Omik, Budapest 1990.

response anywhere. The "positive" election results turned the heads of top circles of the "party elite". The legacy of Pozsgay [a top reform figure in the CP] attracted individuals and, making eyes at the MDF, they claimed to be "humanizing" it. Others followed the zigzags of Miklos Nemeth, who spoke the language of the MDF, pursued the economic policy of the SzDSz [Free Democrats], and unfortunately remained a member of the Socialist Party.

Still others at the May congress wanted to outflank the SzDSz to the right, as the "most authentic social liberals." The majority of the membership simply could not follow this. Those who remembered what social democracy is were astounded to find that the Horn-Pozsgay duo had by no means aroused as much sympathy as they expected in Western social democratic circles. Thus, "social democratization" proved to be a failure as a "search for an image."

At the May congress, it became clear that the MSzP could not escape from under the ruins of "state socialism." The old "leaders" and the old clique politics remained from the past, as well as the "survival" mechanisms, with whose help the majority of delegates were lined up behind a much reduced number of old leaders. Unfortunately, this numerically shrunken apparatus continued where the "old one" left off. Power bargaining, small-time putsches and petty betrayals continued. Membership fell below even the level of October 1989.

Old leadership retains control of party

Not even one new leader emerged alongside the "seven" (Berecz, Gr6sz, N6meth, Horn, Sz6r6s, Pozsgay, Nyers). At the same time, in other parties entirely new faces appeared, and on the bourgeois democratic side undeniable talents revealed themselves. The "seven" very quickly flagged. They should have foreseen that. But their dominant reflex was to save their own positions. They had not the slightest intention of giving up their places to any younger persons in the interest of "the cause" (if there ever was any such thing in their lives). Among the ossified leaders of the state-party, two survived the change of regime in the presidium, Pozsgay and Horn. These politicians — as we know — won international recognition for their "achievements" in "dismantling" the party-state apparatus.

In reality, the "five" are identified with the following basic achievement. In the interest of their own survival, with the support of the pro-reform circles in government, they purged the party membership, saying that there was no need for "Stalinists." With the zeal of the converted, they overshot the mark. They prepared the way for their own eclipse by driving away members of the party. In vain, the

remnants of the party elite, through various party programs each trying to outbid the other, tried to divest themselves of the legacy of the state-party.

In vain — oppressed by a guilty conscience and a minority complex — the majority "socialists" who had settled down in parliament tried through a deal with the other parties to win the confidence of the new government and opposition. They did not know how to be so "constructive" and accommodating, they did not know how to vote obediently for very important laws so as to win praise. However, the new "democracy" was a great disappointment for the SzDSz, since it offered the people a Christian nationalist discourse.

New system resembles parliamentary dictatorship

Rather than bourgeois parliamentary democracy, the system looked more like a parliamentary dictatorship, in which the executive power remained absolute master. In the light of all this, it is not surprising that the outsiders, Fidesz and SzDSz, gave the impression of being more to the left than the MSzP, which appeared to be playing the role of a punching bag.

Likewise, two seemingly completely irrational ideas were created by the survival ambitions of the "leaders". The first is identified with Gyula Horn, the newly elected party chairman. The MSzP was to become an electoral party without a mass membership. That was really an original idea, since up until now history has not seen a left electoral party. Capital is not enthusiastic about supporting major social democratic parties. A not particularly major socialist party such as the Austrian one has 700,000 members. Despite the consequences of the collapse of the state-party, this "experiment" is a disastrous notion.

The second impracticable idea came from the fading Imre Pozsgay. According to this, here in Hungary — we should establish a French-Italian style Socialist party. This tragicomic conception was further weakened by the fact that Pozsgay garnished it with the anti-Communism cultivated by the SzDSz and the MDF. At the end of the day, it had no credibility. But after a decade of reform Communism, this idea, put forward precisely at the time of the elections, led to accusations of coat turning. In accordance with the tradition of the state-party, the party leadership lagged behind the events, and is it still trailing behind them.

Correspondingly, the parliamentary fraction illustrated all this in the view of millions in an almost farcical way. The old people tried to defend the interests of the left, while at the same time discrediting them. It is impossible to expect from the fraction that it say in front of the country and the world that the IMF neo-free enterprise therapy in Hungary, as well as

in East Europe and in the world in general, has failed. Former minister Bekesi cannot say this when he himself was the "best" representative of this policy in Hungary. Today, however, they are surprised that the MDF and the Small Holders Party [the ruling coalition] are pursuing the policy that they initiated, undoubtedly with less style and culture, but more successfully, which means that the country is more quickly and efficiently heading into the abyss.

Of course, there might be one or two individuals with more character, with greater intellectual and political courage, in the presidium, who could say that the Western-type market economy utopia of the "reform Communists" has failed, while important sections of the population are being impoverished and agriculture and traditional big industry are being ruined, while interest payments on the debt, the growth of inflation and unemployment are advancing according to the "plans."

Finally, it should be said frankly that we do not want so much of a change in the system, if we accept the realities (of course, we would have to know what we want). At most, what has been realized is the International Monetary Fund program, which today the MDF and the SzDSz claim as their own, and this program should long ago have been left to them and not given a "socialist" coloring. But they have not yet recognized that the abstract model of the market economy, which has replaced the old state-redistribution model of state socialism, is "inapplicable." Only a jackal capitalism can be introduced, which would rapidly wipe out the credibility of the most demagogic MDF government.

The old "leaders" still do not see that after the change of system, the party as a whole has to change its function. The reform circles in fact served as a springboard for some leaders to gain the top spots in the party and, in the pragmatic tradition of the state-party, to reduce the "new party" to being an instrument of their power combinations. In this way, the old-new "leaders" not only isolated the party in society but shut it off from any genuinely original and left renewal, and found no friends in the international left.

Left not yet in catastrophic position

However, the left is not yet in such a catastrophic position as the situation of the MSzP might lead us to believe. In fact, the referendum affair, which was prepared in a totally childish way, offered an important experience. The left — despite its total dispersion — has the active support of about a million voters.

The MSzP, however, has not yet been able to mobilize even a few tens of thousands of people for a reasonably successful political action, to say nothing of a

million. For this, the left's favorable position has had no effect. However, the government's economic policy has brought discontent, impoverishment and oppression for hundreds of thousands of people. The MSzP has not been able to unite this potential for protest, and has abandoned it to the (extreme) right, thereby pronouncing a historic condemnation against itself. When, as a result of their experience with the MDF-Small-Holders government's catastrophic policy, working people are progressively losing their illusions, the socialists are "constructively" managing all this. Where is the limit to this fall?

The MSzP's major problem, however, lies elsewhere. The "leadership" is still only thinking about "big-time politics," parliamentary politics, the quickest way to get a minister or two in the government. In the meantime, however, it is being pushed out from where the left has had its traditional territory and base — it is being pushed out of the forms of self-organization, from the social organizations where people struggle daily to solve problems. The party has hardly any field of activity left. The decisive section of the party intelligentsia is using a provincial, watered-down liberal ideology to help the old managerial and financial bureaucracy hang on as owners in "the brave new world." The failed elite wants to become part of the new power elite. This is what gives life to the groupings in the party leadership oriented to the MDF and the SzDSz.

Hungarian politics take triangular form

A precondition for creating an independent left is the recognition that Hungarian political life is "three cornered." There is a traditional Christian-nationalist conservatism (with internal orientations going from the Small Holders [traditionally the party of small farmers] all the way to national liberalism), a European liberalism (with internal shadings), as well as a socialist left with its own groupings and tendencies. If the attempt to create an independent left proves successful in the short term, then the residue character of the MSzP can be overcome. If finally this party shows that it is the party of the "productive classes," which make up the great majority of the Hungarian people (engineers, white and blue collar workers, cooperative farmers, state economic workers, the left intelligentsia and so on), and not the political representative of the economic bureaucracy, then it can have a chance to survive.

Of course, for survival, some major and practical conclusions have to be drawn. Not in the order of importance — and with no claim to completeness — I would cite some prerequisites. It would be necessary finally to free ourselves from the old "leaders" and shift the axis of the party's activity to defending the ownership rights

of the working classes, to organize mass actions that would support the workers' efforts to exercise a check over the privatization process. It is necessary to break out of our "salon socialist" sectarian isolation, for the party to become the political movement of the social organizations (workers' councils, trade-unions, residence associations and so forth).

A left party cannot counterpose so-called economic efficiency to people, to defense of the environment, to the ongoing struggle for social justice, which includes the defense of human rights. Otherwise, there is not going to be any establishment of civil liberties but only impoverishment of the masses and economic power for the privileged, trampling on the rights of minorities. Without an organic combination of these factors, no new genuinely left party can be created.

"Image building" impossible

Precisely for this reason, it is not possible to "build an image," either social democratic or any other. Simply, a pro-human face is what is needed, and that can only be developed on the basis of the above practical orientations. In this respect, it can become clear that socialism, more than any form of capitalism, is the extension of the concept of human freedom, from politics to economics, to production. This development was obstructed by "state-socialism" which in its late form existed as an amalgam between neo-liberalism and Stalinism. Today the task is different. We have to free ourselves from both traditions. It has to be recognized that socialism is the movement of civil society. ★

Invest in the New Europe!

OUR readers will no doubt have been hurrying to sell their shares as the world's stock markets tumble. But do not lose hope. The Fourth International is offering a *unique investment opportunity*. This May we launched an appeal for funds to help make our views known and to assist our supporters in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As recession bites in the West, so the need for an alternative to capitalism and Stalinism will become apparent in the (ex-?) Stalinist countries. You can help turn the tide of history through a donation, however small.

The address to send donations to is:

Eastern European Solidarity,
AMRO Bank, account no. 444 531
092, Amsterdam.

(AMRO Central agency, Rembrandt Plein 1).

BETWEEN 10 and 15,000 women and men demonstrated in Berlin on September 29 answering an appeal from a joint East-West women's coordination. This demonstration was notable for two reasons. Firstly, it brought together both those opposed in principle to German unification, those critical of the way in which it was brought about — without the population being allowed to participate — and people who do not fear the political and social consequences of this step. The Greens, far left organizations, the PDS (the former East German Communist Party), and federations of the Socialist Youth, as well as a part of the autonomous women's movement and the independent women's association in the East took part. On no other occasion has such unity been forged by the left.

Another remarkable aspect — the organizers of the demonstration insisted that what was involved was not only the "question of women". There was an integral connection between the attacks on women in the ex-GDR and the overall political situation, with phenomena such as the growing chauvinism towards immigrants, the continuing deterioration of social life and Germany's new-found aspiration to play a role as a great power, with the militarization that this must entail. While deciding that only women could speak at the demonstration, the organizers have thus taken the lead in the mobilization against the *Anschluss* as a whole.

Ex-GDR women big losers from Anschluss

The fact that it will be above all women of the ex-GDR who will be the losers in the *Anschluss*, has been the subject of a broad public debate over the summer. Everyone has been made aware that women in the ex-GDR, who were 94% employed, are the first to lose their jobs and have the least chance of finding another. There are many reasons for this. Firstly, the right to work has been abolished. Mass sackings had begun even before monetary union and the notion that women have less need of a job than men has made its reappearance. The removal from work of a million and a half workers in the course of a few weeks has led to complete disorientation, with everybody looking towards saving their own skin. The unions have played a marginal role — they have not found it easy to root themselves and organize in areas which may disappear from day to day. There is generalized competition of all against all and in this struggle men can employ all the advantages accruing from a patriarchal society.

Secondly, the reinforcement of the maternal role of women. Previously care for children was given over to the state, through crèches, kindergartens and so on.

Abortion mobilizations challenge right offensive

THE results of the regional elections in East Germany on Sunday, October 14 show that West Germany's conservative chancellor Helmut Kohl retains the initiative in the turbulent new period opening in German politics. Kohl's party, the Christian Democratic Party, received some 43% of the vote, the social democrats 26%, the PDS (ex-Communist Party) 11%, and the Free Democrats and Greens/Bundnis about 8% each. These elections are a prelude to the first all-German elections on December 2.

However, one area where the German right-wing have not had things all their own way in recent months is over their attempts to introduce the West German (restrictive) abortion law into the East. Mobilizations against this measure and other attacks on women's rights involved in Kohl's unification plan may be a key element in the left finding its feet in the new situation in Germany, as Angela Klein reports.

ANGELA KLEIN

Some 83% of children grew up in such institutions. This allowed women, even mothers of small children, to go out to work. Nonetheless they remained in the last analysis responsible for the children. The Stalinist system in no way encouraged a change in the social role and division of labour between the sexes.

The rapid and brutal introduction of the market has led to an equally rapid and brutal dismantling of the state welfare structure: half of the crèches and kindergartens are to be dissolved by the end of the year — the East German parliament having passed a law in August making the communes responsible for funding them. The communes do not have the money — they are already unable to meet the growing costs of social benefits and the sale of state enterprises has not yielded the expected sums. On the contrary, they find themselves constrained to employ significant sums to finance the modernization of the infrastructure and establishments which can attract private capital. There is no money left over for such things as crèches.

Women suffer double disadvantage

And finally, of course, women are at the back of the queue when it comes to getting training opportunities. They are thus doubly disadvantaged; both by the re-

establishment of the labour market and the reduction of the massive network of social services which is collapsing along with the state which built it. They are thus sent back to the home, reduced to their role as mothers and their dependence on men.

Given this overall logic, there is a clear danger that the law in favour of free abortion on demand hitherto in force in the GDR will be replaced by the reactionary law in place in the FRG.

This latter law forbids abortion and makes it a criminal offence, apart from in exceptional cases. Even these exceptions are too much for the clergy and the conservative current of the Christian Democracy. A year or two ago Bavaria was in the forefront of the attack on women.

Harassment of doctors who perform abortions

Under the pretext of tax fraud, the public prosecutor ordered the seizure of the patients' records of a doctor in the small Bavarian village of Memmingen who was known for helping women and performing abortions. On the basis of this, a number of charges were brought against women.

Most of the victims were found guilty in a spectacular trial on the basis of two arguments: that the social need, accepted by the doctor, did not exist and was mere-

ly a pretext and that, in any case, the women could have had the children adopted.

This judgement caused a big scandal, since the judiciary had overridden the rights of the doctor — who was himself punished. The trial also saw something of a resurgence of the women's movement in West Germany, although it has continued to be fragmented into a thousand and one projects — in themselves often interesting and useful.

Last year there was a demonstration of 10,000 women in Memmingen for the abolition of the anti-abortion law. In June this year another demonstration took place in Bonn, bringing together 20,000 women.

Women from East Germany, Ireland, Italy and France spoke at this demonstration, which took place at precisely the moment when the question of which abortion law should be maintained in the united state was being debated.

While recognizing that the East German abortion law was more progressive and calling for it to be introduced in the West, the women on this demonstration also called for the right to self-determination for women.

At the same time a cross-party initiative of women has been taking place in parliament in favour of the decriminalization of abortion. Women from the Greens, the Social Democrats, the Liberals (FDP) and the Christian Democrats have been involved.

This initiative's main achievement so far is that the law previously in force in the ex-GDR will remain valid in that part of Germany until the end of 1992.

In the meantime the new German parliament must come up with a general solution. Without the cross-party initiative, it



is probable that the ex-GDR law would have simply been replaced by the FRG law.

New initiative increases bureaucracy

Even this initiative has its problems. While opposing the criminalization of the women, it does not rule out charges being brought against doctors. It also does not rule out obligatory "consultations" which would increase the bureaucratic obstacles to a woman obtaining an abortion.

This last scheme was the work of the parliament's chairperson Rita Süßmuth, from the modernizing wing of the CDU. Her efforts were thwarted by the opposition of the FDP, but she has now come up with an even more dangerous notion.

She is now calling for a revision of the constitution in the sense of the inclusion of an article protecting the "rights of the unborn child".

This amendment would be followed by a "law for the protection of life" — which would contain a whole battery of bureaucratic, social and material rules aimed to prevent abortion, as well as state regulation of organ transplants, euthanasia for the old and the handicapped and so on. With regard to this last point, it should be noted that recently figures from German universities have been reviving racist theories concerning the selection of "undignified life" using the theories of the Australian academic Peter Singer.

This proposal for a "law to protect life", based on a change in the constitution dangerously blurs the issues.

On the one hand, the elevation of the "unborn life" to the status of a legal subject deserving special constitutional protection gives it the same legal status as living men and women. In this case, abortion becomes murder.

On the other hand, Rita Süßmuth wants women who have had an abortion not to be subject to criminal charges. They would not cease to be persecuted, however; they would remain subject to charges under the civil code if the husband or father complained.

The Christian Democrats have announced an offensive for "a law to protect life" after the December elections. The next two years are going to be very tough for the German women's movement.

Both the right-wing offensive and the approach of 1992 require an urgent rebuilding and re-organizations of the women's movement on the abortion issue.

The relatively weak mobilization on September 29 was an expression of the fragmentation of the movement in the West and also the growing resignation in the East, where daily problems are dominating women's concerns.

The east-west coordination of women will be working to meet this challenge. ★

UK economy — a spiral of decline

BRITAIN'S decision to enter the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System on Monday October 8 represents a radical attempt at a sharply recessionary solution to the British economy's problems — notwithstanding enthusiastic support from sections of the left.

The government has all but lost control of the economy, with inflation hovering at 10% despite interest rates of over 15% and a balance of payments deficit nearing £19b.

ALAN FREEMAN

THE timing was political. The Tory Party, as the *Financial Times* explained earlier, had arrived at "a new definition of when the time will be ripe for ERM entry. One deducts the six months believed to be the honeymoon period of lower interest rates from the election date one first thought of — and there is the magic date."

The Labour Party leadership's endorsement of ERM entry earlier this year was politically vital. The Tories calculate as follows: there will be a honeymoon period, because the ERM provides a much larger currency pool — notably German D-marks — to defend the British pound. The recessionary effects of ERM entry will come into play as the medium term effects of Britain's trade situation are felt. Either the Tories get a new electoral mandate for "the painful measures needed to correct the economy" — or a weak, rightwing Labour Government will be saddled with responsibility.

By seeking to defend a fixed exchange rate for the pound, ERM entry pits the government against a hundred-year trend. The pound has continuously fallen against the currency of every country whose productivity is rising faster than that of the UK.

During this century the pound has fallen an average of 1.1% against the US dollar, 2.1% against the DM and 3.1% against the Yen since World War 2. Since 1948 it has fallen an average of 3.6% per year against the DM — since 1973, 4.5% against the DM and 5.2% against the Yen. Just before flotation in 1972 it stood at 8.75DM and 850 Yen. It is now around 3DM and 280 Yen.

The underlying issue, which ERM membership in fact exacerbates, is the structural weakness of the UK economy, for more than a century orientated to imperial domination. All aspects of the economy concerned with Britain's over-

seas role have been strengthened at the expense of domestic manufacture — the UK's defence industry, its overblown financial and commercial sector and the large ex-colonial importers.

UK falls behind competitors

This is explained in a research paper from the Socialist Economic Bulletin¹, a regular information service for the left sponsored among others by Labour MPs Ken Livingstone and Diane Abbott: "Exchange rate stability between major members of the ERM is founded in the last analysis on common rates of growth of productivity" it says, "But the UK, despite temporary gains in 1981-87, has failed to sustain improvements in productivity in line with European competitors" (see graph).

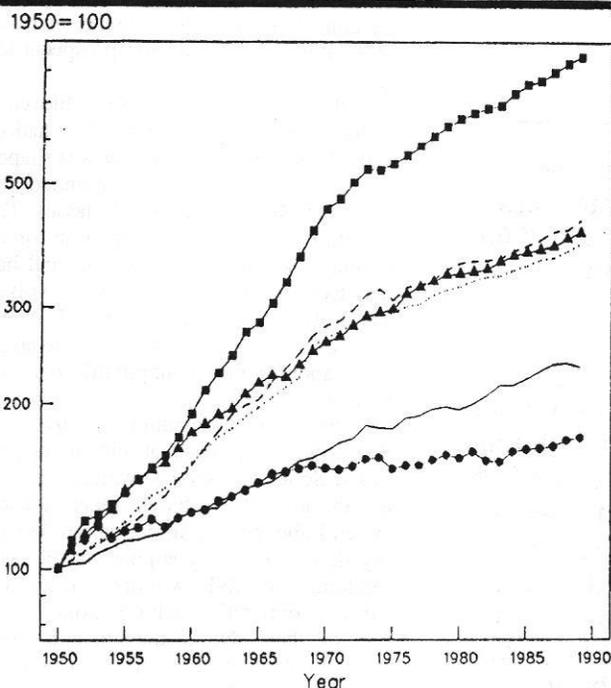
Productivity is critical to exchange rate stability. A rise in productivity is equivalent to a relative price reduction, because the same thing is being produced for less input. If, therefore, UK productivity lags behind its rivals it must either lose market share because its goods are over-priced, or cut its prices for which only lower wages or lower profits can compensate.

Exchange rate stability therefore depends on convergent rates of productivity growth. Postwar growth rates average out to 6.6% for Japan, 4.1% for France, 4.3% for West Germany and 4.4% for Italy. The last three very similar rates are the real basis for the stable exchange rate in the EMS currency snake.

Until 1979, Britain's productivity growth rate in this period averaged out to

1. The Socialist Economic Bulletin is available for a subscription of £12.50 for six issues and £5 for a single issue. A £25 subscription also covers 10 briefings, including briefings on the Tokyo Stock Exchange crash, on the ERM and on the economic implications of German unification. Subscriptions to Socialist Economic Bulletin, Ken Livingstone MP, House of Commons, London SW1, Great Britain.

Growth of output per head 1950-1989



Source: OECD, Maddison, Phases of Capitalist Development
Semi Log Scale

2.4% per year. Since 1987 this pattern of slow growth has continued. Productivity growth for the economy as a whole has been negative for the last four quarters.

The major exception to this generally low rate was the increase in 1979-81. But this relied on unique circumstances: a once for all gain during a very intense recession, made possible only by sustained increases in the relative price of oil, which removed balance of payments constraints. During this period, 15-20% of Britain's productive capacity was destroyed, while the oil balance moved from -0.6% of GDP to +2.5% of GDP — an improvement of over £16bn in 1990 prices. Without this, the balance of payments problems would have been insurmountable — as, in fact, they are now becoming.

Oil bonus runs out

Even with the rise in oil prices brought about by the Gulf crisis, this bonus is unlikely to be available to UK capital in future. The oil surplus has fallen to 0.25% of GDP — a fall of £12bn in 1990 prices. Output has declined substantially. Moreover even \$30 per barrel — 65% of the July 1990 level — only takes the real price back to its 1978 level. So bad is the UK's balance of payments situation that not only visible, but invisible trade is going into the red. The balance of trade in manufactures has declined from 6% surplus in 1970 to minus 3.2% in 1989 — equivalent

rate of productivity growth. By the beginning of 1990, UK GDP's growth rate had fallen to under 2% and its manufacturing growth rate to 0.6%.

Walter Eltis, the Director General of the National Economic Development Council, noted in a paper at this body's last meeting that "Manufacturing industry continues to be the key to our overseas trade, yet, between 1979 and 1989, investment in new plant and machinery by financial services grew by 30% and investment in construction rose by 126%...[but] investment in manufacturing was just 8% higher — investment was barely positive."

ERM entry is a fundamental turnaround. It removes the government's most basic instrument — its monetary policy. As the IMF itself puts it: "The EMS faces the well-known dictum in international economics that it is possible to achieve simultaneously only one of the following three objectives: fixed exchange rates, independent monetary policy and open capital markets." But in no sense does this mean lower interest rates. On the contrary, where before governments had the option to loosen monetary constraints and devalue, this is no longer an option. Any future government will be obliged to set the interest rate at whatever level is necessary to attract enough capital to offset trade losses and defend the exchange rate.

This is understood by all serious commentators. As one remarked "the notion that if we enter the ERM we will achieve

to £45bn in current prices. Since 1979 the surplus on services has fallen from 1.9% of GDP to 0.8%, with the surplus from profits abroad now only 0.6% of GDP and every indication that matters are getting worse.

The basic factor is the systematic failure to invest in manufacturing. The UK is the only Western country which simultaneously maintains a negative balance of trade and exports long-term capital. The result is a systematic bias against investment in manufacturing which further cripples British capital's

currency stability and be happily released from the need for high interest rates doesn't really hold water. For while those huge trade deficits last, we're going to need high interest rates to pull those cash deposits in."

Thatcher herself explained this at the Dublin summit in May when she first began to hint at ERM membership: "I think we must be very wary in assuming that by going into the ERM interest rates will come down." Since the pound will be permanently overvalued — which means that export prices for UK manufactures will be artificially high — UK manufacture will only be able to compete by crushing attacks on the wage rate. Again financial commentators are perfectly aware of this — thus Victor Keegan in *The Guardian* on April 23: "Britain urgently needs the economic equivalent of ECT which is sometimes used as a last resort in the treatment of psychiatric disorders...in the case of the UK this would take the form of immediate entry into the ERM... accompanied by a freeze on wages for a year." Or Samuel Brittan in the *Financial Times* on June 14, 1990: "No serious proponent of ERM membership has ever seen it as a quick fix. Membership works by squeezing severely the profits of companies engaged in international trade if they attempt to raise prices faster than their European competitors."

Pound overvalued within EMS

This is all the more imminent in view of the extremely high rate at which the pound has gone into the EMS. The general consensus even among pro-EMS financial authorities was for a rate of at most DM 2.60. The pound is in fact overvalued by about 25% in terms of relative productivity. All previous attempts to defend a high exchange rate have brought a crash in their wake: 1925-31, 1964-67 and 1979-81.

Britain is locked in a spiral of decline from which the only way out is a radical break with its imperial past. Such an alternative, outlined in the Socialist Economic Bulletin, would involve the expansion of the economy and above all manufacturing. Some 80% of all past changes in output per head in the UK is explained by changes in manufacturing output. But British capital, dominated by the financial, commercial and military sectors on which Thatcher bases herself, and which the Labour leadership under Neil Kinnock is absolutely unwilling to confront, is resolutely opposed to any attack on the only resources which could fund such an expansion — the defence budget and the City of London profits. What is therefore posed is a sharp rise in unemployment provoked by an intense recession, a prolonged and brutal attack on wages and yet further cuts in an already ravaged state budget. ★

Scottish nationalists turn left

THE crisis of British capitalism has for some years been reflected in a constitutional crisis of the British state. Leaving aside the case of Northern Ireland, there has since the 1960s been growing support for nationalist movements in Scotland and Wales (for information on the Welsh language and nationalist movement, see IV 182).

Scotland united with England under a single monarch in 1603, but retained its own parliament until 1707. It continues to have a separate local government, legal and educational system from England, as well as its own established church.

The ravages of Thatcherism have tended to strengthen both socialist and nationalist sentiment in Scotland. This was translated into an overwhelming anti-Tory vote at the 1987 general election, when Scotland returned 50 Labour MPs to the Westminster parliament (these were quickly to be dubbed the "feeble fifty" because of their loyalty to the Labour leadership's right-wing line). Disillusionment with Labour, combined with hostility to the hated Poll Tax (see IV 182 and 183) which was introduced in Scotland in 1989, before its introduction in England and Wales, has led to increasing support for the Scottish National Party (SNP), which has recently taken a left turn.

GORDON MORGAN

THE SCOTTISH National Party elected Alex Salmond, a declared socialist, as their leader at their September 1990 conference. Salmond's strategy is to portray the SNP as being a left alternative to Labour as well as a Nationalist party.

He will attack the Labour Party in Scotland for failing to defend Scottish interests despite having two thirds of Scotland's MPs and control of most of its cities. The SNP will continue to attack Labour on the Poll Tax — some Labour councils are instigating forced "warrant" sales of goods from people's homes to meet their Poll Tax debts. Salmond has criticized Labour's about turn on the Trident submarine which is being built by the Tories — Labour now says it will retain those which have been completed, whereas the SNP is opposed to nuclear weapons.

Finally Salmond will attack Labour on the Scottish economy, in particular the prospect of the Ravenscraig steel plant being shut as part of a "rationalisation" by British Steel. This raises the immediate prospect of the loss of the remainder of Scottish heavy industry and up to a quarter of manufacturing jobs.

Whilst such attacks are not new, Sal-

mond intends to sharpen the edge of SNP criticism, which has recently been portrayed as carping from the sidelines. He seeks to transform public perception of the SNP by associating it with labour movement struggles and rejoining the mainstream of Scottish politics.

These tasks show signs of being achieved. Latest opinion polls show the SNP up 4% at 24% and Labour down to 42% from a height of 55% last year. The Tories remain in third place in Scotland at 19%.

Senior Labour figures, while publicly denouncing the SNP, privately admit the new Salmond leadership to be a serious threat.

Although a radical change in style from the SNP leadership can be expected, the change from traditional petty bourgeois nationalist to left nationalist leadership has not been unexpected.

Nationalism rises with class struggle

Scottish national struggles have historically combined with rises in class struggle. Until the 1920s Labour was in favour of Home Rule, and the ILP and the Communist Party continued the tradi-

tion. The SNP by contrast developed in isolation from the labour movement — from its inception it remained wedded to the concept of a separate bourgeois state, no matter how limited the prospects for this.

In the mid 1960s the SNP achieved a major breakthrough and by 1974 it had 13 MPs. Its leadership until now was shaped in this period and they continued the attempt to be a party for all classes. The Labour Party meanwhile had been forced to adapt to Nationalist demands and had tentatively revived the idea of a devolved assembly in Scotland with limited powers and, explicitly, no powers of taxation. The Labour government put this to a referendum in 1979.

During the referendum of 1979, the SNP took an equivocal attitude to the proposed Scottish assembly which they saw as an attempt to block independence. When Labour failed to deliver an Assembly despite majority support in the referendum, the SNP withdrew from any further cooperation with Labour. Many felt the then SNP leadership had disastrously cut themselves off from political realities. A "'79 group" was formed consisting of most of the youth and the ex-Labour members who had joined the SNP.

The 1970s saw the steady decline of the Tory party in Scotland, a trend which shows no sign of changing. Many of the SNP votes in the early 1970s had been anti-Tory votes which subsequently went to Labour, which became the dominant party in Scotland.

The '79 group became the left of the SNP and quickly gathered support from around a third of party members. SNP conferences became increasingly divided. Leading members of the group were Jim Sillars, an ex-Labour MP and Alex Salmond. The '79 group attempted to get involved in industrial struggles, much to the annoyance of many Labour activists who distrusted the SNP. Councillors from the SNP, who were largely traditionalist, invariably voted with the Conservatives.

A protest vote against Labour monoliths

The '79 group showed the potential of a left nationalist programme. SNP votes were highest in the Highlands (where Labour was weak) and, by contrast, in housing schemes with monolithic Labour councils. The SNP was effectively a left protest vote in the cities and radical policies tended to increase that vote.

The traditionalist leadership became concerned that the '79 group was diluting their policy of pure nationalism so they disbanded the group for factional activities and suspended its leadership. Time, however, was not on the traditionalists' side. New members supported the left, and by 1987 a clear majority supported Sillars as senior vice convenor.

The Poll Tax changed the SNP's prospects. From the start the SNP condemned the tax and it rapidly adopted support for non-payment. Sillars was elected MP for Glasgow Govan in a huge swing immediately after Labour voted to implement the Poll Tax. Everyone anticipated a major turnaround with the SNP threatening to overtake Labour in the polls.

Following the fiasco of the 1979 referendum, an all party campaign for a Scottish assembly was set up. This has been influential in keeping this demand at the centre of Scottish politics. Labour has gradually strengthened its commitment to the Assembly and extended its proposed powers. In 1988 the CSA published a Claim of Right for Scotland which argued that the Scottish people had the right to determine their own form of government, irrespective of whether Westminster or any other body legislated for such a change. It proposed the setting up of an assembly of representatives of Scotland to determine the form of government for Scotland — a Constitutional Convention.

It was expected the SNP would back the proposed Scottish Constitutional Convention. It was equally felt Labour would not support it, particularly as the claim was in many ways revolutionary — "sovereignty resides in the people, not parliament".

Scottish convention a tactical victory for Labour

Labour did, however, participate and quickly wrong footed the SNP. The SNP withdrew from the Convention, claiming amongst other things that the Convention had rejected independence as an option. In fact although the consensual proposals of the remaining members of the Convention are for a federal relationship with Westminster, the proposed powers of the Assembly are greatly increased over the proposals of even three years ago — the Assembly would have tax raising powers and possibly powers to nationalize. The only powers residing at Westminster would be defence, central economic policy and foreign policy.

However, even the extended powers of the Assembly would prove unable to solve the structural crisis of the Scottish economy and would be seen as inadequate. Clearly the Assembly if established would be a major stepping stone towards independence.

For withdrawing, the SNP were portrayed by the media as sectarian and acting against Scottish interests. Labour had a major boost. Sillars compounded matters by silly predictions and unfounded claims. SNP support collapsed to pre-Govan levels.

As the SNP Convenor Gordon Wilson was retiring, it had been thought by many that Sillars would take over. Instead he put up a stalking horse by backing Margaret Ewing, an arch traditionalist. Salmond stood to challenge the perceived continua-

tion of the old failed leadership.

Salmond gained the support of the left, those concerned with the policy errors and a considerable anti-Sillars group including many traditionalists. His victory was substantial. More surprisingly, the main Poll Tax spokesperson, Kenny Mcaskill, a Sillars supporter, was defeated narrowly by a Salmond supporter. These personality and tactical differences are not too deep, however, and Salmond is by far the best spokesperson the SNP has.

The SNP conference meanwhile reaffirmed its opposition to payment of the Poll Tax, maintained its denunciation of the proposed Assembly and retained its opposition to nuclear weapons. On the Poll Tax, a very few delegates wished to end support for mass non payment — they were roundly denounced. Non payment was reaffirmed by acclamation.

Referendum on Independence supported

On the Assembly, the SNP overwhelmingly voted to participate in elections to it and argue within for independence. This, of course, was only if an Assembly was set up, which in turn assumed Labour were elected to government in Westminster — both these were thought unlikely. Nevertheless this was a major step forward in policy. Conference also voted to push for the independence option to be included in any referendum. This would make the referendum a three way choice — status quo, assembly or independence.

With this change the SNP and Salmond put Labour on the spot. The last thing Labour want is a referendum and particularly not one which could vote for independence. Yet senior Labour figures such as Bob Gray, the leader of Strathclyde Region, have suggested that local authorities organize exactly this referendum. Scotland has now had the SNP executive unanimously back Gray's call for the local authorities to organize the referendum. Under the old leadership a similar suggestion was defeated. Clearly changes have occurred.

The SNP's central policy is "Independence in Europe". This means that an independent Scotland would seek membership of the EEC. The SNP claim that as Britain is an existing member, Scotland would automatically be granted membership.

The Tories point out that a precedent would be set for the Basques and other nations and that France and other countries would block membership. Debate continues as to why having achieved independence, it should be surrendered to Brussels. The SNP seems likely to oppose full economic and political union.

It may appear that such concerns are fantasy when clearly Thatcher will not grant independence. Nevertheless the

Scottish press endlessly discusses possible scenarios for devolution or independence. Senior investment analysts predict Scotland could prosper given its energy resources the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) and the Convention of Local Authorities are setting up quasi-national representation at Brussels, while the *Economist* suggests the Tories grant devolution and cut Scottish representatives at Westminster, thus ensuring a Conservative government whilst cutting Scottish "subsidies".

Meanwhile the Government is acting, as if Scotland had been written off its political map, as it effectively is. Guarantees for retaining industry are ignored, headquarters are moved to London, rail and road link improvement schemes are shelved to concentrate investment in the South East, distinctive education and legal procedures are made uniform, and nuclear waste dumping is to be located in Scotland.

Energy supplies rerouted south

Even Scotland's most obvious asset, energy, is being downrated — Scotland's surplus energy will receive only marginal prices in the denationalized electricity grid, North Sea gas is being rerouted at huge extra cost to England so as to make chemical and steel production cheaper there, and in the process undermine the present cost advantage of Scottish production. Clearly the government is not attempting to win votes. Even a third of the dwindling band of Scottish Conservatives favour devolution if not independence.

The next election is critical. Labour has retained its support by promising an assembly. If Labour win the assembly must be delivered in the first session. The powers, structures and forms of government have been agreed by Labour's leaders on the Constitutional Convention.

If Labour lose nationally and as expected the Tories hold only five out of 72 seats in Scotland, we again enter the scenario where Labour are called upon to take action. This time they have supported the Claim of Right which could be construed as committing them to setting up a Parliament in defiance of Westminster. This will be utilized by the SNP.

Salmond's approach will be to establish the SNP as the main opposition party in Scotland to Labour. This will mean developing and representing their policies on a wider range of issues than to date. Their policies are generally to the left of Labour though still Nationalist. But then, again 40% of voters favour independence although only half of these vote SNP — most of the remainder vote Labour. Salmond can only increase SNP support. If Labour lose the next election, the SNP could quickly become the largest party in Scotland.★

The price of oil

OVER the summer the battle for the safety and trade union rights of Britain's North Sea oil workers has taken on a new intensity with a wave of strikes and occupations. The actions taken have followed the pattern of recent unofficial rebellions of rank and file workers in Britain, with the official union structures providing little support. Almost 500 people have died whilst working in the North Sea and a major factor in the development of the current movement has been the Piper Alpha disaster of 1988 which killed 167 workers.

A clear victory in the current dispute would be a massive breakthrough for union organization in many sectors previously considered as difficult to unionize.

Whilst the militancy of the rank and file remains strong, union leaders have proposed ballots for official strikes to win reinstatement for the hundreds of workers who have been sacked and locked out — ballots which will take weeks to organize and will be subject to legal harassment from the employers. The following article, written in early September, gives an account of the issues at stake.

NORMAN LOCKHART

OVER 700 oil workers from as far afield as Glasgow, Liverpool and Newcastle marched with their families and supporters through Aberdeen on Saturday September 1.

This protest against the sacking of over a thousand offshore workers for taking 24 hour strike action in support of a single UK Continental Shelf Agreement [which would offer all workers the security of trade union protection, and regularly negotiated wages and conditions] marks the build up of a campaign onshore and preparation for further strikes and occupations on the platforms. Thousands of "bears" (construction workers) have been cleared from their installations and "beached". But already women's support groups have been organized along with the relatives of those killed offshore.

The high point of the dispute so far has been the historic sit in on installations around the East Shetland Basin. Some women and men spent up to five and a half weeks offshore. Shell often interfered or cut off phone calls to families as well as to the Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC — the offshore workers' organization behind the industrial action). This was the most blatant form of intimidation and harassment and entirely within the tradition of management offshore.

Jane Hall (21), a stewardess who spent over five weeks offshore, commented in

an interview with *Blow Out*, the voice of offshore workers, "this tactic hurts Shell... you can do a lot by sitting in even if it does not feel like it at the time. Now we are ashore we realise that although it did not feel much we were effective". Her mother Pat pinpointed the issue that has been central to this struggle since the OILC was established last year. "You're bound to worry, it's your family. But it is about safety for everyone and they should have a union to speak for them while they are out there".

Ronnie Macdonald, chair of OILC, pointed out that the sit-ins have made it "inconceivable that this industry will ever be managed again without genuine input from those employed in it".

Changes in personal relations

Besides new found confidence, the sit ins have transformed the way offshore workers think of each other. Wilma Mason (23) said that the "bears" had admired the women for sticking it out with them — outlasting many. But it was also their status as catering staff that was more respected. One scaffolder had been heard to remark during occupation cleaning duties, "I never knew cleaning floors was such hard work".

The cuts in wages, jobs and conditions imposed during the 1986 price slump have still not been restored. But since the Piper Alpha disaster and the destruction

of Ocean Odyssey, oil workers are more prepared to speak out on the safety issues that affect them. The present fight is taking place despite many companies giving up to 11.7% in pay rises earlier this year. Injuries are still a daily occurrence and in the last ten years 330 offshore workers have been killed.

Terje Johansen, information officer of the Norwegian oil workers union NOPEF, brought solidarity greetings to the regular mass meetings held in Glasgow and Aberdeen. "There is no reason why British oil workers should not enjoy the same safety and conditions offshore as we have in the Norwegian sector". This was followed by a resolution of support from an international oil workers conference attended by trade unionists from Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Holland, as well as Britain, held in Stavanger. The oil workers of Trinidad and Tobago have also sent messages of support as has the North East executive of the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers).

The national officials of the 7 unions representing offshore workers have been more timid in their support, some grudging the use of local offices. The EETPU (the electricians' trade union), for example, has broken ranks already by arranging a separate deal with a contractor behind the backs of even the other officials.

Discussion about forming new union

If this continues it is bound to revive the discussion about the setting up of a new industrial union for offshore workers. However union branches, shop stewards' committees in shipyards and so on have responded generously. Glasgow ambulance workers contributed £1,000. Those sections of the labour movement that believe a well organized offshore workforce is important are being approached for financial support and resolutions to their leaderships are also important.

The OILC has been created by oilworkers frustrated by twenty years of neglect by the official trade union movement and previous Labour governments. Some of those on strike had torn up their union cards years ago in disgust.

Already the Gulf situation and the resulting rise in oil prices has been used as an argument in court by a legal representative for Shell — the 'national interest' and the 'balance of payments' were posed as arguments against the workers occupations to defend their jobs against lockouts and sackings. But it was the greed of the multinational oil companies, allied to the desire of western governments to control oil supplies, that led them to invest in the politically stable but environmentally hostile North Sea.

While the OILC waited for the period of summer maintenance work before

launching its action, as its main strength is with construction rather than with production or drilling workers, it is a measure of the oil companies' hypocrisy that they blame us for holding up safety work started 15 years late. Chevron is trying to unilaterally suspend work on Emergency Shut Down Valves (safety devices which the government had initially said would have to be installed on the oil rigs before the end of the year) and BP hopes that continued industrial action will strengthen their argument for an exemption from the

Department of Energy, in order to continue production and take advantage of the increased price of oil.

Messages of support and donations to;

OILC

Criterion Buildings

52 Guild Street

Aberdeen AB1 2NB

Tel. 0224-2110118/9 Fax; 0224 210 095. ★

United Secretariat of the Fourth International appealing for an international mobilization against the war on October 20). Growing popular opposition in France to the imperialist aggression is evident in the broadening of the anti-war movement and its increasing resonance. While the first demonstration against the war in Paris drew only 2000 people, mainly from the far left groups, a second shortly afterwards was sponsored by the CGT, France's largest trade union federation, and attracted 5000 people.

The October 20 demonstration is set to be still larger, with a range of sponsors including the French Communist Party, the Greens, pacifist movements and democratic Middle Eastern organizations. Demonstrations are also to be organized in at least ten other French towns and cities. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International, together with Lutte Ouvrière, another revolutionary organization, is appealing for a common contingent on the demonstration of all forces demanding the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of imperialist troops from the Gulf region.

Meanwhile, demonstrations are planned throughout the United States on October 20, from San Francisco to New York, around the slogans of opposition to US intervention in the Middle East and immediate withdrawal of US troops. As Bush's economic problems multiply, Americans are increasingly beginning to resent the huge sums being squandered on the Gulf adventure — a recent New York Times/CBS poll shows support for the sending of US troops to the Gulf at 61%, down from 75% in late September. ★

AROUND THE WORLD



IRELAND

Hunger strike against extradition

DESSIE ELLIS, a republican political prisoner held in the formally independent part of Ireland, has declared a hunger strike to death, beginning October 10, to prevent his extradition to Britain on a conspiracy charge. This will be the first all-out action of this type since the hunger strike of republican prisoners in Northern Ireland in 1981 that led to the deaths of 10 of the protesters. Ellis's family and supporters have explained that under Britain's conspiracy laws, it is virtually impossible to disprove the charge against him, and that the discrediting of the convictions of the Guildford Four (whom the British finally had to release after they had spent 15 years in prison) and the Birmingham Six show that Irish suspects risk being railroaded by British Courts. Further information can be obtained from *Republican News*, 58 Parnell Square, Dublin 1. ★

Police raids

REPUBLICAN OFFICES throughout Northern Ireland were raided in early October by British troops and Royal Ulster Constabulary in a large-scale operation dubbed "Operation Whiplash." About 800 troops and police were involved. The reason given for the raids was that they were part of an attempt to stamp out "paramilitary" racketeering. In its October 11 issue, *Republican News*, the paper of Sinn Féin, noted that many of the premises hit had been repeatedly and recently raided, and so the British forces knew that they would find no evidence of illegal practices.

In Derry, the second largest city in Northern Ireland, the police took £6,000

from the Derry Taxi Association, a cooperative business, endangering its ability to keep up its payments to its creditors. In Belfast, the "security forces" raided the bookstore run by the Republican welfare organization, the Green Cross. The manager of the store complained that it was the second time this year that the store had been raided, and that this time, as before, serious and quite unnecessary damage was done. "We have never refused entry to the RUC or British army and if they had called and asked I would have let them in." The raiders took away large amounts of documents and office equipment.

Sinn Féin officers denounced the operation as harassment and intimidation. It certainly marked a major escalation in the pressure of the "security forces" on the Sinn Féin and neighborhood organizations in the nationalist areas of Northern Ireland. ★

GULF CRISIS

Paris Demonstration

A MAJOR demonstration is to take place in Paris on Saturday October 20, as part of a day of international activity against the threat of war in the Gulf (see IV 192 for the declaration of the

Trotsky commemoration in Beirut

THE Arab Committee for the commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the death of Leon Trotsky, in which the Revolutionary Communist Group, Lebanese section of the Fourth International, is active, organized a conference-debate in West Beirut on September 26 on the theme of "the thought and struggle of Leon Trotsky in the light of current developments in the USSR and the world".

More than 200 people met in a conference hall with only 150 seats, to hear left deputy Najah Wakim and Revolutionary Communist Group supporter Kamil Dagher, writer and translator into Arabic of the Trotsky biography by Isaac Deutscher. The speakers underlined the topicality of the thought of Trotsky and established the necessary distinction between the bankruptcy of the Soviet Union and that of socialism. Kamil Dagher also gave a balance sheet of the positions of the Fourth International on the subject of the problems of the Arab region, from the partition of Palestine in 1947 up to the present crisis in the Gulf.

The conference was chaired by Maan Bachour, a progressive Lebanese intellectual well known in the country. It is noteworthy that the audience also included people who came from the Eastern ("Christian") sector of the Lebanese capital. ★

Exit Aoun...

MICHEL AOUN, known to his followers as "the general," aptly dubbed "Napolaoun" by the Druze leader Walid Jumblatt, finally gave up the fight on October 13 and shamefacedly took refuge in the French embassy. It is those Lebanese Christians who were enticed by the determination he displayed up until then and fought under his command who have to pick up the bill.

SALAH JABER

THE BILL is a big one. Since March 14, 1989, the day "the general" declared his "war of liberation" against Syria and its Lebanese allies, including the war that he waged against the Lebanese Forces Christian militia for control of the Christian stronghold, "Napolaoun's" megalomania has cost the Lebanese, and in particular the Christians, thousands of dead and wounded and resulted in material damage that, for much of the area, exceeds that previously caused by the whole series of wars in Lebanon since 1975.

As for results, this carnage produced absolutely nothing. Aoun was unable to achieve a single one of his declared objectives, for the simple reason that in the context of the existing relationship of forces they were unachievable. In this respect, the affinities between Michel Aoun and Saddam Hussein, which have brought them to support each other, illustrate perfectly the saying that "birds of a feather flock together."

Both men share inordinate ambition and a total disregard for the human cost of their adventures, such as the Iraqi dictator's war against Iran. However, the relations they established cannot be explained simply by elective affinities. They represented first of all an alliance against a common enemy — Syria.

It was the same desire to take on Syria that impelled the Mitterrand government to support Aoun, at a time when, moreover, France was still an ally of Iraq. Official French support was toned down, however, when in the summer of 1989 the Saudi monarchy and the other holders of the Gulf petro-dollars came up with the Taef accords (named for a Saudi town), which were supposed to put an end to the war in Lebanon.

The new Lebanese president, Elias Hrawi, chosen on the basis of these accords by the survivors of the Lebanese parliament elected in 1972 (!), was recognized by all the great powers and the Arab states, except Iraq.

Syria, however, had to temporize a bit before going into action against Michel Aoun, who had become an outlaw in the eyes of "international law." France and Iraq — the former semi-officially, and the latter officially — continued to protect the Lebanese Don Quixote.

United States warns Syria

Although the United States had broken with him, it nonetheless warned Syria against intervening militarily inside the Christian stronghold. Furthermore, after the Taef accords, Damascus could not but look favorably on the battle within the redoubt between Aoun's army and the Lebanese Forces backed by Israel.

This battle was more violent than all those that the reactionary Christian camp had waged against its enemies. It ended in a deadlock. In the meantime, Syria did not hesitate to cynically provide aid to the "general" — nor did the latter turn it down, in return changing his tone toward those against whom just previously he had been waging his "war of liberation."

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, created ideal conditions in more than one respect for decisive Syrian action against Michel Aoun. Under blockade, Iraq was in no position to support him.

Moreover, in joining the American-Saudi camp against its sworn enemy Saddam Hussein, the Syrian dictator, Hafez el-Assad, knew that he could get a carte blanche from Washington for action in Lebanon, an exporter of terrorism and not oil. This, moreover, was only a part of Syria's reward for its participation in the blockade against Iraq and the crusade against Saddam Hussein, support which is essential to the overall effort.

Against the background of the blockade of Iraq, Syria and its protege Hrawi at first went for a blockade of the zone controlled by Aoun. Then, on October 13, they launched a military offensive that in two hours led to the capitulation



of "Napolaoun," who had continually sworn that he would rather die than give way. Advice from Paris undoubtedly did as much as the fighting to lead him to his ignominious total surrender. The French government told him that the most they were prepared to do for him was to save his skin by granting him political asylum.

Aoun, who is known to have put tens of millions of dollars in foreign accounts in his own and his wife's names, preferred the prospect of a gilded exile to the "heroic" death for which he had claimed to be ready. Unfortunately for him, the Lebanese government, pushed by Damascus, is not going along with this.

Aoun's stolen millions

As a precondition for letting him go, it is demanding the return of the millions that he has diverted to his personal accounts. In this test of strength between Paris and Beirut, Damascus wants to take advantage of the most favorable conjuncture it has ever enjoyed in the region to settle old scores with the French establishment, which is unanimously hostile to Syria.

Whatever the outcome of this last vicissitude of the Aoun chapter of the Lebanese war, the war itself is not about to end. Aoun's exit will be followed by many more entries. The disarmament of the militias provided for by the Taef accords will only be another repetition of the same old farce. The Israeli deterrent will prevent the Syrians from deploying sufficient forces in Lebanon to disarm the country's belligerent factions. The latter will remain very numerous, armed to the teeth and always ready to kill each other in combinations defying all prediction.

Lebanon is condemned for a long time to remain the theater for settling all the region's scores, plus the local objectives of its various militias.

The future of Lebanon in the long term will depend primarily on what happens in Syria itself. ★