

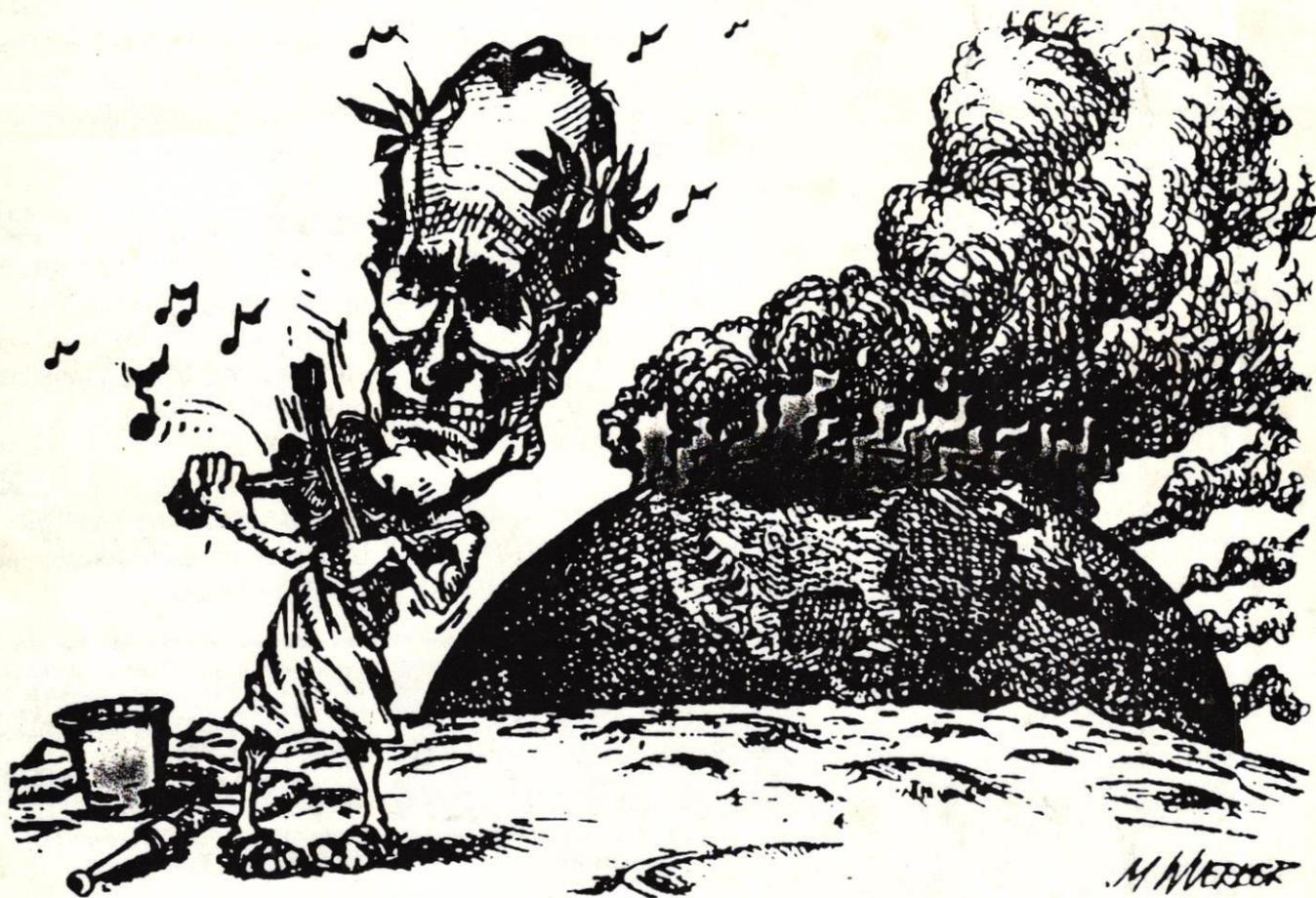
International VIEWPOINT

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Iraqi revolt threatens Bush's plans



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Iraq: civil war and pax americana

AS THE victory circus goes on — with such Hollywood-style stunts as the return of the US ambassador by helicopter, 16 years after another US ambassador was forced to flee Saigon in similar fashion — the extent of the carnage wreaked by the “surgical war” in Iraq and Kuwait is only slowly coming to light.

It will take many years for the effects of this sledgehammer surgery to heal, leaving behind terrible and deep marks. And to complete the image of what, apart from radioactivity, was the equivalent of an atomic bomb attack, terms reminiscent of artificial night and nuclear winter are being employed to describe the effects of the huge poisonous cloud produced by the burning Kuwaiti oilwells, already considered as one of the worst ecological disasters in history.¹

The dimensions of the slaughter and the disaster, the terrible devastation left in Kuwait and Iraq by the clash between the Nero of Baghdad and the Truman 2 of Washington, makes the sight of the worthy representatives of world capitalism crowding round the holders of the petrodollars to grab the postwar contracts all the more revolting.

Bush, crowned emperor by the US Congress and the imperialist media, is now, in the fashionable phrase, turning his attention to “winning the peace” after having won the war. Or to put it another way, the US administration is hoping to strike while the iron is hot to shape the regional *pax americana*, without which the military victory will soon lose its lustre. Thus, in the aftermath of the great battle, politics becomes the continuation of war by other means.

Iraqi army put to flight

Washington's first big political challenge is, of course, Iraq itself. All those in the West who believed, or claimed to believe, in the “anti-fascist” character of this war are today facing embarrassment.² When George Bush ordered the ceasefire on February 28, what remained of the Iraqi army in southern Iraq was in such disorder that the fighting had turned into a killing game with human targets. The coalition troops could have easily continued their advance to Baghdad, or at least to the gates of the capital, in order to provoke the overthrow of Saddam Hussein.

This they chose not to do — and certain-

AMERICA walks tall once more. Once again, if the newspapers are to be believed, David has overcome Goliath. The American commander in chief, Norman Schwarzkopf (known as “the bear”), weighing in at 240 pounds, gives an original interpretation to the role of David; after his extraordinary exploit in overcoming mighty Grenada, he now finds himself at the centre of an upsurge of self-satisfaction over the brave deeds of American arms in the Gulf. Among these one which will certainly establish a new legend: the massacre of a huge number of soldiers and civilians fleeing along the highway leading from Kuwait City to Basra.

SALAH JABER — March 14, 1991

ly not out of some sudden interest in sticking to the mandates of the UN security council. In Grenada and Panama, with far less at stake than in the invasion of Kuwait, and against regimes which, in comparison with Iraq's, were relatively democratic, Washington's troops did not hesitate to depose the existing regime and replace it by one dependent on the USA. But in these two countries pro-American alternative with a degree of legitimacy and stability existed. This was not, and is not, true of Iraq.

Fear of power vacuum in Iraq

We have pointed out before³ that the White House and its Saudi protégés are far more frightened of a power vacuum in Iraq than of Saddam Hussein. The spectacle offered by the Iraqi opposition at its meeting in Beirut on March 10 to 13, was not one that the supporters of the new regional order — a sub-division of the “new world order” — could view with relish. This mosaic of tendencies united only in their hostility to the tyrant of Baghdad, and divided on everything else, would find it very difficult to establish a minimum of stability in Iraq, if they had to set up their government on the rubble of the Saddam regime's military-police apparatus.

Ba'athist totalitarianism, especially in the last decade, has been of the kind that leaves apparently either chaos or the maintenance of the old apparatus, in part

or in whole, as the only two alternatives. Even worse from the point of view of Washington and its protégés, the main forces likely to emerge from this chaos are tied to Damascus, Tehran or Moscow, and would be very difficult to integrate into the projected *pax americana*. Thus the only way to understand Bush's appeals to the Iraqi people — and, explicitly, to the Iraqi military — to get rid of the tyrant is as appeals to the Ba'athist leaders to sacrifice Saddam Hussein on the altar of the supreme interest of their regime and its stability.

The Saudis have kept lines open to the opposition forces solely with the aim of being ready for anything. Furthermore, they have been promoting dissident Ba'athists who could contribute to the maintenance of the regime once it has got rid of some of its leaders. But all in all Riyadh, like Washington, would find it a hundred times more preferable to deal with a weakened and

“tamed” (in the apt phrase of a top American official⁴) Saddam Hussein than to risk the big leap in the dark involved in a total collapse of the regime. This is the political calculation that is determining their concrete military attitude to developments in Iraq.

Road to Baghdad open

Other reasons could be found perhaps for the failure of the coalition troops to march on Baghdad when the road lay open before them, but it is the only explanation for the fact that the six weeks of intensive air and missile attack spared the Iraqi forces massed in the north of the country, in Kurdistan and even in the capital. Washington's objective was never to destroy and dismantle the whole of the Iraqi armed forces, but to cut them down to “acceptable” size, around 200,000 to 300,000 men, incapable of threatening their neighbours, but sufficient to dissuade those among the latter who had hegemonic ambitions, and to crush the Shi'ite, Communist or Kurdish opposi-

1. See article by George Mitralias in *International Viewpoint* no. 202, March 18, 1991.

2. Among these can even be found people on the left, and not only people lacking a grasp of the facts of the situation, but experts such as Fred Halliday in Britain. The latter has written: “The military action against Iraq was legitimate, just as in the 1930s and 40s it was justified to support the war against fascism.” (*The New Statesman and Society*, London, March 8, 1991).

3. *IV* 202.

4. *International Herald Tribune*, March 11, 1991.

tions.

The attitude of the American troops in Iraq⁵ perfectly illustrates the basic choice that has been made. And this choice has determined the events that have been taking place in Iraq since the end of the allied offensive. Baghdad's military forces have been smashed in the south of the country, creating a power vacuum. The lid had been taken off the pressure cooker, and a mass uprising has ensued, an uprising of a population that has suffered for many years a terrible and unbearable tyranny, and which, furthermore, has borne the brunt of Saddam's two insane wars.⁶

According to several sources, this uprising was essentially spontaneous. Soldiers from the routed army joined in, notably soldiers originally from this region. It will have been hard for Tehran to resist intervening in the uprising, given that the southern Iraqi towns are in their majority Shi'ite and near to the Iranian frontier. Iraqi refugees from the pro-Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalist current were infiltrated back into Iraq. But that does not mean that we can describe the revolt as such as Shi'ite, in the sense of an uprising motivated by communalist objectives, and even less as fundamentalist or pro-Iranian, as has been done in the mass media.

Fundamentalists hide programme

In fact, the main pro-Iranian fundamentalist current, led by Mohammad Baqr Hakim, has not been putting forward its basic programme and has been rallying, as was seen at the Beirut congress, to the general democratic demands, which are a lot more popular than the call for an "Islamic Republic" even among the Iraqi Shi'ites. Tehran is also well aware that its men are unlikely to be supported by the Arab population — whether Shi'ite or Sunni, let alone the Kurds. The regime of the mullahs also fears the appearance in Iraq of a "chaos" that would favour the liberation of Kurdistan, the resurgence of a powerful Communist movement⁷ and the appearance of liberties long-suppressed in Iran itself, with contagious effects inside the latter country.

From this point of view, the proposal of the president of the "Islamic Republic", Rafsanjani, on March 8, has been much misinterpreted in the West. The media have seen Rafsanjani's appeal to Saddam Hussein to withdraw from the political stage as indicating support for the insurgent masses. The reality is quite different. In fact, the Iranian president was calling on the Ba'ath party to get rid of the despot and rule in alliance with the (pro-Iranian) opposition⁸.

This appeal came after an offer of cooperation from Saddam Hussein himself, who had sent his Shi'ite lieutenant Saadun Hammadi to Tehran. Saddam has also made a similar offer to the Kurds, proposing to reactivate the accords on Kurdish

autonomy of March 1970.⁹

The hand extended by the despot was rejected, not owing to intransigent opposition to his regime, but to his person. Tehran and its supporters as well as the Kurds linked to Iran consider Saddam Hussein's withdrawal as a basic condition for making their collaboration with the Ba'athists credible. That is to say that the calculation of the Iranian leadership, or at least of Rafsanjani, is the same as that of the Americans or Saudis, insofar as the maintenance of the Ba'athist regime minus its chief is concerned. The rivalry is over who will exercise influence in Iraq and cut out the other.

In consequence both of the two camps — Tehran on the one side and Washington/Riyadh on the other — are trying to throw spanners into the other's works. The anti-American rhetoric coming out of Tehran during the last days of the coalition offensive, preceded by the offer of refuge to Iraqi planes on Iranian soil, had the aim of facilitating the possibility of an alliance with Baghdad against the coalition. On the other hand, the American forces in southern Iraq have given the green light for Saddam Hussein's regime to drown the uprising there, which is supported by Iran, in blood.

As a matter of fact, on top of the two military choices cited above, there is a third, even more blatant one. The American army could, without the slightest problem, block the route to the south to all reinforcements of men and tanks from the north and centre. All it would have had to do, indeed, would have been to include a prohibition on such movement in the ceasefire conditions, given that the shattered Iraqi regime is exclusively preoccupied with crushing its own people and has docilely accepted all the conditions set out by Bush in Washington and New York and by Schwarzkopf in Safwan¹⁰. In the same way, Baghdad could have been prohibited from using air space for military ends, which would have prevented the use of Iraqi army helicopters against the popular rebellion.

Americans permit Iraqi troop movements

But the American forces have done the opposite. They have allowed Saddam Hussein to move his soldiers, his tanks and his helicopters throughout Iraqi territory, including towards Basra. They have allowed, and continue to allow, him to crush the popular uprising in the south and centre in a bloodbath. The scant information that filters out on this subject, through the Iraqi iron curtain re-established with the complicity of the coalition, talks of massacres with heavy arms and executions of the insurgents by the hundreds — all perfectly possible given that Saddam's is one of the world's most bloodthirsty regimes.

In the face of protests in the United

States from those who believed in the myth of the democratic crusade against the new Hitler, Bush felt obliged on March 13 to "confess to some concern" on the subject of the use of helicopters. A few days earlier, Pentagon General Brandtner declared that the US would even permit Saddam Hussein to use the planes now in Iran against the rebellion, if he could get them back, and if they did not threaten the coalition troops.¹¹

Napalm defined as conventional weaponry

Bush's concern on the subject of helicopters, derisory as it is when set against his expressed concern over the "instability" of Iraq, was preceded by a warning from Bush to Baghdad against using chemical weapons. Faithful to the definition of "conventional" weaponry developed by the Pentagon, the Iraqi regime must thus restrict itself to bombing the areas in revolt with napalm.

The American forces are doing more than just leaving the Ba'athist dictatorship to repress the popular uprising in its own fashion. They are offering the services of "Desert Shield" in the sense that this directly or indirectly dissuades Iran from stepping up aid to the rebels. According to the *International Herald Tribune* (March 6, 1990):

"The United States, Saudi Arabia and other countries in the coalition form an imposing deterrent to any Iranian attempt to gain a foothold in Iraq, particularly if Tehran violated Iraqi territorial integrity." In the same way, to the north, Washington's ally Turkey is energetically persuading the Kurds not to go too far in their fight with Baghdad.

The Turkish president, Turgut Özal, has more than once threatened to intervene in Iraqi Kurdistan if separatist sentiments are expressed too effectively. At the start of the coalition offensive, the parliament in Ankara adopted special war powers authorizing the sending in of Turkish troops into northern Iraq if considered

5. The Arab members of the coalition have restricted themselves to Kuwaiti territory.

6. The south of Iraq was in the front line of the Iraq/Iran war as well as the war that has just ended.

7. The Iraqi Communist Party can take advantage of the non-participation by Moscow in the military coalition and the credit won by the Kremlin's last minute attempts to stop the war, and the fact that, whatever the regime in Baghdad, it will inevitably be largely dependent on the USSR. The fact that Moscow has maintained the 1972 Friendship and Cooperation Treaty with Iraq and has refused to promise not to deliver arms to that country, as was requested by the British prime minister John Major when he met Gorbachev in Moscow at the start of March (see *IHT*, March 7, 1991), also shows the Kremlin's thinking.

8. "It is impossible for the Ba'ath Party to govern alone, especially under the leadership of someone no longer wanted by the world, the region or the Iraqi people" (*IHT*, March 9-10, 1991).

9. *IHT*, March 8, 1991.

10. The site of a meeting on Iraqi territory between the Iraqi military chiefs and those of the coalition.

11. *IHT*, March 11, 1991.



necessary. The limit for Kurdish aspirations set by Özal is none other than the autonomy that Baghdad, on paper, already granted them 21 years ago, and which Saddam Hussein is now offering to reactivate.

The thing on which everyone in the region seems to agree is opposition to the right of the Kurdish people to separate and form their own state. The United States, Iran, Syria and Saudi Arabia are all loudly proclaiming their support for "the territorial integrity of Iraq." Speaking to journalists who asked him what the Kurds could hope to get out of the New World Order, the French foreign affairs minister, Roland Dumas, could only come up with "the Kurds are desperate."¹² Saddam Hussein is well aware that the danger from the Kurdish side is limited. He knows that whatever advances the Kurdish forces make they cannot force him to grant more than he already accepted in 1970. He also understands that the Kurds, as a national minority, cannot aspire to take power at the centre.

The danger in the regions populated by Shi'ite Arabs, who are the majority in Iraq, is much greater, notably owing to the intervention of Tehran on the side of the insurgents. This is why the Baghdad tyrant, profiting from the safe conduct ensured by the American forces, has chosen for the time being to bring elite troops down from the north to deal with the rebellion in the centre and the south.

By doing this Saddam Hussein has exposed his remaining troops in the north to discomfiture, which has surely ensued as the masses in revolt have been joined by Kurdish nationalist guerilla fighters. He has to deal with the most pressing

problem and leave the settling of accounts with the Kurds until later, and this is what he appears to be doing now. In this battle for the survival of his dictatorship, Saddam Hussein is relying first of all on his praetorian guard, the Republican Guard and his police and para-police services, which are themselves the target of terrible popular vengeance wherever the uprising has even temporarily got the upper hand.

The dictator's next concern is to attempt to stop the rest of his army from disintegrating. To this end, he has decreed an amnesty for deserters and granted monthly bonuses to all his troops, and in particular to the soldiers of the Guard who are already relatively highly privileged in terms of money, equipment and social advantages.

The cohesion of the army is ensured, with only limited success, by the same Ba'athist terror that holds down the population. Soldiers' families are taken hostage to limit the possibility of rebellion to those whose relatives live outside territory under Ba'athist control. The systematic execution of rebels dissuades the others from themselves revolting.

Behind a figleaf of non-interference

The outlook for the rebellion is also darkened by the de facto support given by the United States to the Baghdad regime. As a figure from the Iraqi bourgeois democratic opposition has justly protested in the *Washington Post*: "The United States, behind a fig leaf of non-interference, waits for Saddam to butcher the insurgents in the hope that he can be

overthrown later by a suitable officer".¹³ The discussions in the US Senate reported in *Newsweek* turn Bush's Saddam/Hitler analogy back on its author: "The position of the administration is precisely that we want to get rid of Saddam, but not his regime... It is like getting rid of Hitler but leaving the Nazis in power."¹⁴

The insurgent Arab and Kurdish masses of Iraq against the Ba'athist tyranny are not meeting any worthwhile solidarity on the part of the masses in other Arab countries, where these are not actually hostile for reactionary reasons, such as anti-Shi'ite communalism or anti-Kurd chauvinism. This is tragic confirmation of our apprehensions on the serious illusions present among the Arab masses, including on the

left, concerning the real meaning of the Iraqi despot's actions.

In symmetrical fashion, the noble souls in the West who supported the "anti-fascist" democratic crusade of the imperialists have fallen silent today, on the pretext that there are things even more "fascist" than Saddam — the "fundamentalists" who threaten to come to power in Baghdad. In both cases the rebels in Iraq find themselves viewed with suspicion, if not with hostility, by people who held antagonistic positions in the six week war.

The importance of fighting the imperialist aggression without giving the slightest credit to Saddam Hussein's regime or his annexation of Kuwait is now absolutely clear. Today, just as yesterday, genuine support to the people of Iraq requires a struggle simultaneously:

- For the immediate withdrawal of the imperialist troops, who first committed the crime of the pitiless blockade and bombardment of the Iraq people and are now committing a further one by supporting the Saddam regime against them.

- For an end to all embargoes, sanctions and war reparations imposed on the Iraqi people.

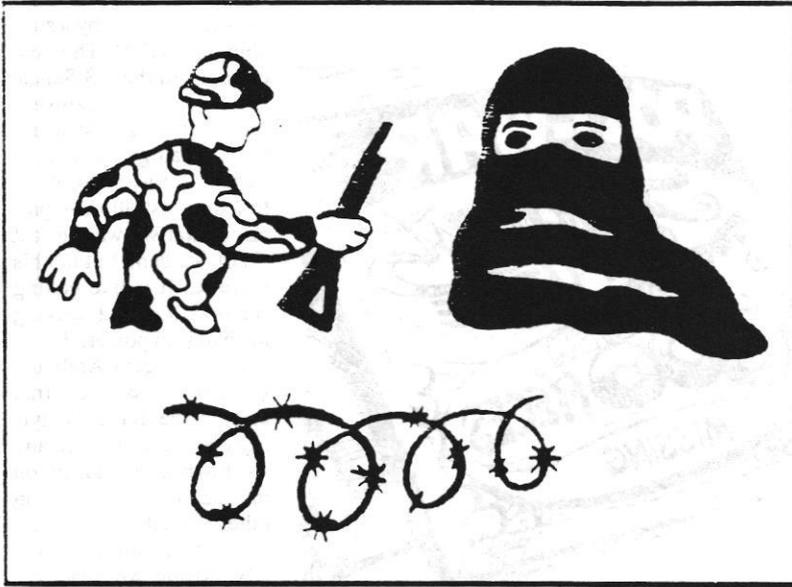
- For support to the Arab and Kurdish peoples of Iraq in their struggle against the Ba'athist tyranny, for democratic liberties and the election of a constituent assembly.

- For support to the Kurdish people in their struggle for national emancipation and for their right to self-determination, including separation. ★

12. *Le Monde*, March 12, 1991.

13. *IHT*, March 13, 1991.

14. *Newsweek*, March 18, 1991.



The New Order and the Intifada

WAR very often serves to clear up misconceptions, and reduce rickety compromises to dust. The Israeli-Palestinian flirtation of the past few years has always been based on a misunderstanding, on half truths and rickety compromises which often bordered on the surrender of principle. The Gulf War has, sadly, allowed things to be clarified.

MICHEL WARSHAWSKY

HOWEVER, for those who do not take their dreams for reality, neither the position of the Israeli peace camp in relation to this war, nor the position of the Palestinian nationalists, nor the divorce which has resulted from these contradictory positions, should be surprising.

There was absolutely no reason for the Palestinians of the occupied territories not to align themselves with Iraq in its conflict with the imperialist states and their regional allies; Arab solidarity, the Arab nationalist discourse of Saddam, the disgust provoked by the opulence of the ruling caste in Kuwait and its contempt for the Palestinians, the hypocrisy of the US administration in its role as self-appointed arbiter in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and above all the menace — real or imaginary — that Iraq represented to the state of Israel — there are more than enough reasons to explain the popular support for Iraq in the occupied territories.

As far as the militant nationalists are concerned it is necessary to add the anti-imperialist sentiment which remains alive, despite the efforts of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) over the past few years to normalize its relations with Washington and the European capitals.

Scuds welcomed

When the Palestinians of the occupied territories got up on their roofs, despite the curfew, to applaud the Scuds directed at Tel Aviv, they expressed a real joy at seeing their enemy on the receiving end for once, knowing what it was to experience fear, what it meant to be enclosed in a house, to not be able to send their children to school, to see their houses destroyed. Because if the Israelis had a small taste of such inconveniences, they have been the daily bread of the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation, for

the past three years if not for longer.

The Israelis for their part did not wait for the missiles to fall on Tel Aviv to line up behind one of the two camps facing each other in the sands of the Arabian peninsula; the national unity that had been breached by the Palestinian uprising reconstituted itself behind Shamir and Bush.

The national consensus

The left returned within its walls, the peace movement disappeared. In September, the militants of the Revolutionary Communist League (RCL — section of the Fourth International in the Israeli state) published an "Open letter to a friend on the Zionist left" where they explained the motivations and the limits of the Zionist left and thus the majority of those in the Israeli peace camp:

"The crisis in the Arabian-Persian Gulf was, for the political-military establishment and the right in Israel, like a gift from heaven. On the surface, the crisis took attention off the *intifada*, postponed possible international pressures, and most importantly, put the topic of war back on the table — a topic which is the object of the secret, and sometimes open longing of the majority of the Israeli establishment.

"But also for you, and for many of your friends, the possible war aroused a new pleasure which you are not ready to admit, even to yourself. But the fact is, you do love wars — "unavoidable wars", of course. You love the uniform, you love the call-ups and operational preparations, you love the uplifting feeling in Israeli society when the fragrance of gun-powder rises to the nostrils. And, more than anything, you love the feeling of national fraternity which characterizes the period of preparation for war.

"You had already taken your decision before the Gulf crisis. You wanted some-

thing to happen so that you could return to the warm embrace of the consensus and feel anguish. Once again, "shooting and crying".

"Indeed, in the Gulf war you saw to it that your truth will not only be done, but will be seen to be done; you took part in the racist and insane choir chanting "the Iraqi Hitler"; you couldn't even find it in your heart to reveal even a criticism of the hypocrisy of the American government, which, only a year ago, itself occupied a sovereign state in Central America, or of the cynicism of the heads of the State of Israel."

Patriotic ex-pacifists

In an interview given to the French weekly *Politix*, the deputy of the Civic Rights Movement — and reserve colonel — Ran Cohen, summed up this attitude; "We are not pacifists, we are patriots and soldiers; it is as such that we choose our camp, not in accordance with abstract philosophical criteria". And in concrete terms, the Israeli "pacifists" have certainly chosen their camp in the course of this war; left writer A.B. Yehoshua called for the use of the atomic bomb against Iraq, another writer, Dan Meron, denounced Shamir for not having used the army, Yael Dayan opposed the petition of the Womens' Movement for Peace demanding the distribution of gas masks to the inhabitants of the occupied territories, Yossi Sarid applauded the arrest of Professor Sari Nusseibeh and has used the most abusive terms to signal to the Palestinian leaders that he has more important things to do than conduct a dialogue with

such fanatics.

The war has put back on the agenda the concept of transfer, that is the mass deportation of the Palestinians. This constitutive element of Zionist policy has always existed in the plans of the leaders of the Israeli state, although it had become clear from the beginning of the 1970s that a "cold transfer" was no longer a realistic option. Only a war could furnish both the pretext and the smokescreen necessary to the realization of this crime.

The prospect of war in the region has furnished the occasion to bring the old plans out of their drawers, excite the imagination of Israeli progressives and provoke panic amongst Palestinians.

The Revolutionary Communist League has been the only organization to warn against a catastrophism which would concentrate attention on a single possibility — the most extreme — and neglect what was more probable, namely the exploitation of the war to terrorize the population of the occupied territories, change the relationship of forces with the Palestinian national liberation movement and attempt to crush the *intifada*. And this is exactly what has happened.

Palestinian economy hit

Over a period of more than a month and a half the population of the occupied territories has experienced the toughest and longest curfew since the beginning of the occupation. Beyond the individual repression and the hunger, the deaths, the wounded, the destroyed houses and the innumerable annoyances, it is the Palestinian economy in its entirety which has been hit, especially in agriculture. In the longer term, the curfew has been the opportunity to implement the policy of "separation" advocated for several months by Defence Minister Moshe Arens and by a part of the Zionist left. This policy signifies, in practice, cutting a great part of the Palestinians off from their sources of income in Israel, and their replacement by Jewish workers — Soviet immigrants in particular — or even foreigners.

Even after the protests of the entrepreneurs and agricultural proprietors, the number of Arab workers who have regained their jobs is estimated at 35% at the maximum. Exactly as in South Africa, a policy of "pass laws" has been introduced, forbidding the majority of Palestinians not only from entering Israeli territory, but even from leaving the region in which they are registered. It amounts to a structural change in the nature of the occupation, which under the appearance of a so-called separation of Israelis and Palestinians, encloses the Palestinian population, and them alone, in ghetto regions, zones of residence, Bantustans. If one adds to this the massive dismissals, it is possible to grasp the extent of the deterioration of the living condi-

tions of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

And yet the Israeli left has not flinched. With the exception of a campaign against the curfew and the hunger and some food convoys for the refugee camps organized by a group of progressive rabbis and militant anti-Zionists, among them the RCL, no expression of solidarity, no act of protest. It is easy to understand the disappointment and the anger of Palestinian militants, in particular those at the forefront of the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue.

"That they are against Iraq is understandable; that they venerate the Americans, we are used to it, but that they have not a word for the defence of our rights as human beings. No, decidedly, this Israeli left has nothing in common with what is called the left in other countries. These people are not even liberals....." Mary Khas, a well known leader in the Gaza Strip, a former member of the Israeli Communist Party before she decided, before 1967, to leave Israel for Gaza, said to me with unaffected anger.

This woman who has on several occasions guided Yossi Sarid and the other Zionist left leaders through the refugee camps, who at the beginning of the *intifada* had visited the Israeli schools, the youth movements, the conferences and the other places of Israeli-Palestinian dialogue no longer wishes to hear of it, and she is far from being alone. When I reminded her that Yossi Sarid had also told his Palestinian interlocutors no longer to telephone him, she replied "so much the better. We no longer have anything to say to each other".

Dialogue continues

Yet there remain, on the two sides of the demarcation line, leaders who do not despair of dialogue. Faisal Husseini, the most prominent Palestinian leader in the occupied territories:

"It is going to be necessary to renew the dialogue, and it will renew itself. There have been some misunderstandings, but it is us, and us alone, that is the Palestinians and the Israeli peace movement, who can unblock the situation and move forward to a peaceful solution". And, in echo, deputy Ran Cohen; "I do not agree with Yossi Sarid when he says 'it is not worth telephoning me'. Whether you like it or not, it is necessary to renew the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue, including with the PLO if that is what the Palestinians want".

The problem is that the leaders have lost much of their credibility, and if on the Israeli side a part of the peace camp has chosen to follow Yossi Sarid in his policy of "war now", amongst the Pales-

tinians, the intransigent line of the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement is gaining popularity.

Ran Cohen and Faisal Husseini also have a similar view of what is going to happen now that the Gulf War is over. "The Americans will, in the context of the new order, force the hand of the government and oblige it to negotiate with the Palestinians. Including, if there is no other choice, with the PLO. Certainly, it will be slower than six months ago, with very many intermediary stages before the formation of a Palestinian state and more guarantees" says Cohen, and Husseini confirms it; "The merit of Saddam is to have put the Palestinian question on the agenda, and taken it out of the rut where the Shamir government had stuck it. It could be necessary to pass through stages, but eventually, the negotiations that the Americans are going to initiate will lead to the Palestinian state".

It is in this belief that the Palestinian leader agreed to meet the US secretary of state during his visit to Jerusalem, and this despite the firm opposition of currents close to the PFLP and DFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine and Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine — the two leading components of the left within the PLO), which have distributed leaflets in the occupied territories threatening reprisals against anyone who meets a representative of the US administration while this latter refuses to recognize the PLO as the sole representative of the Palestinian people.

Obviously, the problem is to know to what extent the US is really interested in forcing Shamir's hand. That the Israeli left believes this is hardly astonishing; for it, Washington is the guarantor, not only of order — and they revere order — but also of law and of justice. The Palestinian leaders, on the contrary, have a rich experience of "US peace plans" which have remained dead letters, leaving the Israeli leaders a free hand to continue the occupation and the dispossession of the Palestinian people. Left journalist Uri Avneri is one of the rare Israelis who has no illusions:

"Washington statesmen might decide that, for the sake of maintaining a continuing US presence in the region, it would be better that the Israeli-Arab conflict not disappear, but be kept simmering over a low flame. The existence of a strong and frightening Israel certainly increases the dependency of the Arab states on America. Every beginner in Washington understands that there will be no true peace without the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel. To that end it is necessary to involve the PLO in the process. But the Gulf War supplied a won-



derful excuse for avoiding this. On the other hand, Baker could attempt to achieve a sort of Camp David 2 between Israel and Syria, thereby also binding Damascus conclusively to the American sphere of influence. Shamir can return the Golan just as Begin returned the Sinai. According to the Irgun map, "Only Thus", neither of them is part of the land of Israel.

"This will not bring about peace. The open sore of the Palestinian tragedy will continue to secrete pus and to poison the whole region. Within a few years the seed of calamity sown by the Gulf war will germinate and a new Arab generation will emerge." (*Ha'aretz*, March 6, 1991).

Dismantling the bomb

But even assuming that President Bush has indeed decided to dismantle the Palestinian bomb, it remains unknown to what extent a formula can be worked out which will satisfy at the same time the Palestinian minimum and the Israeli maximum.

For Shamir and his government, it is "no to the PLO, no to a Palestinian state", the best that can be negotiated would be some form of autonomy, and the negotiations will be with the leaders in the occupied territories. Hussein: "We are a people, that is why one does not negotiate with a self-styled local leadership, but with our national leadership, that is the PLO. And a people has a right to self-determination, that is a state. These two elements are not negotiable".

The militants of the Palestinian left in the occupied territories are less categorical. One among them told us: "In the PLO there are some currents ready to play the game of autonomy, as a provisional solution obviously, and who would not hesitate to give the green light to local notables, more or less influenced by the nationalist right, to negotiate in the name of the PLO".

In the last analysis what will determine the next stages, including the limits of the compromise realizable by the PLO and the diverse currents of the Palestinian national movement, will be the capacity for struggle of the Palestinians, in the occupied territories, but also in Jordan, in Lebanon and throughout the Arab region. Indeed on this plane, the perspectives are clear; the *intifada* continues, and is likely to become even more radical, if only because of the dramatic economic situation in which the inhabitants of the occupied territories are living, a situation which, as a renowned orientalist recently explained "creates an atmosphere reminiscent of 1987, when the feeling of impasse and no longer having anything to lose made the *intifada* explode and reduced to dust the status quo and the analyses of the experts and the politicians". ★

National Pact or constituent assembly?

AT THE START of the Gulf crisis, Jordan's King Hussein put himself forward as a "mediator". Then, when the war broke out, he took refuge in "neutrality". In both cases, the regime's adaptation to the anti-imperialist radicalization of the masses was purely verbal, without any practical consequences. This was, indeed, understandable, given that the masses were demanding arms and the breaking of the blockade of Iraq.

OMAR SALEM

THIS is the context in which Washington has found itself able to "understand the difficult circumstances in which King Hussein found himself" and George Bush has declared that it was not his intention to "overlook Jordan's role" in the postwar regional reorganization. The American president has despatched a special envoy to the monarch to ask him to avoid all friction with Israel and assure him that he is not to be written out of the regional script.

The king stuck to his neutrality until the end of the war. This position was publicly restated several times by the king and other representatives of the regime. On February 6, 1991, however, the sovereign made a speech without any apparent motive in which he laid into the United States and its Arab allies, meeting a chorus of praise from the parties of the national consensus.

Populist speech and popular anger

The aim of the speech was to contain the spontaneous popular anger which neither the parties of the consensus nor the regime could control. At the start of the third week of the war, the anti-Iraqi coalition had started to bomb Jordanian trucks and other civilian vehicles on the road between Amman and Baghdad,

infuriating the population. On the morning of February 6, several thousand inhabitants of Ramtha, near the Syrian frontier, stopped a convoy of Syrian and Turkish trucks on their way to Saudi Arabia, and tried to seize their cargo with the intention of sending it to Iraq.

It was on the very same evening that King Hussein made his populist speech, while at the same time his police agencies rounded up 200 people in Ramtha. A curfew was imposed in the town for the subsequent two days.

The left, respecting the national consensus, decided not to notice the repression that accompanied the speech. It has also chosen to overlook the resumption of American aid, which has taken place despite the King's speech. According to government figures, some \$750m worth of gifts and loans on easy terms were granted in the final week of the war. In fact, gold and money reserves have reached record levels at \$2.1bn.

The financing obtained by the Jordanian regime fits within the regional framework of the "new world order" inaugurated by the massacre perpetrated against the Iraqi people. On March 1, at the end of the war waged by the coalition, the king made a new speech, in which he described the broad outlines of his policy for the "new period", at a time when the population was still reeling from the shock of the scale of the defeat suffered by Iraq. The passivity of the masses following the royal speech was only the first result of the illusions sown, in the course of the six preceding months, by the regime, the media, and all the parties of the national consensus.

Reactivating the regional Arab order

The sovereign appealed, in his speech, for the turning of "a new page... founded on reconciliation and inter-Arab understanding" and the reactivation of "our Arab regional order". He reaffirmed his commitment to work for "a lasting peace and regional stability" and declared that "Jordan opens wide its arms to whoever wishes to establish amicable relations with us".

The king apologized to "the leadership of the Israeli people" for the rejoicing amongst Palestinians when the Scuds fell on Israel. Finally, the king declared that he would pursue his project around the National Pact, the final version of which had been published at the end of 1990 (see *IV* 195, November 26, 1990).

The regime is thus attempting to circumvent both its own crisis and the masses, profiting from the demoralization of the latter following the Iraqi defeat and



The monarch's speech did not constitute in any way a turning point, but confirmed very well the nature of the regime, which has never changed.

There are those in the "national consensus" left who, having been impressed by the "populist" speeches of the king in the last few months and having seen in these a radical change in the regime, have been surprised by his last speech and have remained flabbergasted.

The National Pact which the monarch will submit, in his expression, for popular "blessing", has been adopted in unanimity by the royal commission charged with drawing it up, in which all the parties of the reformist left were represented. It is not only a programme of class collaboration, but also a rewriting of the history of the country.

Its preamble retraces the history of the Hashemite dynasty to which King Hussein belongs; it absolves the regime of all crimes against the Jordanian and Palestinian people, and covers up his past in the service of Arab reaction and imperialism.

There is no doubt that the Pact will be a useful instrument in the hands of the throne to put the political

parties to the service of its policy, and confer on its armed forces a "national legitimacy" to strike against the revolutionary forces in the period to come.

It is not objective conditions which have derailed the struggle against the regime over the last two years. It is rather the subjective capacity to organize this struggle which was absent. The hope of revolutionaries is that the global crisis of the regime will give birth to a radicalization from which will emerge militants free of the illusions held by the court reformists.

In this spirit, Jordanian revolutionary Marxists are opposing to the farce of the National Pact the demand for a freely elected constituent assembly. Against the attempts to liquidate the Palestinian cause, they defend the demands for the total and unconditional withdrawal of the Israeli army from the territories occupied in 1967, as well as the right to self-determination of the Palestinian people, including their right to return to the territories from which they have been expelled. ★

benefiting from the collaboration of the parties of the Pact. These latter have already shown that they were capable of containing and mystifying the masses, where the repressive and media apparatuses of the regime were not sufficient.

The king launched his policy for the new period, fortified by his local success in projecting an image for himself as a nationalist leader, democratic and not implicated in "fratricidal" conflicts. Being now more acceptable to the Palestinians, whereas the role of the PLO is in regression, he could be coopted by the Palestinian leadership as a last recourse. The famous "Jordanian option", renewed, seems more credible than ever.

Liquidating the Palestinian cause

It would guarantee the king a key role in the liquidation of the Palestinian cause, that is the commandeering of the struggle of the Palestinian people, at least cost and in the regional context of the "new world order".

Appearance and reality

TWO developments on March 20 seem to contradict the analysis of the articles on Iraq and Jordan published in this issue. First, the US Senate voted to cut off military and economic aid to Jordan because of King Hussein's attitude during the Gulf war. Secondly, a US F-15 shot down an Iraqi Su-22 over the town of Tikrit in Iraq, while the Bush administration warned Baghdad not to use its air force against the rebellion unfolding in the country.

Superficially, these events imply that the US government really wants to punish the King of Jordan, its long-time ally and protégé, and assist the popular uprising in Iraq. The truth is very different.

The decision to rescind this year's military and economic aid to Jordan was carried by 57 votes to 43. It irritated the administration, as is often the case with votes in Congress. Senate majority leader Bob Dole opposed the decision, saying it would tie Bush's hands in his Middle East "peace" efforts. The Senate resolution thus authorized Bush to restore economic aid if he certified that Jordan was cooperating politically with his government. Nor did it exclude the resumption of military aid, subject to congressional consent.

The downing of the Iraqi bomber is more blatantly hypocritical. According to Iraqi opposition sources, planes have been repeatedly used by the dictatorship to bomb the uprising (and are still being used). This has led to much criticism of Washington for failing to limit Saddam's ability to murder his people. Bush had then to make some token gestures: Baghdad was warned not to use fixed-wing military aircraft, but can continue using helicopter gunships which are its main repressive weapon against the rebellion.

In fact, the real dilemma of the administration today is whether to withdraw from Iraq to give Baghdad a free hand to quell the rebellion, or stay there to deter Tehran from stepping up its aid to the rebels.

Salah Jaber - March 21 ★

FSLN debates future of revolution

THE first congress of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) will take place July 19-21, 1991. The congress was initially scheduled for February 1990, but the FSLN leadership decided to postpone it, on the grounds that the social situation in the country demanded all the energies of Sandinista militants. Meanwhile, a frequently violent public debate is continuing in the press, with members of the national leadership and well known cadres of the FSLN putting forward a wide variety of positions, whilst the former middle cadres (now often unemployed and left to fend for themselves) and the rank and file grumble (see the letter of G. Lopez p. 11).

CECILIA GARMENDIA

SINCE the electoral defeat of the FSLN in February 1990, the discussion has centered on the causes (economic and military choices, alliances, the policy of the FSLN in relation to the mass movement and the population in general); on the "social partnership" with certain sectors of the bourgeoisie and the attitude to take towards the measures undertaken by the government (confrontation or negotiations); on the current role of the Sandinista People's Army (EPS); and on the kind of party to build (internal functioning, elected or nominated leadership, and so on).

Social mobilization attenuated

The signing of the social partnership accords in October 1990 has attenuated the social mobilization which reached its high point during the general strike of July 1990; but these agreements have not checked, far from it, the persistent degradation of the standard of living of Nicaraguans and the deterioration of the economic situation. Dismissals continue, (24,000 public employees will be sacked between now and April — 33% of current employees in administration, health and education — as well as 10,000 workers in the nationalized sector); a new privatization plan, worked out with the International Development Association (IDA, controlled by the United States) will be implemented and will affect 350 enterprises.

New privatization laws will soon be proposed to Parliament; these attacks are currently creating a renewal of social tension (a strike of health personnel para-

lyzed the hospitals in February 1991), but the mass movement seems disoriented by the zig-zags of the Sandinista leadership. Nicaragua's debt will be settled in the "Latin American" manner; half will be paid over 40 years and the rest converted into shares in the productive nationalized sector, the target of different measures taken by the government of the National Union of the Opposition (UNO) since February 1990.

Under the social partnership accords, the government succeeded in imposing an eventual privatization of banks; the state monopoly of foreign trade also seems threatened (it was one of the first measures taken by the revolutionary government in July 1979). Agrarian reform is frozen (despite the supplementary pressure exercised by the demobilized former Contras of peasant origin); the raising of interest rates has tightened the noose around peasants who had received land during the revolution. Whereas the accords envisaged the freezing of redundancies, the growing autonomy of local governments and administrations (a sign also of the divergences inside the UNO which reached their apogee in the so-called "revolt of the mayors"²) has meant that this measure has not been observed in many areas.

Incessant decline in purchasing power

Purchasing power declines incessantly; inflation has reached 10,000% for 1990; the cordoba-oro — the new currency which should be in parity with the US dollar — already exchanges at a rate of 7 to 1

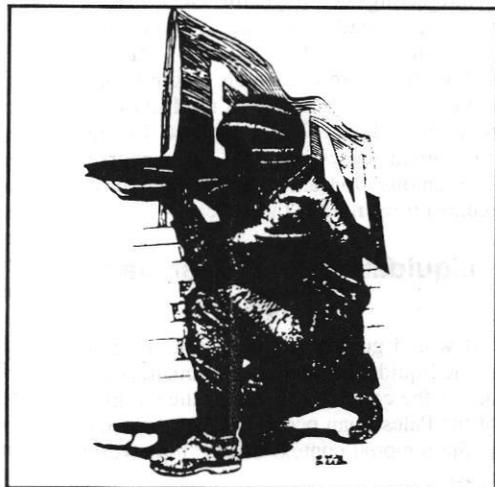
against it; productivity has fallen by 5%. Public service workers, for example, have lost 50% of their purchasing power. This has obviously led to a spectacular lowering of the living conditions of the masses, aggravated by the reduction of social services (growth of infant mortality, reappearance of a series of diseases banished since 1979 — fatal epidemics of measles, chickenpox and so on).

The EPS has fallen in size from 90,000 at the beginning of 1990 to 28,000 (the smallest army in Central America); it has also been shaken by a series of debates and incidents which have been terminated in a more than authoritarian fashion. Colonel Picardo, chief of the air force, was dismissed with his closest collaborators in August 1990, accused of indiscipline for having defied, indeed criticized, the authority of the commander of the EPS (general Humberto Ortega)³; these events concealed a more profound debate on the current role of this institution, the "rebels" being suspected of interfering in politics, whereas some now want the EPS to be no more than the guarantor of the Constitution.

At the end of 1990, four Sandinista (as well as Salvadoran) officers were imprisoned, accused of having sent missiles to the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) in El Salvador. Commandante Luis Carrion, a member of the national leadership of the FSLN, spoke, with regard to the FMLN, of a "disloyal attitude which does not correspond to the quality of the political relations and the solidarity of the FSLN"⁴.

FMLN forced to return missiles

The leadership of the FMLN, under the threat of the expulsion of the Salvadoran refugees based in Nicaragua, was forced to send back 8 Sam-7 missiles and 14 Sam-14 missiles to the EPS. The Sandinista Youth, qualifying the act of the accused officers as "heroic", indeed as a sign of a "revolutionary morality", rebelled; "the FSLN is not the party in power and it cannot then feel itself offend-



ed, or betrayed". The National Workers' Front (FNT, which brings together the whole of the Sandinista trade unions) has also criticized the attitude of the EPS leadership.

The 4 officers launched a hunger strike, supported by the association of dismissed former soldiers, after their condemnation to three and a half years imprisonment on February 14 — they finally stopped on the announcement of an eventual pardon. The response of certain top Sandinista leaders to this act has been shocking (see the interview with Dora Maria Tellez, p. 12). If prudence is understandable in such an affair, the FSLN, as a party which is no longer in government, and no longer officially leading the EPS (a minister of state is responsible for it) had plenty of room to take an independent position.

To qualify the efforts of the FMLN to protect a civilian population faced with the bombardment of the Salvadoran army as a "disloyal" act reveals a double morality and a certain historic amnesia (the attitude of the Sandinista government in December 1989, in the San Isidro accords, condemning "the armed actions and terrorist acts" hardly a month after the offensive launched by the FMLN, had already shaken the Sandinista ranks and shown the impasse into which the FSLN was drawn through its instinct for self-preservation)⁵.

Unjustified excess of zeal

Thus the attempts of the government to "depoliticize and professionalize" the EPS are fully underway, with the active aid of an important part of the Sandinista leadership.

It is true that the transition accords, signed during the handover of government⁶, limited the Sandinista leadership's margin of manoeuvre, if it wished to keep control of the army — but this does not justify such excesses of zeal.

The measures taken since April 1990 by the UNO government have been made against the principal gains of the revolution (nationalized sector, Sandinista army and police, social gains — free health and education, right to work, agrarian reform, and so on).

If it hopes to regain the majority and continue to represent the interests of the masses, the FSLN must effectively advance in its definition as a party. This is what is at stake in its congress. ★

1. See IV 187.

2. UNO mayors close to vice-president Virgilio Godoy stirred up some confrontations at the end of 1990 between supposedly demobilized Contras and the Sandinista army and police. They demanded in particular the resignation of Humberto Ortega.

3. Rumours accuse him of having had contacts with the right and its journal, *La Prensa*, of wishing to make the air force an "autonomous" institution, and of wanting to repress the July strikers. Officially, he has been accused only of having a "particular conception" of the army.

4. *El Nuevo Diario*, January 30, 1991.

5. See IV 176 and 178.

6. See IV 184.

Going to the root of things

IN THE context of the preparation of the FSLN congress, a debate has opened in the columns of the Nicaraguan press. As part of this discussion, a farmer in region IV (the departments of Masaya and Carazo, to the south of Managua) sent an open letter, in the name of a group of peasants, to the daily *Barricada*, which we reproduce virtually in its entirety.

GUADALUPE LOPEZ

THE peasants of region IV have had a good deal of discussion on what the revolution has bought them, and what they have gained during all these years of sacrifice.

In that which concerns us, if we think about it, we see that the rain still falls on us (our cabins fall down); the more fortunate have learned to read and write, even if they hardly remember it; we have neither horse, nor beef meat; at best, we possess three *manzanas*¹ in a cooperative.

But all this is not very important for we are agreed that the revolution has given us something better; consciousness. This, we will never sell on any market.

A comrade said to us "there is something which is better than being a Sandinista, that is to be a revolutionary". We begin to understand what he meant.

We have travelled, and travel broadens the mind. We have seen many peasants in Nicaragua and also very much land. Good land for agriculture and for livestock, but the cake is unfairly divided; on the one hand, there is an enormous share for some and on the other, there are the crumbs for the poor.

Some say that there has already been an agrarian reform and that land can no longer be distributed. Others claim even that there have been very many injustices and it is necessary to go backwards; but so long as there remain so many empty bellies and such a big share of the cake for some, the agrarian reform must continue.

There are peasants without land who live close to a big estate; for our part, we would already have occupied it. In time, if this was done, the expert from the Ministry of Agrarian Reform (MIDINRA) would come along with his great speeches: "You should not be extremist, the big landowner has said that he has no more land, wait, I will find you some elsewhere". And the people stay there on the road. Obviously, you will often see the expert coming out of the estate, with his

jeep full of milk and cheese.

It is true that it was necessary to take account of the war and be patient. It was necessary in the first place to put an end to this savage aggression, the sovereignty of Nicaragua was at stake. But now we are going to concentrate our attention on the second priority; the agrarian question.

We are going to give those who have more than 100 *manzanas* of cultivable or cultivated land what they deserve; it is necessary to expropriate it, confiscate the land and give it back to the peasants, to the agricultural workers, to those without land and to the unemployed who are ready to work. And to pay no attention to his livestock or his beautiful speeches.

Big landowners waste money

1. There exist numerous farms, of 4 to 5 thousand *manzanas*, with 300 beasts, and 7 or 8 families which work there for the proprietor or for the state. The proprietor fills his pockets; he sends his money to the United States or wastes it, buying imported products which are no good to him. To increase production, it is necessary to redistribute this property to 500 peasant families.

2. These families will no longer live in a situation of "hidden" unemployment and will no longer sell grain or milk or cheese or meat. The price of alimentary products will fall, which will suit the workers in the towns who, immediately, will modify their demand for wage increases.

3. The peasant needs a Sunday suit, schoolbooks for his kids, nails and tools, zinc to repair his roof, rum or refreshments; he will have his pennies. You will see; the industrial middle class and the traders will be happy; they will do good business with the peasants — for the middle class, good business is the best poli-

1. A *manzana* is an agricultural unit of measure employed in Nicaragua. One *manzana* is equivalent to 0.7 hectare.

tics.

4. The land owner has only to change his trade and become bourgeois, to devote himself to industry or to commerce. The land is for those who work it.

5. The technicians, the functionaries and the secretaries will also come out winners, it will be necessary that they work hard and live as the middle class of the underdeveloped countries must; but they will eat more, and for less cost.

6. The state must change its policy in relation to the peasantry. The loans for sowing and the MIDINRA experts who come to see what we have sown and that there is no disease, are not enough. What are we going to do with our tractors, given the price of fuel and spare parts? The intellectuals and the technicians must rather find us better techniques, midway between the wooden plough and the Belarus 80 tractor; the government could install some schools so that the young peasants can learn a little of accounting and administration.

7. The intelligent and wealthy governments which, some say, exist in Europe, can help us.

8. It is evident that a true agrarian reform is the best way to improve the economy and that the modern bourgeois will obtain thus a good part of the cake; now we are going to deal with the political questions. As long as there are peasants who dream of their little piece of land, what you call social and political stability will not exist in this country.

Land reform brings peace

This way of settling the problems of the countryside, with machetes, and those of the nation, with rifles, is the fruit of the backwardness of these big landowners and of those governments who transform the workers into soldiers. The agricultural worker and the poor peasant will become soldiers if their boss orders them to; but if they possess their ten *manzanas*, there will no longer be wars, for lack of soldiers, and the people will learn to no longer put their lives in danger for nothing. See then how agrarian reform can lead to peace and social stability.

9. You have perhaps noticed that we are a little Sandinista and a little revolutionary. Sometimes, pressed to resolve our problems, we function by ourselves, and before receiving an order from above, we occupy a farm.

As the laws change every day, we no longer ask questions, we steer towards that which is just and we fight. In order for the revolutionary forces to triumph, it is necessary to win the big battle of the countryside.

10. It is obviously not a matter of taking up Kalishnikovs and attacking the big estates. This struggle takes place in the plain and it is an affair of cunning (this is what they call "politics"). What is necessary is; a peasant organization which is

disposed to mobilize itself and to fight; the constitution and a handful of laws; a lawyer who knows his paperwork and does not sell himself for a piece of bread; the radio, and everything that can serve propaganda; and a lot of imagination.

Consciousness is needed; you will see how much the struggle will grow and how much it will reinforce itself. If someone tells you that it is illegal or unjust, it is necessary to tell him that nobody knows how the big landowners have succeeded in dispossessing us of our lands and throwing us on the roadside.

11. If property belongs to the state, don't pay attention to that. Respect only the farms which are conducting advanced research (new seeds, inseminations, and so on). The rest, privatize it. What is necessary is that the workers be conscious and disposed to steer the plough; to milk a cow or sow coffee, it is not necessary to have studied in Michigan. Moreover, who has milked the cows for all these years?

Advance by other roads

It is necessary to say that sometimes we have received orders seeking to stop us from occupying this or that farm. If somebody says to us that it is so that cooperatives can be installed there, we follow the orders; but if it is for the state, we turn a deaf ear and look elsewhere. We have never seen the advantages of that [the nationalized sector]. It is undoubtedly an improvement, but, in the countryside, we want to advance by other roads.

12. The big landowners come to us with their stories. They tell us that we are loafers, that we don't know how to work, that we are backward and that we have no "civilization". But who looks after their lands while they party and run after women?

There was never enough space to build schools or cemeteries on their land, they said; there could be 500 literacy campaigns, that will be no use as long as we don't have enough to eat. From where can we get the money to buy a newspaper or a book? If they wish to modernize this country, and introduce what they call "civilization", they can begin by having their feet on the land.

13. We don't like to mince words; if they [the readers] are intelligent, they will see that we are speaking about the very root of popular power in the countryside. If it is necessary to discuss [in the FSLN] how to hasten the end of the regime currently in government [the UNO] or how to be a party, it is necessary to go to the root of things. Afterwards, according to the task, we will see at what time we work and with what.

First, we must know where we are, what we want and what we can do.

Then, we can speak of strategy and tactics, of forms of organization and of who can help us. But this will be for another time, if we have the chance. ★

"The Front is going through a crisis"

DORA MARIA TELLEZ joined the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in 1974; she led, with Edén Pastora, the commando unit which occupied the national palace, where the Somozaist deputies met, on August 22, 1978, obtaining the liberation of numerous political prisoners, among them Tomas Borge. After having participated in the liberation of the second biggest town in the country, Leon, Dora Maria Tellez was named "commandante guerrillera"; she is a member of the Sandinista assembly and a deputy in parliament. During the Sandinista government, she was minister of health. In an interview in the new Independent Nicaraguan weekly *El Semanario*, from which we reproduce large extracts, Dora Maria Tellez spoke in particular of the coming FSLN congress.

HOW do you analyze the contradiction which persists between those Sandinistas who advocate a substantial modification of the political propositions or tactics of the FSLN and others who criticize this attitude?

All this is natural. The Front is going through a crisis. A party which loses an election and does not enter into crisis is a dead party, it is obvious.

This crisis stems from first the fact of the electoral defeat, and then the exhaustion of the political programme of Sandin-

ism (I am referring to Sandinism since the epoch of Sandino).

This, for example, spoke of agrarian reform; but in Nicaragua there is a historic lag such that it is only 60 years later that we have succeeded in doing it.

Today, we experience a crisis of programme because reality has changed and the country has changed.

The question of knowing what the political programme of the FSLN is is still not resolved.

And you do not overcome it through desires — it is necessary to reconcile what we want with what is possible, the rest is just demagoguery.

To do this, a minimal consensus is needed between all Sandinistas, and today we are faced with a diversity of positions and propositions....

For me, consensus is built starting from an analysis of reality.

It is necessary that the FSLN discuss the road which the Nicaraguan revolution must take, starting from today.

It is necessary to look to the year 2000 and not to return to 1979, 1984 or 1989.

There are different interpretations of national reality amongst FSLN militants. Some think that the current government is a dictatorship which must be overthrown by force; they start from the fact that the people owe us something and that it is necessary that they repay us, and so on.

I am trying to understand current Nicaraguan reality, which is nuanced.

The government of the National Union of the Opposition (UNO) does not seem to be a dictatorship.

Then, I do not consider that the revolutionary process is finished; I conceive it as a staircase, it has continuity, reverses, throwbacks, a process of new accumulation of forces, but this happens in a continuous fashion.

Facing us, we have a government of the bourgeoisie; it makes no attempt to conceal this.

But we must determine where Nicaragua is going; what is possible and desirable to do, and what is to be the role of the FSLN — which moreover must build its identity, learn to be a political opposition, establish a framework of alliances like any organization (it has moreover always done this), obviously, as a function of popular interests.

It is necessary, beyond this, to work in the direction of national stability which depends on social and political stability.

I think that the Front must change, adapt itself and modify some of its ideas.

■ For this re-adaptation, do you think that the current internal democratic mechanisms are sufficient?

No. Democracy does not consist solely in elections, it must stimulate a political debate without phoney procedures, or polarizations, without disqualifying this or that position and with everybody accepting the nature of the Front.

Democracy in the FSLN is closely linked to the relations we have with the people. If, even inside the Front, we are not capable of learning to listen, to conceive that different appreciations exist, while continuously seeking a political consensus, we will never succeed in drawing closer again to the people.

If we are not capable of tolerating a different position, when it comes from a Sandinista militant, how are we going to approach the population which is not Sandinista?

We are not obliged to all have the same opinion on this or that question; that is internal democracy.

It is not an end in itself, nor an enjoyable game, nor in the style of *perestroika*; it is a political necessity that the FSLN rebuilds its links with the population.

If Sandinista militants are capable of learning to listen, to discuss, to persuade, to search for consensus inside the FSLN, they will be capable of doing it as much outside our ranks, with the people.

■ The positions expressed publicly by some leaders of the FSLN seem sometimes to contradict the actions of the organization, for example, in relation to alliances inside Parliament.

There, it seems that there have been numerous convergences between the Sandinista deputies and those linked to Alfredo Cesar¹, whereas the speeches of some FSLN leaders seem to indicate the contrary....

We had approved this strategy in the document of El Crucero²; it is very clearly indicated there that, in this way, the FSLN seeks to neutralize the most reactionary positions.

If the Front developed simply a policy of negotiations, it would be liquidated, for this is only a part of a political project. The schema of alliances is part of this project, of which the essential goal is to win back the lost majority.

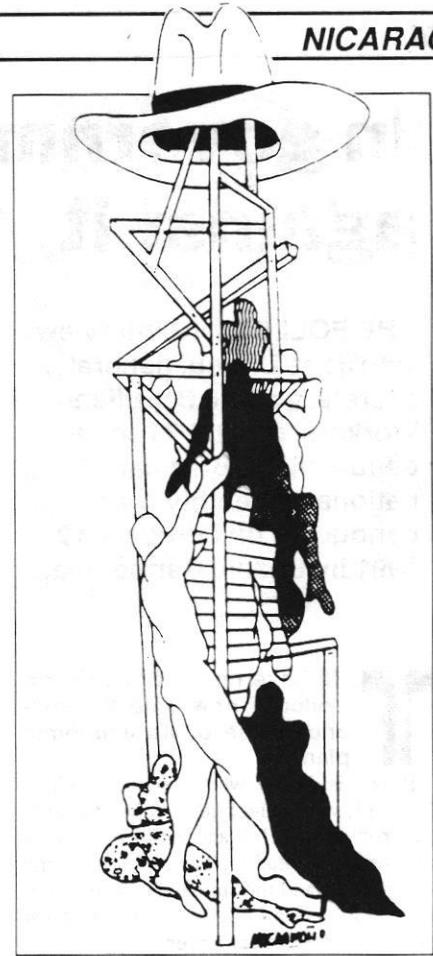
One way of doing this is the policy of alliances, because the country needs peace and economic improvements. Then comes our work, with the peasants, the workers, the producers, the inhabitants of the popular neighbourhoods, women, youth, and so on, so as to win back the social base of Sandinism.

If the Front limits itself to negotiating at the summit, that would be the end of it as a party, in any case in its current form.

If it limited itself to reestablishing its social base, without building alliances with other political forces, which are close to it, and this with very precise goals, it would make another error.

The revolution passes by different roads and necessitates diverse means.

■ In relation to the missiles affair³, two sectors close to Sandinism (the National Workers' Front — the FNT — and the Sandinista Youth) have



come out in favour of the accused EPS (Sandinista People's Army) soldiers.

Have there been debates inside the Front on the decision taken by the EPS to punish these soldiers?

In this affair there are two problems. First, that of the state of law, of legislation and of judicial order. If somebody steals a missile or a packet of cigarettes it is an offence, full stop.

Intentions are another affair, whether good or bad, one cannot introduce them into a trial.

The law does not ask what was the intention of the authors of an offence, it condemns, that is all.

But the evaluation of the acts of the EPS or its head is the affair of the government. It seems to me that the army has an important role to play in national stability and that, from a professional point of view, it adapts itself to the necessities of the country.

But it has obviously had to pay a certain political price because of the reduction of its numbers. ★

1. Alfredo Cesar, who had participated in the Contra leadership, is close to president Violeta Chamorro. He was party to the so-called appeal of "the Los Palmas group". During the renewal of the presidency of the national assembly, the FSLN deputies voted for his candidature, on the grounds of barring the road to "the reactionary extreme right".

2. After the electoral defeat, the FSLN held an assembly of cadres at El Crucero, from which emerged a balance sheet document, which also drew the outlines of work in the current phase.

3. See introduction, p.10, for details of this affair.

In government — and against it

THE FOLLOWING interview with Jose Dirceu, general secretary of the Brazilian Workers' party (PT) and a deputy in the Brazilian national assembly, was conducted on February 12, 1991 by Cecilia Garmendia.

THE government of Fernando Collor is now onto the second phase of its economic plan.

Brazil is in its worst recession since 1981-83, with a decline in Gross Domestic Product of 4.1% and a fall of 12% in industrial production. The main problems — inflation and the state debt — have not been resolved, and there is no short term perspective for development.

The government's main aim is to control inflation — which is running at more than 20% per month — and reduce the public debt. The foreign debt — a problem both serious and insoluble — is on ice. Brazil is no longer paying its creditors, while the funding countries are preoccupied with the Gulf crisis. Since Collor cannot permit the budget deficit to increase, he has launched a new plan — involving a price and wages freeze — with the aim of blocking inflation. Collective agreements were renewed in January 1991, with implications for wages and the workers' economic demands; in July 1991 the issues of participation by workers in the income of enterprises as well as union representation are to be dealt with.

At the same time the government has created an investment fund, which, in order to counter the left, it claims is "progressive" and "democratic". In the speculative field — which is very important in Brazil — private capitalists have been obliged to pay into a fund which to some extent is to finance social services (freeing the state from some

of its obligations), investments and the market.

Collor is trying to make us believe that both big capitalists and small shareholders share the same interests. But most of the big bosses have opposed this project. They have no confidence in the president's economic team, and they do not believe in the price freeze, seeing in these measures state intervention in the financial market.

■ How has the workers' movement reacted to the government's measures?

The union confederations, including the one close to the government, have opposed them. There have been several demonstrations against the recession, unemployment and now against the war, organized by the United Workers Confederation (CUT) and other confederations, including the General Labour Confederation (CGT). Opposition political parties and some sections of Brizola's Brazilian Democratic Party (PMDB), which is fighting for ground with the left, have taken part in these actions in the name of the populist slogan of "development/redistribution of revenues".

Furthermore they are not supporting the government in parliament — with the exception of some social democrats and the Communist Party, who claim to be living in hope.

The right has also criticized the measures. But there has not yet been a massive popular and working class reaction. The population is in general convinced that the recession and unemployment are going to grow, but this is not expressing itself as yet through strong mobilizations

or political opposition. There have been strikes in industrial sectors; on March 15, 1991 (the Collor government's first anniversary), a day of action has been called, with demonstrations and perhaps national strikes.

■ This movement is far from massive.

It should be understood that the government's propaganda about "democratization" of the financial market, against speculation, and the creation of the so-called anti-recession funds, and Collor's stated will to control prices, have had an effect on public opinion.

Collor has already found it necessary to decree a rise in public tariffs (*tarifazo*), independently of the rise in the oil price (which, in any case has not gone above \$21 a barrel) to struggle against the public deficit, instead of carrying through a real tax reform.

The government talks a lot about privatization, economic deregulation and opening the country to the outside world, without there being the real international space for this. Who today is going to buy Brazilian enterprises? Foreign investors are not going to buy if the issue of the foreign debt remains unresolved; national capital is in the grip of recession and high interest rates. Collor's economic policies have thus run their course — despite the audacity and political will shown by the government — but no alternative seems likely to appear before the new elections in 1994.

In the absence of support from the majority in parliament for his proposals, Collor rules by "provisional measures", that is, decrees, which are sometimes unconstitutional. He is becoming used to authoritarianism. He is playing for time, before applying another economic policy.

■ Why has the popular discontent not found its way into mobilizations, even after the electoral breakthrough of the PT?



I think that the PT bears a great responsibility in this. For months we were practically immobilized and were unable to develop significant political campaigns. This is the result of the repeated electoral campaigning over two years — from Lula's defeat in the presidential election in 1989 to the 1990 legislatives. The elections have presented us with new political, organizational and even ideological problems. The PT is also suffering the effects of the present crisis of the socialist project, as well as the experience of its administration of some big cities. These include Sao Paulo, with 12 million inhabitants one of the country's most important industrial and urban centres, and Porto Alegre.

The PT leadership also suffers from organizational weaknesses: our structures are not adapted to our political tasks. Our systems of leadership, debate and political elaboration, and of internal communication are not suitable for this historical period. We need a radical change.

■ How do you deal with the relations between your participation in the town halls, your parliamentary intervention and the trade union and popular struggles?

Until the start of 1991 at least we have not found a way of dealing with this. We experienced a crisis in the roles of our political cadres; civic administration has taken up thousands of militants, hundreds of cadres and dozens of national leaders, who were previously involved in leading peasants, workers, students, women's movements and so on. Many of our cadres are today deputies in the parliament, others are municipal councillors — we have 82 deputies, in 21 provinces, 35 in the National Congress and one senator.

Our work in the institutions — the parliament, municipal administration or the provincial governments — seems fundamental to us. We cannot convince people that the left, the socialists, represent an alternative if they are incapable of putting into practise the political activity that they talk about in the assembly or provincial governments.

In order to resolve its crisis of credibility, the left must not only defend people's living standards, wages and civil and union rights, but must also be capable of governing.

The PT has not been able at one and the same time to set in motion a plan for mobilization against Collor's measures, to put forward an emergency economic pro-

gramme in reply to that of the government, and a set of immediate demands for the wage-earners. And this has created a vacuum which Brizola's PDMB and even Collor himself are occupying.

At its last leadership meeting, the PT drew a balance sheet of all this, and decided on a tour by Lula, the appearance of a newspaper, an emergency plan and set dates for meetings and actions to assist in the emergence of a movement of opposition to the government's projects.

■ Recently, the CUT took part in negotiations with the Collor government. Does it accept the idea of a pact in the framework of the "national consensus" that the president is trying to launch?

There is no pact. The CUT put forward its demands to the government in the form of a radical platform, which denounces Collor's policies. In my opinion, it would be necessary to combine negotiations with social mobilizations. The govern-

Next, neither the union movement nor the popular organizations have a clear conception of the tasks of a democratic and popular government. The unions and the residents' associations do not see our elected representatives as theirs and the latter do not live as if they are the representatives of those sectors; there is thus a problem of liaison and a serious contradiction. Without activity articulated with the social movements, our comrades do not have the strength to make their presence felt in the municipal councils, when we are in the minority, as we are in the twenty odd towns where we are the largest party.

Very often the PT's militants and local leaders (those who are not on the council) do not have a clear understanding of the fact that it is their party that is running the local institutions; they criticize the city authorities without establishing any relation between the social movements and local government. We have also made administrative mistakes: we have inherited many cities which are bankrupt, with

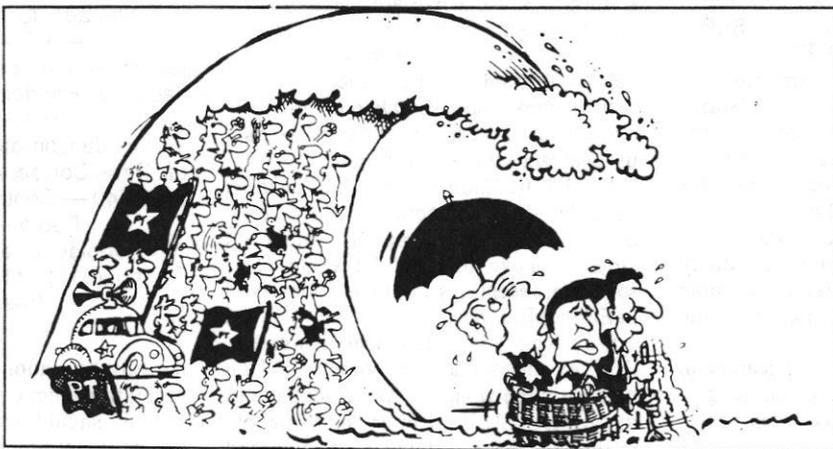
an enormous bureaucratic apparatus of low paid workers, whose wages we have tried to improve. We have had to confront sabotage from the state governments and the existence of huge social demands. Faced with these difficulties people have lost confidence in the PT, which could not solve all these problems overnight.

Our comrades in responsible positions were in their turn annoyed by the PT's attitude which did not

know how to deal with such problems. All this has led to a divide in the PT; on the one side are the elected officials, who feel isolated, on the other the PT which criticizes them.

In my opinion we need an organism which can evaluate and regularly discuss our intervention in the institutions and town halls, which can map out the lines to follow, work out a municipal policy and concrete proposals in the fields of health, transport and so on. We already know something about such problems via the unions and social movements. The Brazilian left began to consider these issues ten or 15 years ago. Our concrete political propositions have nothing in common with reformism. To compete with the bourgeoisie and aspire to rule, it is necessary to give concrete answers to the demands of the youth, workers, shantytown dwellers and so on.

We must have competent governments, which, at one and the same time, respond to the demands of Brazilians and explain the limits to their action, and expose the



President Collor and two of his ministers

ment, for its part, is trying to get a national consensus policy off the ground, relying on the coming into office of the governors elected at the end of 1990.

There are no elections in Brazil this year, and we can devote ourselves to four main tasks: the PT congress — which will discuss the socialism that we want, our reorganization, the current historic period in the world and in this country, and a balance sheet of our municipal administration; the problem of running town halls; the reorganization of the party; and its work in the institutions.

■ And in fact, what would you say about your experience in local government?

Firstly, it must be said that we have suffered due to our lack of experience in practical administration and our limited knowledge of the state apparatus; and we have paid for our weaknesses in this domain. We have made mistakes in our alliances — in Sao Paulo we wanted to govern alone.

reality of the state. We must create spaces for popular participation and create social and political movements.

The PT, as a party, must not be confused with the administration: this is also an error that we have frequently made.

In some places, the local PT leadership took part in meetings of the local council, mixing up party and administration; in other towns, on the other hand, the divide between the PT and the elected officials was total.

One day the PT will govern the big states of Brazil. To get there we have to resolve these present problems. We must govern, while developing the class struggle. This is something that the revolutionary left in Latin America has not understood until now. If it cannot resolve this problem it will lose the ideological battle with the right.

■ **These kinds of problems were also discussed within the Nicaraguan Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN), in drawing up a balance sheet of ten years of the revolution. What was the impact of the FSLN's electoral defeat on the PT?**

We have a fault: we are a party moulded by the politics and culture of Brazil, which has important differences with the rest of Latin America. We are internationalists and have expressed our support for the developments in El Salvador and Nicaragua, Polish Solidarnosc or the Cuban revolution, but all this comes essentially from the left currents that have come together in the PT, and also from the CUT's wide international contacts.

The PT has never taken the Nicaraguan or Cuban revolutions as an example; given the size of Brazil this is, in any case, impossible.

Nonetheless, the election defeat of the FSLN had a big impact. It coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the regimes in Eastern Europe, notably that in East Germany. The capitalist reunification of Germany shook our ranks. It is hard to gauge the effect of all these events on our militants.

To this must be added the internal situation in Brazil, with the opening to the outside world and Collor's privatization plans. The presentation of the market and capitalism as factors of social well-being and liberty have exerted their influence. In our case, Nicaragua is an example in two senses. On the one hand, it proves that revolutionaries can lose elections and leave government, and that, unlike the right, they adhere to democratic principles. But at the same time it was a defeat. The Sandinistas lost. This was mainly due to the blockade, the imperialist war and the international situation; but they also made economic mistakes and faced problems in defining their strategy.

the question of democracy, dealing with direct democracy as with the direction and meaning of electoral processes in the struggle of revolutionaries.

In Latin America, we also have to get to grips with the question of democracy, as a weapon against the policies of imperialism and the right. We must take possession of universal suffrage and demand that the governments are regularly reelected; we must demand freedom of the press and organization and the right to strike; and denounce the fact that the national wealth is in the hands of a privileged caste.

In my opinion, the trend in recent years in Latin America has been rather favourable for us, whether in Colombia or Chile or here in Brazil. The right is obliged to assault political and social rights and democracy to push through its economic plans. It has to create instruments of repression.

We must thus perfect our conception of socialist democracy; it is not enough simply to say that we are partisans of direct democracy. Revolutionaries must not under-estimate universal suffrage, neither elections nor parliament. Every battle to make the assembly more democratic, even in a capitalist country, helps us to advance the social struggle.

The PT tradition is nourished in the struggle for democracy. However, despite our history the majority of Brazilians believe that the PT's idea of socialism resembles what has collapsed in Eastern Europe.

We have to give a practical answer to this, in the social movements, in the unions, in the women's movement and in the town halls. We must show people results and have a democratic ethic and attitude. We must connect our practical activities and ideals. This is the problem for the left throughout Latin America.

We must be able to put forward precise proposals for economic transition towards another form of political and social organization and democratization (means of communication, education, political power and so on). The population must understand that it is not the party which rules, but the society, which must democratize the state and achieve self-organization.

The events in Eastern Europe are not only important for us because of the defeat of Stalinism and the new situation that has been created (even if, in my opinion, this is rather favourable to capitalism at the moment). We must analyze the political actions and social movements that have been able to get rid of these regimes — the importance of the means of communication, culture, the pacifist struggle, the vote and so on. There are very rich lessons here for the struggle in Latin America. Today, people better understand the role of the state and of power.

If the revolutionaries are able to capital-

Release defenders of homeless!

ON DECEMBER 11, 1990, Brazilian police forces violently evicted 300 squatter families from a settlement near Sao Paulo, killing two people and injuring many more. 46 arrests were made and two people — Romildo Rapsoso and Manuel Boni remain in jail, accused of inciting violence. Rapsoso is a member of the Brazilian Workers Party (PT), and both men are local councillors.

According to an account by Valerio Arcary from the leadership of the PT, the men "did not incite violence against the police. They were besides the homeless workers trying to negotiate with the owner's lawyer when the police repression took place."

A campaign for the release of Rapsoso and Boni is underway. *IV* urges its readers to send telegrams calling for their release to:

Ministro da Justicia Jarbas Passarinho, Esplanada dos Ministerios, Brazilia — DF — Brasil;

Governador do Estado de Sao Paulo, Palacio dos Bandeirantes, Sao Paulo — SP — Brasil;

Forum da Comarca de Diadema, DD Juiz Pires Correa, Av. Sete de Setembro, 2740 — Centro Diadema — Sao Paulo — Brasil.

With copies by fax to Valerio Arcary, Fax no: (011) 571-0982 (Sao Paulo, Brasil). ★

ize on the national sentiment, create a social movement, spread the idea that the society should replace the government and work out proposals for a new mode of economic and social organization, they can go forward, supported by an important material force. We must work in this direction, without abandoning agitation, strikes, self-defence, land occupation and so on.

■ **Was the meeting of political parties in Sao Paulo in July 1990 marked by such collective reflection?**

At a time when the propaganda on the superiority of capitalism and the "end of history" was at its height, this meeting showed that there exists in Latin America a political alternative — socialist, anti-bureaucratic and democratic. Without sharing the Soviet model, we explained that capitalism offers no way out — we denounced the debt, poverty and so on. Without pretending to have an answer to everything, we rejected taking up a "centre" position and reaffirmed the existence of the left.

International activities, and internationalist solidarity are more essential than ever — the Gulf War is confirmation of this.

We are going to try to pursue this collective discussion at the next meeting, in Mexico, without excluding anyone. Now we must discuss the Gulf War and the situation in Cuba, Latin American economic integration in the light of the Bush Plan, and different experiences of the left in unions and institutions, as well as the question of constructing parties. Such types of meetings should take place on every continent.

In the PT we are presently discussing the idea of organizing an international conference on Cuba — which depends a lot on the political initiatives of the Cuban party and government. The situation of this country is very difficult, with the blockade and imperialist aggression, but also because of the economic and political situation and Cuba's deepening isolation.

■ **You mentioned coordination of opposition to the Gulf War. What has the PT done on this question?**

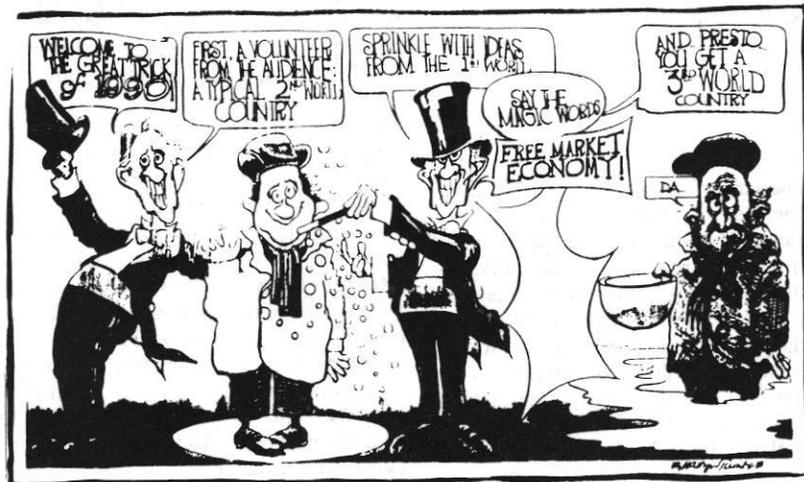
We condemned Saddam Hussein when he invaded Kuwait, but we have always insisted that it is necessary to resolve these problems by diplomatic and political means and not by force. In my opinion, there must be an international conference on the Middle East and the Palestinian problem and an Arab conference on Kuwait. We have denounced the UN resolutions, the US actions in the Middle East, the sending of troops, the economic blockade and then the military aggression. We have organized meetings and demonstrations — even if in Brazil there is not a big public feeling against the war.

The government is not directly taking part in the military operations; it has said that it will only send troops in the framework of a "peace force" after the war. Brazil has many interests in the Arab world — oil, arms, food exports, civil and military construction and so on — and this explains Collor's moderation.

The US have taken advantage of the invasion of Kuwait to carry through an international reorganization of their forces: it even involves counter measures to European unification. The US policy will underline their domination of the Third World as well as their superiority over the European capitalist powers and Japan. American imperialism is also trying to resolve economic problems of its own. But the war is also meant to freeze the period opened by the East European events.

The political and economic costs of the war will of course be transferred to the Third World. US interference in our internal affairs will grow — even if, in the immediate sense, Bush's plans for Latin American integration are on ice, while the debt question has dropped out of the headlines. In any case, if the dominant capitalist countries feel able to burn up hundreds of millions of dollars in a war, then they can also lift the debt burden! ★

A country up for sale



THE Hungarian example illustrates the need to take into account national specificities when analyzing current developments in Central and Eastern European countries. Here, the economic reform process started earlier than in the other countries in the region. At first the reform was undertaken by the Hungarian bureaucracy, but in 1988, even before the coming to power of a conservative majority in the April 1990 elections, the reforms were growing into a movement for the restoration of capitalism.

HENRI WILNO

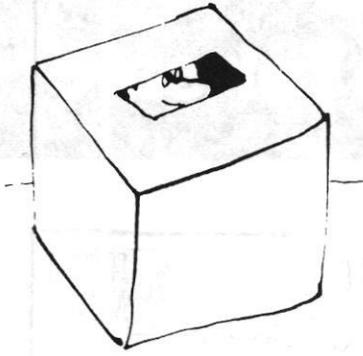
AFTER the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 and the subsequent repression, the Hungarian leadership felt compelled to seek to strike a compromise with the population. A limited political relaxation was undertaken, expressed in the famous formula of Party general secretary Janos Kadar: "whoever is not against us, is with us."

Nonetheless the single party retained its monopoly. The terms of the compromise were the maintenance of the political system on the one side and better living conditions than in the rest of the Soviet bloc on the other — "goulash communism."

Against a background of profound popular demoralization, after 1968 measures were taken to extend the role of the market: the so-called "New Economic Mechanism" (NEM) replaced administration of the economy by the autonomous decisions of the enterprises concerning matters of production. In the framework of overall planned long-term objectives and government policy, the enterprises took production decisions according to "regulators", that is to say norms concerning financial matters, prices, wages and foreign trade. Investment remained under the control of the centre. Furthermore the NEM did not affect state property. There was no talk of privatization, even if private activities were to be progressively permitted, and the country's membership of Comecon was not questioned, despite an effort to insert Hungary more into the world capitalist market.

Steps back from these pro-market policies took place between 1972 and 1978, but after this period market mechanisms gained a greater and greater place in the economy. Pricing policy was modified and liberalized, increased wage differentiation was brought in, and the proportion of investments determined by the centre decreased. The branch ministries responsible for controlling enterprises producing the same types of products in Soviet-style planned economies were effectively abolished, while the big state enterprises were split up into much smaller units.

The private sector was authorized and



even encouraged in commerce and crafts. Nonetheless in practice the central bureaucracy continued to exercise some elements of control over the economy; in 1985 the election of enterprise managers by the employees was introduced, more with the aim of reinforcing the autonomy of these managers than from an interest in self-management. In reality, the enterprise councils have practically no autonomy in relation to the leaders.

During this period, the main reference for Hungarian economists was a theoretical schema according to which any rational economic policy had to be based on the model of general equilibrium, according to which prices and quantities of goods adjust harmoniously and freely on the market, while the property relations upstream and the division of the revenues downstream are social and political questions that each state decides according to its own nature.

In Kadar's Hungary this schema posed the question of the continuing, if lessened, power of the single party in political life and overall economic decisions. Any serious balance-sheet of the "New Economic Mechanism" has to take into account the articulation of all its dimensions: the market, the role of the central bureaucracy in the economy and the maintenance of the monopoly of the single party.

The results of this policy on the economic level were not spectacular and on the social level they were extremely negative. Industrial investment declined in the state sector, and there were also cases — in the extractive and energy sectors — of waste and misdirected investment. The guaranteed markets in the USSR permitted some enterprises to continue to produce below standard goods, but in some sectors Hungarian industry was by no means without successes. There was a more or less satisfactory situation in agriculture, and Hungary escaped the serious food supply problems of other countries in the bloc.

The wastefulness of decentralized bureaucratic management and the political concern to maintain higher living standards than in other bloc countries led to a sharp increase in the country's indebtedness; it now stands at around \$20bn, and is the highest of all the Eastern European

countries by head of population.

Inflation set in as a result of the reduction in subsidies and freeing of prices. The consequence was a sharp reduction in workers' purchasing power; in many households only private activities and often a second job allowed consumption to go on increasing. The rise in the average standard of living was accompanied by a deterioration in living conditions — self-exploitation by doing two jobs, a housing crisis, a rise in the suicide rate and poor health. Leaving aside averages, there was a sharp rise in poverty: in 1989 a million people, that is 10% of the population, lived below the poverty line, and 1.5 million others hovered around it.

Among the poor are the unemployed (unemployment appeared with the reforms, but only to a limited extent, since the 1986 bankruptcy law was used cautiously) and pensioners. Between 1980 and 1987 the average purchasing power of pensions has fallen by more than 25% and many pensioners are compelled to take on underpaid jobs, resort to emergency social assistance (a quarter of them in 1988), or even steal (in 1987 a half of robberies committed by elderly people were of primary necessities). During this time, the privileged of the regime and the new rich of the private sector were building sumptuous mansions in the residential quarters of Budapest.

Popular discontent

Starting in 1987/1988, the dominant circles of the bureaucratic regime made a series of choices which would lead the country towards the restoration of capitalism. This development was determined by a combination of popular discontent and growing economic difficulties. Movements were already beginning to develop on ecology and poverty. With the Soviet *glasnost* in the background, the desire for an end to the party apparatus' monopoly control of the main levers of power came together with the reaffirmation of national identity. Important mass demonstrations took place in March and June 1988 (commemorating, respectively, the national holiday and the 30th anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy, the head of government during the 1956 insurrection). Opposition political groups began to form. The post-1956 compromise began to come apart.

At the same time, the economic situation began to deteriorate after 1985. The only subsequent year of positive growth has been 1987. Otherwise growth has been zero or negative. The weight of the debt has become ever heavier and now eats up more than half of export income. Government policy more and more takes its cue from the recommendations of the International Monetary Fund: the 1987 austerity plan led to a new deterioration in the living conditions of the population.

Divisions in the leadership widened. In

April 1988, Janos Kadar went on the offensive against the reformers, but the May 1988 party conference replaced him with the prime minister, Karoly Grosz. From September onwards, open struggle recommenced, with Imre Pozsgay and Rezső Nyers at the head of the reformers.

Under their pressure, and with popular discontent seething in the background, the Communist Party decided to recognize that the 1956 insurrection was indeed a popular uprising, accept political pluralism and take part from June to September 1989 in negotiations with the opposition with the aim of setting up a parliamentary regime. A new constitution was proclaimed in October 1989.

Communist Party disintegrates

All these measures could not however save the former CP from disintegration. At the October 1989 congress the reformist majority founded the Hungarian Socialist Party (HSP) while a minority headed by Karoly Grosz retained the old name of Hungarian Socialist Workers Party (HSWP). In the March and April 1990 elections, the HSP came in well behind the two winning parties, with 8.5%, while the Democratic Forum got 42.3% and the Alliance of Free Democrats got 23.8%. These two latter organizations are openly in favour of capitalist restoration. The Democratic Forum however envisages the change taking place more slowly and its propaganda has populist and nationalist overtones.

The political events had their economic concomitants, and the "Communist" leaders still in power also veered in a restorationist direction. The banking system was reformed to bring in competition and some elements of a financial market were established. Freeing of prices and of foreign trade continued.

The law on firms of January 1989 removed the obstacles to the creation of private enterprises (with less than 500 workers), and established the possibility of setting up mixed ventures with foreign capital, which opened the way for "spontaneous privatizations" of national enterprises under the direction and to the profit of their existing management. In January 1989, meanwhile, the government announced its intention to privatize 51 state firms, representing around a quarter of industrial production.

Thus, the conservative coalition which came to power in the elections inherited a Hungary already equipped with the main elements of a legal framework for capitalist restoration. The main problems of economic policy henceforth reside in the privatization of the state sector and the day to day management of the transition. The oscillations of government policy bear witness however that this is no easy task.

From the beginning, in fact, differences

emerged inside the government on the rhythms and methods for the liberalization of the economy. By the end of 1990 these divisions had led to the resignation of the Minister of Finance, Ferenc Rabar, a supporter of speeding up of the changes and a drastic reduction in subsidies, policies which the rest of the government was not prepared to follow in drawing up the budget for 1991. In the background of this debate are fears about the sentiments of the population.

Bus and taxi strike

The strike by taxi and bus drivers which paralyzed Budapest last November, and which forced the government to make a partial retreat on the rise in fuel prices, was a warning. The regime continues to be cautious when it comes to declaring loss-making enterprises bankrupt if it would mean massive job losses. However seven over-indebted steel firms are being shut down and sackings are taking place.

But there are not only risks of popular reaction. There are also real doubts on what is the best way to go to get back to capitalism. The issue of privatizations is one example of a basic problem — how to go back to capitalism when there is almost no bourgeoisie?

In September 1990 a law on the privatization of the retail trade was passed, affecting some 10,000 enterprises. Private business has, furthermore, been authorized in Hungary for several years: in 1988 almost 30% of shops were private. The privatization of agricultural land will be harder, given that one of the parties in the ruling coalition is insisting on the restitution of land to its pre-Communist owners.

But the most complex question is obviously that of the 2,000 big enterprises; around three quarters of them are managed by enterprise councils, while the others are attached to ministries. There are two connected matters of controversy here: the opening up to foreign capital, when Hungarian savings can only cover some 10% of these privatizations (and the addition of the resources of the parallel private sector would still leave a huge shortfall); on the other hand, there is the issue of the role of the existing managers in this process.

This question brings us back to a politi-

cal and theoretical debate that divides Hungarian economists and politicians: should the existing managers be left to turn into capitalist managers? That is to say, should they be given the room to manage the enterprises along with Hungarian or foreign partners and even change their enterprise's statute? According to its supporters, this would allow the rapid adoption of classic capitalist patterns by Hungarian enterprises. This position is opposed from various angles. Some denounce its immorality — the privileged of the old regime are to be allowed to turn the new situation to their advantage — while others, such as the economist Janos Kornai, point out that a capitalist economy presupposes the existence of a real bourgeoisie, and that this will not be created by the touch of a magic wand.

It is thus not a good idea to make a present of the public sector to the existing managers, but to encourage, with the aid of credit, the development of a real private sector capable of buying the state enterprises.

Spontaneous privatizations

At first the enterprise managers played an essential role. The 1989 law on companies gives the enterprise councils, controlled by the leading cadres, the power to turn their enterprises into commercial companies, and sets out the conditions for allowing foreign investment. It thus opened the way for "spontaneous privatizations." The first operations took place in a very underhand way, often involving the undervaluing of the enterprises concerned, and the efforts of the managers to exploit the situation to their own best advantage.

Protests led to the creation in March 1990 of a State Property Agency intended to oversee privatizations. The income from privatization was to be shared: 20% stays in the enterprise's budget and 80% goes to the state. There are three possible ways to undertake a privatization: the initiative can come from the State Property Agency itself ("active privatization"), the enterprise itself ("spontaneous privatization") and from the potential buyer. In all these cases the decision is referred to the Agency. The latter publishes lists of enterprises that it is proposing for privatization. On the whole the listed enterprises are in a favourable situation. Afterwards will come the turn of the more vulnerable firms.

It seems that we are seeing a new swing of the pendulum. The new finance minister, Mihaly Kupa recently demanded an acceleration of privatization and criticized the Agency's attitude — accusing it of being more preoccupied with safeguarding state interests than getting on with the selling. This seems to suggest that the existing managers are going to be given increased scope. ★

The case of Videoton

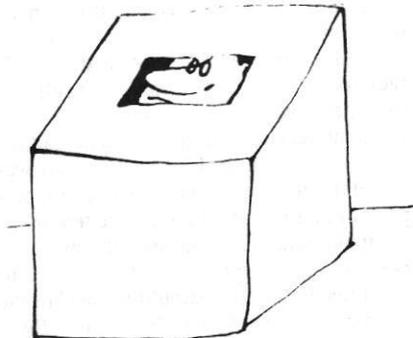
THE VIDEOTON enterprise is one of the flagships of Hungarian industry. As such it has been targeted for restructuring and for developing an export drive. This firm is involved in three main areas: domestic electrical goods, information technology and military radio technology. Since 1968 it has produced colour televisions, and since 1970 word processors under licence from the French Bull company. Of all the Soviet bloc countries, Hungary has been the most adept at "pirating" information technology, and Videoton has considerable experience in this field. Some 80% of its production is exported, and, until last year 80% of these exports were to other Comecon countries.

MAXINE DURAND

HOWEVER in the mid-1980s the firm's technological lag began to become apparent. There were problems with productivity, notably owing to a level of training that was not improving fast enough. Confronted with these difficulties, the firm was gradually transformed into a holding company with 22 components, while the share of foreign capital increased from 25 to 49%. Agreements were reached with groups such as Thomson, Alcatel, Bull, Akai or Phillips. More recently the reduction of exports to the Soviet Union, which is a political priority for the government, has increased Videoton's problems, which have been further aggravated by the reduction in credit and the rise in interest rates.

For the last two or three years, therefore, Videoton has been living with the

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prospect of being restructured. In 1990 alone, the workforce was cut from 17,000 to 15,000. The only real opposition has come from a small, recently formed trade union, tied to the Democratic League of Independent Unions. The official union, which organizes the majority, steered clear of the strike that broke out on September 21, 1990. After the movement ended, the government forced most of the management to resign and installed a government Commissar. Nonetheless, it was the plan of the former management that was finally put into effect in November 1990: 170 people are to take early retirement and 900 are to be fired in exchange for a payment of 120,000 forints (less than \$1,000, but 15 months average wages).

A debate that we attended between the director of personnel, a survivor of the old leadership, and the local union leader, throws light on the paradoxes of the situation. The unionist was proud of his responsible behaviour in not going on strike, being influenced by a union tied to the right-wing opposition favourable to swift privatization. This pirouette was answered by that of the director of personnel who accused the trade unionist of failing to assist the management by picking out the workers who ought to be got rid of and favouring a more arbitrary system. In the end some 1,700 workers got their redundancy money, but not, protested the personnel director, those who really deserved it.

Reinventing unemployment

The big innovation is thus unemployment. In the Székesfehérvár district, where the main Videoton factory is located, the number of unemployed has risen from 172 at the start of the 1990 to 1,860 at the beginning of this year — a local unemployment rate of 2.6%. The number of those receiving unemployment benefit has risen from 47 to 719. The district has, furthermore, been designated a "critical zone" and thus entitled to government aid.

The enterprise is in the hands of the experts, and the accounts are being done by the British firm James Capel, who are due to produce a restructuring plan. Probably the plan will only see room for 5 to 6,000 employees — from 15,000 today — and will envisage the creation of a sales company and several small enterprises, which should make it possible to attract foreign capital into the hard core of the enterprise. This is a typical example in Hungary today. The aim is to separate out the wheat from the chaff in the most efficient enterprises, and thus form a competitive entity that can attract foreign capital.

In the case of Videoton for example, the French Bull group is showing an interest in the information technology branch, not in itself, but because Videoton has a sales network in the Soviet Union employing 450 people. Videoton would thus be used as a transmission belt; the development of

a specific product would not be the main aim of this partnership. Thus the group could well end up reduced to manufacturing printers and terminals for American and perhaps Japanese firms on a subcontracting basis.

It may be necessary to wait some time to see any positive economic benefits. On the contrary, in the short term there will be a rise in unemployment and a growing disorganization of the Hungarian productive apparatus. And this will be true even despite the relative competitiveness of such Hungarian firms as Videoton, Ikar-

us and Tungram compared to the rest of the former Soviet bloc.

The population is thus gripped by anxiety about the future. Some 60% of Videoton's workers are women. 35% are unskilled workers, 30% skilled, 10% with college qualifications, 18% are employees with secondary education, while the rest are involved in the administration. There are going to be substantial layoffs in Videoton. Many of those who do not lose their jobs are to be "reconverted". But, as another unionist remarked: "reconversion into what?" ★

Privatization and workers councils

Interview with Tamas Krausz

TAMAS KRAUSZ, a historian and leader of the Hungarian Left Alternative, talked to IV about the privatization process. The interview was conducted in Budapest on January 20, 1991 by Maxine Durand.

HOW would you sum up the post-Communist government's activities?

From many points of view one could talk about a restoration. We have a new state/party, a parliament which doesn't function, since there is a Central Committee that stands above it, and below a civil society that lacks means of expression. Thus there is a type of parliamentary dictatorship, which is not a parliamentary system on Western lines.

The new elite is divided into a Christian conservative tendency and a liberal, American-style, tendency. At the moment these two currents are aiming at a compromise behind the backs of the public, because they have realized that the people do not support the new system and are either indifferent or suspicious. The compromise flows from the elite's fear that its power could be threatened insofar as the IMF's measures do not succeed, and as unemployment, inflation and poverty spread.

At the same time the left is fragmented, and I am not speaking here only of the old conservative left. Furthermore Hungarian workers, lacking any real tradition

of international solidarity do not understand what is happening either in Hungary or the surrounding countries.

Why has the Hungarian government not resorted to "shock therapy" on Polish lines?

Hungarians have been able to see that the Polish solution gets you nowhere. All they have to do is watch the television. The Free Democrats wanted to send Hungary down the Polish road, but the nationalist current promised not to. Nonetheless, in practice, they too have adopted this policy since December 1990, and in my opinion a Polish situation or something like it is fast approaching. The populist-nationalist movement is certainly stronger in that country than here. But the basic reason for the caution of our government is that they have at least understood that you cannot privatize without capital.

Is there not a contradiction between the nationalism of the Democratic Forum and their intention to sell the most efficient enterprises to foreign capital?

Fundamentally, the two parties say and do the same thing. If there are differences, these are to do with speed, not with the basic direction of policy. And there is in fact no contradiction as far as the sell-offs of enterprises are concerned; these are political decision, as they were in Kádár's time. For example, László Pál, who was secretary of state for industry in 1988, proposed in a report that the public telephone company should be put into the hands of Hungarian enterprises. But the government decided that it should be sold to the German Siemens firm or Ericsson of Sweden, because both of these support the rul-

ing party, the Democratic Forum.

■ To what extent does Hungary's destiny continue to depend on what happens in the Soviet Union?

Hungary depends on Soviet oil and steel and other exports, and thus what happens there is of vital importance. Everybody can see now that Hungary has been destabilized: the shop-windows may be full, but two or three million people have become poorer and the new tax system may lead to a further regression. The old conservative left could perhaps profit from this situation, envisaging a restoration with the support of some Soviet military groups. This is a fantasy, but the Hungarian regime does not rule out such a possibility; Hungarian television has been trying to establish a parallel with the Lithuanian events.

■ Hungary considerably reduced its exports to the USSR, so the dependence is surely less.

That is true, but the immediate consequence has been a fall in industrial and agricultural production of around 10%, leading to the closure of enterprises. Western capital, meanwhile, shows an interest only in a limited number of sectors — such as Tungstam or a part of Ikarus. The West wants a banana republic in Hungary, not a competitor. The structure of the economy is going to be disrupted, and I am convinced that the new Hungarian government will then be obliged to turn back to the Soviet market, because that is where everybody, from Germany onwards, wants to go. For the moment everybody is waiting because the Soviet Union has broken down. But within two or three years the Soviet situation will no doubt have settled down.

■ How can the workers respond? Can we expect the emergence of a new left?

We are fighting to establish a new left, but in the near future the kind of movements we will see will be like the taxi drivers' strike. People are spontaneously seeking new forms of resistance, but they have no confidence in parties or ideologies. This is why it is premature to want to organize a new left wing party. I have met workers who have said to me: "Splendid, you have spoken well, but why should I believe you?" And this is the central question.

■ What about the unions? What is the significance of the changes in the leadership of the Workers' Councils?

You must understand that the political parties are of very recent origin here. Unlike the trade unions they do not have real social roots. This is why people have much more confidence in the former than in the parties. The workers' council movement was a form of resistance against privatization and unemployment, but the government also understood that that they also expressed opposition to the Communist organizations and the ex-Communist managers. Many of these latter have gone over from the Communist structures to the new bourgeois national-ist regime.

However, one of the reasons why the majority of the workers' councils supports the new regime is that it has promised to change all the old bureaucratic leaders. Of course, some workers' council members understood that the real problem is the system, not the personnel. Nonetheless they have placed their confidence in the new regime, and the latter has thus been able to get control of the workers' councils. This happened last week in a wholly authoritarian fashion. A part of the left wing has withdrawn from the councils.

In my view the left will maintain its positions in a number of the councils and build a new national coordination. But we must avoid all sectarianism and be present in all the unions. In the longer term I see the unions regrouping around three poles: the left wing unions, the unions tied to the Forum and the nationalist parties and finally those of the Democratic League, tied to the Free Democrats (liberals).

■ There is something surrealist about this country. The remains of the old system are combining with a new system which is only just developing. Is Hungary now a capitalist country?

The left wing organizations in the West that we have been able to meet thought that, after the fall of Stalinism, there would be a revolutionary solution. This was a very big mistake that has disorient-

ed the left both in the West and in Hungary. The majority of these groups believe that Eastern Europe has seen a political revolution. I, for my part, have written an article talking of a "conservative revolution." Certainly, the political system has changed, the Stalinist bureaucracy and the State/Party have been destroyed; but the workers have less power than before. One could say that we have gone neither forward nor back but sideways.

Marx and Lenin put forward the idea that several modes of production can coexist inside a particular society, and this applies to Hungary today. The system combines remnants of Stalinism, some socialist features, and the influence of the international capitalist centres, the latter being the dominant tendency at the moment.

■ What is the attitude of the workers to the changes?

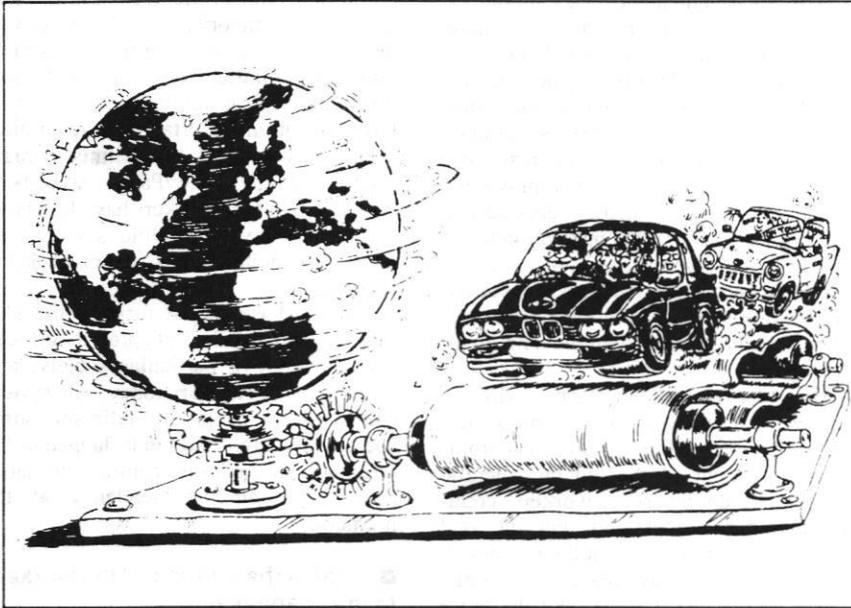
For many of them things have got worse since Kádár's time. You cannot explain to them that it is better now because there is multipartyism and free speech. They know that they have no access to the press. And even if you can say what you want, it changes nothing. The destruction of the old structures has led to some very interesting psychological shifts. People feel freer, but on the other hand, it is hard to find work; in such a situation people very quickly lose their enthusiasm for capitalism, faster than the regime imagines. That may open up possibilities for us. One can envisage a right wing nationalist mass movement on the one hand but perhaps also an important potential for protest may arise, on which the left can build.

■ Is a new ruling layer emerging or is it just the old bureaucrats recycling themselves?

You cannot talk of a new bourgeoisie. The people who might belong in this category are often completely uneducated, hardly able to read or write. They have no solid social position, they only know how



'All of you at the same time?'



to count up their money and sell their goods. They know nothing of Western business practices. This is a truly primitive accumulation of capital! I don't know how to define the current state of affairs; what is clear is the old state socialism has ceased to function.

In Hungary there is a new liberal and nationalist political elite, but both these factions are dependent on the international bourgeoisie. To put it simply, the elite of Kádár's time existed only thanks to the Soviet Union and the Soviet bloc. Today this Kádárist layer has been destroyed. The new ruling layer is divided into two. An elite that was subjectively Communist now finds itself in a semi-opposition. The other part is dispersed among all the political parties. In a way, all the parties stem from the old HSWP (Hungarian Socialist Workers Party — the former ruling Communist Party).

■ What did you mean when you talked of elements of real socialism in Hungary?

A lot of people in the West do not understand the importance of the right to work. Some have called the system under Kádár state capitalism, and believe that we have the same system now. Perhaps in some ways this is true but it is not very useful. It is too abstract. The workers have social rights to lose, for example that of defending themselves through organizing unions, without which no socialist movement can exist.

This socialist tradition remains and the workers aspire to control the factories. In fact, in many cases, privatization cannot be carried out without the workers councils and unions. The workers and technicians are beginning to understand that if they do not succeed in controlling the privatization process, if they do not intervene, they will be out of work.

I am a university teacher and I grew up

with "state capitalism" or "state socialism" with free education — a socialist gain. To produce a new bourgeois class the regime will have to attack such gains. State expenditure will be reduced, including on the health service. This was of course in no way a perfect system, but things can always get worse. We oppose any sort of restoration of the old "socialism" but we are equally against an uncontrolled capitalism. Who knows if Americanization will not turn out to be worse than Sovietization? In Romania nobody wants to see another Ceausescu, but in Hungary there are workers who wouldn't mind having Kádár back. You can hear people saying this everywhere — a lot of people have already lost a lot. And the left is not able to make its voice heard.

The television and radio have been shared out between the nationalists and the liberals. A year ago I was several times invited onto the television. Today, I am no longer invited — a sign of the change in political orientation.

■ A lot of people both in the West and the USSR have been saying that a market economy cannot be re-established in the East without open dictatorship.

I think that a market economy cannot be established, above all in the USSR, for a number of reasons. First of all, on the psychological level, people simply do not know how to behave in a "capitalist" fashion. There is no business tradition. There is no capital to found enterprises. There is not enough foreign capital: the so-called Western aid is mainly designed to destroy the old order, not to put in place a new capitalist system. That system exists here in a primitive and underdeveloped form, and there are going to be great disappointments, perhaps this year.

In the Soviet Union, Shatalin proposed

a 500-day plan for building capitalism; but 500 days is not long enough. So; the market, the highest stage of Stalinism? In reality there will be dictatorship, without the market and without democracy. The evolution in Hungary depends from many points of view on the international environment. Perhaps the Germans and Americans are ready to pay for the new capitalist class in Hungary. But that will cost a lot, above all with the Gulf War, which may change the whole line of thinking of the decision-makers of international capitalism.

■ Does the Hungarian left see itself as neo-Kádárist?

There is such a tendency in the new HSWP, where there are two currents, one Stalinist conservative, the other new left, plus a small liberal group. There are also two groupings inside the HSP, the social liberals and left wing socialists. The latter can be again sub-divided.

One current is sentimentally very socialist; it wants to develop a socialist resistance in Hungary, and build socialism, but, having no coherent economic policy, they cannot in the end avoid the IMF's conclusions. The second sub-group is the Left Alternative, to which I belong.

The social-liberal tendency, associated with Gyula Horn or Rezső Nyers, (who is something of a social democrat, who wants to defend social welfare) is very influential. Horn and the others are ambitious careerists — Stalinists who have turned into liberals. And there is nothing surprising here, one dogma has turned into another.

■ Is there a danger of a new nationalism?

The old crown from Hapsburg times has reappeared on the national flag. This re-establishes continuity with obscurantist traditions, but the parliament, including some HSP members, voted for it. To understand this we have to understand the political culture in this part of the world, and in particular the importance of the desire for revenge.

It seems likely that social conflicts will be channelled into national conflicts, with a long tradition to fall back on. Nationalism will probably take the form a new populism taking up a certain number of social demands. This will be very dangerous for the left, since it will occupy some of the left's traditional ground. There is a populist tradition in Hungary.

If the right wing opposition to the government becomes too strong here, the latter will try to limit, control, absorb. Things are already speeding up: a year ago, there were still people in the Democratic Forum and the Free Democrats who considered themselves left wing. Now the Forum is more and more seen as a party that wants to cling onto power. Thus the new populism will emanate from the government. ★

A leap in the dark for the PCI

THERE were no surprises in the Congress proceedings. The leading group around Achille Occhetto, which won a comfortable majority in the provincial congresses¹, carried through their plan, essentially continuing along the line advanced since November 1989².

The moderate wing of the opposition also stuck to its positions, in particular in the counter-report made by Aldo Tortorella: it adheres to the traditional gradualist reformism of the party, and retains an essentially positive appreciation of Gorbachevism.

A small minority around Antonio Bassolino, although accepting the transformation of the party and its name, had some reservations.

Bassolino, for example, explained that the new party should reaffirm the motor role of the working class, underlined the very deep crisis of the European left and denounced the limits and mistakes of Gorbachev.

The birth of the PDS took place in conditions identical to those that characterized the last days of the PCI, with very deep internal divisions, whose dynamic is very difficult to discern, but which, in any case, represent a serious obstacle to Occhetto's project.

On the one hand there is a left wing, represented by Bassolino, the Ingrao-Tortorella current and the ex-leaders of the Manifesto current (Magri, Castellina and so on).

Together, despite the objective difficulties, they could hope to counter-balance the majority, as indeed happened in August 1990 at the start of the Gulf crisis.³

Ultra-reformists in strong position

On the other side is the ultra-reformist tendency around Giorgio Napolitano. Although they were not able to impose their line of total support to Andreotti's foreign policy, they nonetheless came out of the congress in a strong position.

They are demanding the adherence of the PDS to what remains the majority current of the workers movement in capitalist Europe and can thus appear as having a coherent project, implying also convergence and then unification with the Italian Socialist Party (PSI).

The end of the congress and the first weeks of the new party's existence have clarified even further the difficulties of the PDS project.

First of all, the congress was in no way the "founding congress" envisaged by Occhetto and his supporters. Only a very small number of adherents to the PDS did not belong to the PCI.

One of the newcomers, the economist Michele Salvati, spoke of their "small detachment", adding that the "subterranean left" which had been so much talked

THE congress of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) which took place in Rimini on February 3, 1991, was a major event in the history of the Italian workers' movement. Founded in January 1921 with adherence to the Communist International, the PCI has been the leading political party of the Italian working class for decades, through some very tough social conflicts and in a context of mass politicization. At the end of the congress, the PCI formally disappeared; in its place is a formation with a more or less liberal-socialist orientation, which believes that the basic opposition between social classes and their political parties is obsolete. The change is expressed in the adoption of an anodyne new name: the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS).

LIVIO MAITAN

about had failed to "emerge". In fact only people who were already in the PDS' orbit — some of them having been elected to Parliament or city councils thanks to its support — got their PDS card.

Furthermore, at the first meeting of the National Council, which was to elect the general secretary, Occhetto failed to get the necessary quorum; apart from the technical problems this poses, it shows that he is challenged even inside the majority coalition.⁴

Finally, on the day after the congress, the results of the elections to the new national leading organs, and the manoeuvres around the appointment of local leaderships, sparked off poorly concealed conflicts.

This was the case for example, in Turin and Milan, while in Genoa, according to the Party's own daily: "the enthusiasm of a year ago has turned rather cold." Some made no attempt to hide their disillusionment.

The PDS is also in danger of being afflicted with big regional unevenness: according to the *Rinascita* review⁵, nearly half of the members are concentrated in two regions, Emilia and Tuscany.

Hopes of rapid change abandoned

Awareness of all these difficulties has led members and even some leaders to set their project of "the alternative" in the longer term, leaving behind the hopes for rapid change of a year ago.

So far, Occhetto's operation has had a result diametrically opposed to that intended: the new party's contours are no clearer than those of the PCI, its sphere of

influence remains limited and it is torn by deep and unhealing conflicts.

The main contradiction that threatens it comes from, on the one hand, its capacity to swiftly profit from the advantages of having a new skin, and on the other the need to maintain contact with the aspirations of its base and traditional electorate.

This contradiction was shown up by the Gulf war. One day the PDS voted in the parliamentary debate in favour of the conclusions of Prime Minister Andreotti in defence of intervention (if with some reservations), then the next day the party criticized Bush's decision to launch the ground war.

These oscillations have been less visible in the party's daily *l'Unità*. Supporters of the war have been able to put their views in its columns more often and with more room than the "pacifists" or even supporters of the party line.

In a little more than a year, the PDS will

1. The text presented by Occhetto got 67% of the vote, that of Ingrao-Tortorella 26.6% and Bassolino's 5.7%. Only 29.9% of party members voted. The official figure for the party's membership before the congress was 1,280,000.

2. See *International Viewpoint*, no. 183, April 23, 1990, and no. 194, November 12, 1990.

3. In August 1990, when the PCI abstained on the government's decision to send ships to the Gulf, Ingrao distanced himself from this attitude by a parliamentary declaration and did not take part in the vote. Some 20 of the party's deputies supported his position.

4. The PDS Congress elected a National Council, a sort of parliament with 547 members. The Council in its turn elected a leadership of 118 members, which elected a "Political Coordination" of 24 members.

5. In the 1970s *Rinascita*, the party's review since the end of the war, had a very big circulation (around 100,000). But it has recently stopped publication owing to a dramatic fall in sales.

6. Normally the legislative elections should take place in 1992. By-elections and the regional elections in Sicily take place in May 1991.

face a stiff electoral test.⁶ If it fails, its whole perspective will be to a considerable extent compromised.

Rather than aspiring to the heights of the most important European social democratic parties, it will be haunted by the prospect of sharing the fate of the Spanish Communist Party, with all its past splits and its present impasse.

This danger is all the greater in that the split which took place at the end of the congress was much more significant than expected.

This split had been months in the making, even if those involved had maintained a certain vagueness about their plans for tactical reasons.

However, at the congress itself, apart from certain purely formal reservations, all was made clear, above all in the interventions by Armando Cossutta and Sergio Garavini.

Cossutta concentrated his attack on international politics, presenting a very different picture from that in Ochetto's report, from which all mention of imperialism was absent.

For Cossutta, the PDS' basic ambiguity resided in the fact that: "the PDS has severed its moorings with the Communist framework, thus losing its oppositional identity and its character as a force for change and human liberation and is now uncertain of its bearings: it is neither a government party nor an opposition party."

Basic weakness of Ochetto project

Garavini also pointed to the basic weaknesses in Ochetto's project: "It has been explained to us that the end of the Cold War and traditional anti-Communism would open the way to an opening-up of the political system, the coming of a wholly leftist government, through the alternation of different majorities. It is obvious however that there is not the slightest sign of such an outcome."

His conclusion was fairly vague: "we need a project of democratic reform and renewal that is based on the Communist culture; but this project does not correspond to the reasons for the PDS' existence."

Nonetheless the meaning of this is clearly that the most radical wing of the opposition to Ochetto was not going to join the new party.

A month after Rimini, those who left seem to have the wind in their sails — their successes have exceeded all their hopes. The national and local assemblies they have organized have brought together thousands of people in an enthusiastic atmosphere.

What they call the "Movement for A Communist Refoundation" has already some tens of thousands of supporters.⁷

The break has also had a significant impact at the institutional level. Eleven

senators and three deputies, along with many municipal, provincial and regional councillors have joined the new movement.

It is harder to see what is happening in the unions. No member of the present national leadership of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL) has joined, but it is different at the local level. Here cadres and leaders have already signed up and are preparing for the next CGIL congress that is to take place in July 1991.

The debate on the nature of the new organization, to be decided at a national meeting scheduled for the end of April, is already underway.

In broad terms, there are two main schools of thought: the first wants a movement, the second a party. There is also a discussion on the possibilities of creating links of a federal type with other parties and organizations of the left (the PDS, the Greens, Democrazia Proletaria and others).

One of the reasons put forward for such a project is that the PDS is far from being a stable organization, and that there could well be other breakaways in the not too distant future.

It remains the case that this new formation, including its leadership, brings together currents with significant differences.

Thus, there are those who are nostalgic for the old party of the immediate postwar period, if not for the Stalin epoch, and who regretted the breaking of relations with Moscow under the reign of Enrico Berlinguer⁸; those who hark back to the party of the 1970s and early 1980s; those who, while having made strong criticisms of the party's policies for years, always stayed in it, but who have refused to stay when the party sloughed off its last skin; finally, there are those ex-supporters of the Italian Socialist Party for Proletarian Unity who rejoined the PCI when that party dissolved.⁹

Cossutta wing has greater weight

It would be risky to try to estimate the relative strengths of these currents now. But the weight of Cossutta's supporters is greater than that of the other elements in the proto-leadership bodies and the embryonic apparatuses at a local level.

For the moment, the "Refoundation Movement" has not come up with a programmatic statement nor a precise political project. To get a clearer picture it will be necessary to wait at least until the national meeting in April 1991.

But both in the texts presented to the last two congresses of the PCI and in the declarations made since the split, it is clear that the new movement is resolutely opposed to the abandonment by the PDS of its identity as a workers movement and rejects all subordination to the imperialist

objectives of NATO and of the coalition that intervened in the Gulf. But the least one can say on other basic questions is that things are more confused.

It is likely that those nostalgic for Stalinism represent a mere handful, which will not have a big influence on future developments.

On the other hand, there seems to be a broad consensus for a favourable attitude to Gorbachevism, or, more precisely, to a vision of a self-reform of the bureaucracy.

As for the Italian workers movement, there is no clear break with the gradualist and reformist conceptions which have characterized the postwar PCI, from Togliatti to Berlinguer.

Renewal or residual phenomenon?

The question remains open, therefore, as to whether this new formation will be able to contribute, within the limits of its strength, to a renewal of the Italian workers movement, after the bankruptcy of its major party — which requires a clear understanding that we are entering a quite new period.

Or if, in the end, it turns out to be nothing more than a residual phenomenon with no real future. And it has to be said that so far the elements of continuity with the old party seem to be prevailing over the desire for innovation.

This is reflected, among other ways, by the approach adopted to Democrazia Proletaria (DP), which underlined at its last congress the importance of the conflicts inside the PCI and has insisted since then on the need to address the question of a communist refoundation.¹⁰

Present in the different assemblies of the new movement, DC has expressed its desire to immediately establish close links with it at every level and in the social movements. But such offers have come up against something of a blank wall.

Sometimes the reply has been that the new regroupment must sort out its own principled positions before thinking of engaging in common activity with others.

In these conditions, DP has decided to launch a series of initiatives in the coming months and to put on the agenda of its next congress a discussion of the issue of communist refoundation, in all of its aspects. ★

7. In Italy party memberships tend to be much higher than in the rest of Europe. Even parties with minimal electoral influence claim to have some hundreds of thousands of members.

8. Cossutta is not a leader formed in the classical Stalinist school. At the end of the 1950s and in the 1960s he was at the head of those who ousted the old guard in Milan.

9. The PSIUP was borne out of a split in 1964 in the PSI, at the moment when the latter decided to join a centre-left government. After a devastating failure in the legislative elections of 1972 it dissolved. A majority of its members rejoined the PSI, a minority went into the PCI.

10. See IV 178, February 12, 1990 and no. 194.

British state forced to release Birmingham Six

AFTER over 16 years the British state has been forced to recognize the innocence of the six Irishmen convicted in 1975 of having carried out the Birmingham pub bombings of November 1974. The men, Paddy Hill, Billy Power, Richard McIlkenny, Gerry Hunter, John Walker, and Hugh Callaghan, were finally freed on March 14 (see IV 198 for details of the campaign leading up to the men's release).

BERNARD GIBBONS

THE release followed their third attempt to appeal against their conviction within 16 years. Their last appeal was turned down as recently as January 1988, with Appeal Court judge Lord Lane saying he and his two fellow judges had become "more and not less convinced" of the men's guilt.

The background to the men's final victory included the freeing of the Guildford Four in October 1989 (the Four had been framed at around the same time as the Six, and in similar circumstances — see IV 173 for details), and the disbandment of the West Midlands Serious Crimes Squad, responsible for the interrogation of the Six in 1974 — there is overwhelming evidence now that the squad has been framing people systematically over a period of many years. Moreover, new scientific tests revealed that the police had fabricated evidence presented at the men's initial trial, and the forensic evidence purporting to show that some of the men had handled explosives had been entirely discredited.

The IRA's 1974 bombing of two pubs in Birmingham killed 21 people and injured 162. The men were arrested the day after the bombings, while travelling to Belfast from their homes in Birmingham. They were going to attend the funeral of James Mcdade, a member of the IRA who had been killed while carrying out a bombing operation in Coventry. Mcdade had been a popular singer and personality in the Birmingham Irish community, and had grown up in the same tiny Catholic enclave in Belfast as several of the men.

Working class men with families, settled in the Birmingham area, the Six were an unlikely team of bombers. Nor is it credible that an IRA active service unit would set off together for a hard-drinking trip to Belfast within hours of having carried out such a serious bombing, given the close police surveillance of the ports that was likely. Nonetheless, the men were picked up for questioning and the police decided they had found some people to hang the bombings on. The men were tortured and forced to sign faked confessions.

Riddled with inaccuracies, contradictions, and improbable stage Irish expressions, the confessions should not have stood up to scrutiny in any law court worthy of the name. But the British state had found its scapegoats, and at their 1975 trial the judge said that the men had been convicted "on the clearest and most overwhelming evidence I have ever heard".

Unprecedented legal conspiracy

At the men's initial trial, the judge had also said that, if they were innocent, it would mean that the police were involved in a conspiracy "unprecedented in British legal history". This has now been shown to be the case, and moreover it is evident that the most senior judges in the land have connived in that conspiracy. But it is doubtful that any but the lowliest participants in the crime will ever suffer any punishment for it. Instead of launching a direct investigation into the Birmingham case, the government has appointed a Royal Commission with a vague remit to review the judicial system.

Few people in Britain emerge from the Birmingham Six case with any credit. Pride of place must go to the families of the jailed men, who campaigned to prove their innocence with an incredible tenacity, and in the face of almost universal hostility until the state case began to crumble in the mid-1980s. Then there are the men's lawyers, the tiny handful of investigative journalists who worked to unravel the convictions in a series of television programmes, and the much tinier

handful of politicians who campaigned on behalf of the Six, most prominently left Labour MP Chris Mullin.

Meanwhile, as the campaign for the release of the Six began to gather steam in local Labour Parties and trade unions over the past few years, the Labour leadership did everything in its power to stifle such demands. Similarly, whilst the Irish government is now falling over itself to claim credit for the release of the Six, it remained for many years hostile to the campaign for their release and used its influence, particularly in the United States, to undermine it.

The poison of occupation

There are few in Britain who have pointed out that it is the unjust and ultimately untenable British occupation of a part of Ireland that is at the root of the poison which continues to slowly work its way through the British body politic — whether it is through frame-up cases like the Birmingham 6 or the Guildford 4, the continuing saga of the shoot-to-kill policy and army collaboration with loyalist death squads in Ireland itself, the cover-up around the execution of three IRA volunteers in Gibraltar, or any of the other scandals that continue to simmer away.

It is not often that six working class Irish nationalists have the ear of the world to denounce British justice for the sham that it is, and the Birmingham Six are determined to use to the full the brief moment they will have to do so. In interviews since their release, they have insistently taken up the cases of others unjustly jailed, and they can be expected to be at the forefront of the campaign against the extradition of Irish prisoners to Britain.

In the words of one of the Six, John Walker; "We must see to it that nobody else has to go through what we went through. There is no justice for Irish people in Britain". ★



The undoing of Yugoslavia

ONE year after the breakup of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), the federal Yugoslav state itself seems set for dissolution. Despite its federalist rhetoric, Serbia, under nationalist demagogue Slobodan Milosevic, began the process last November when it adopted a new constitution. It was followed this February by Slovenia and Croatia.

Macedonia is expected to do the same soon. Montenegro has vowed to stick with Serbia come what may.

In Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Moslem and Croat nationalities would like this republic also to declare itself a sovereign state, but this option has so far been rejected by the Bosnian Serbs. The two remaining federal units, Vojvodina and Kosovo, have meanwhile been swallowed up by Serbia (many Montenegrins fear that their republic will suffer the same fate).

At the same time the demonstrations over the weekend of March 9/10 in Belgrade raising democratic demands offers a hope for the de-stabilization of Milosevic on his home ground. Given the fact that Milosevic's Greater Serbia plan is doomed to failure simply by weight of numbers (Serbs make up only 40% of the Yugoslav population) nothing more than short term solutions to the crisis are in sight.

The following article was written on March 7, 1991, before the student demonstrations in Belgrade.

MICHELE LEE

SERBIA's iron-fisted policy in Kosovo, where Albanians are in the majority, has led the province to secede from Serbia and declare itself a fully sovereign republic within Yugoslavia. However, the Yugoslav option is being denied to it. Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and to an extent also Bosnia-Herzegovina take the position that the subjects of current negotiations must be the six existing republics, thereby excluding the two provinces, Kosovo and Vojvodina, from the discussion regarding Yugoslavia's future and encouraging the feeling among Kosovo Albanians that they would do best to seek unification with Albania.

Serbia, meanwhile, has revised the Federal constitution not just by annexing the two provinces, but also by adopting the position that the proper subjects of any new political settlement are not the republics/provinces at all, but the South Slav nations. In its view, Yugoslavia's internal borders are administrative, not political; hence Serbia has the right to represent all Serbs, irrespective of where they live. Official Serbia has publicly committed itself to annexing parts of Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina — and eventually

also of Macedonia — in the event of the federation being replaced by a looser state structure.¹

Arguing that all Serbs wish to live in a single state, it has been encouraging secessionist movements among Serbs living in these republics. In Croatia, this has taken the form of armed struggle: attacking local police stations, blockading roads and railways, forming armed guards, disseminating strident anti-Croat propaganda and so on.

Rights for Serbs but not for others

Thus civil war is no longer merely a distant prospect: already initiated in Kosovo, it is now spreading into Croatia. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, too, Serb nationalists have set up institutions of power parallel to the republican assembly and government. The motto "One Serb nation, one Serb state" runs counter, of course, to similar rights for the other nationalities, which is why Serbia's policy is pushing the country in the direction of civil war.

Apart from the six republics, two other agents have emerged as subjects in their

own right: the Yugoslav army and the Federal government headed by Ante Markovic. The Federal ministers of defence and the interior, the army chief of staff and several other active and retired generals have recently formed a new party, the League of Communists — Movement for Yugoslavia, whose backbone is the "Yugoslav army and its commanding officers, as an institution and as citizens."

This party is intended "within the next five or six months to become the strongest political force." The army top brass has experienced the Communist loss of power in parts of the country as a betrayal: "In some of the Yugoslav republics, anti-Communist "democracies" won their elections, in part because of the traitors within their local Communist leaderships. It is especially important to liquidate such people from our party, the party that is led by our commanding officers. We should not repeat the errors made in the recent past; we should liquidate the fifth column among us..."

Army fears cuts in financing and prestige

At home, the army has formed an alliance with Serbia while in the longer run it counts on conservative forces in the Soviet Union (and the Soviet army in particular) to save "Communism and socialist society" and thus solve that other paramount issue — "the continued financing of the Yugoslav army, [which] the hostile forces have discontinued or threatened to discontinue." Serbia's current intransigence is a direct result of the Yugoslav military's support.

Prime Minister Markovic, on the other hand, enjoys the support of the West, which is awed by the prospect of Yugoslavia's complete break-up. The West's strong card is the International Monetary Fund, without whose good will Yugoslavia faces an imminent economic collapse. Markovic's position is that the country must choose between him and the generals. But his plan of uniting Yugoslavia around a common economic reform has foundered as much on the stubbornness of the republics as on the rapidly growing incoherence of the Yugoslav economic space.

He has thus been left with the ungrateful role of Yugoslavia's undertaker — a task which, nevertheless, he has performed with some honour. It was above all Markovic, who, on the night of January 25-26, helped to avert a military intervention in Croatia which, had it been successful, would have led to the introduction of military rule in the rest of Yugoslavia, setting off in all probability a generalized civil

1. Serbia's eventual encroachment into Macedonia will be contested by Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government has recently published a statement in which it commits itself to recognizing a sovereign Macedonia, if and when this is adopted by the Macedonian parliament, and abandon all claims on its territory.

war.

The pre-eminence of national politics in Yugoslav internal life is nothing new. The recently published stenographic account of a February 1991 meeting of republican and federal leaders called to discuss Yugoslavia's future shows an uncanny resemblance to the last congress of the LCY in February 1990.

There is Milosevic's Serbia (flanked by an impotent Montenegro), hoping to decide by sheer force of Serb numbers the fate of the Federation, ready to start civil war if defeated at the conference table. Lined up with Serbia is the army, which fears not just anti-Communist retribution but also the loss of its material privileges — in budgetary terms, and through the dismantling of the military-industrial complex, which only a centralized state can prevent. There are Slovenia and Croatia, convinced that they stand a better chance of navigating the transition in a looser association, which they also perceive as an indispensable protection against Serbian aggression.

Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia occupy a middle position, torn between the twin fears of a Serb-dominated Yugoslavia and Yugoslavia's dissolution. The February meeting of the country's state leaders ended exactly like the 14th Congress of the LCY: Croatia and Slovenia walked out, Serbia pushed for the meeting to continue without them, Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina voted to postpone the meeting to a more opportune moment.

Reluctance to take the plunge into separation

Several subsequent meetings of the presidency were also sabotaged by the Serbian side. However, it is easier to dissolve a party than a state. The republican assemblies may vote themselves full sovereignty, but nobody wants to be the first to leave. The crafty Slovenes have invented a new term — dissociation — to describe what they wish to see happen. The existing Yugoslav association should be dissolved and replaced by a new one.

Two dates are seen as crucial: May 15 and June 30, 1991. On the first, Croatia's representative on the Federal presidency is due to replace Serbia's as the country's head of state for a year. If the Army and Serbia allow this to happen, that is, if they agree to respect the Federal constitution, then the prospect of a peaceful settlement of the Yugoslav conflict will be much enhanced. June 30, on the other hand, is the final date set by Slovenia for a negotiated inter-Yugoslav agreement. If no agreement is reached, then Slovenia, followed by Croatia, will secede unilaterally.

Contemporary Yugoslav politics contains novel features, but bears also the marks of the old. The disappearance of the LCY has undoubtedly removed the minimal protection from the ravages of international capitalism which the working

class had enjoyed after 1945. Nevertheless this protection had already worn thin, becoming little more than one by-product of an inert and increasingly conservative system — which moreover was showing signs of positive morbidity by the early 1980s. The introduction of martial rule in Kosovo in 1981 was followed, in succession by: an attempt to reintroduce strict censorship; the failure of an initiative to open up debate among party members; the trial of six Belgrade intellectuals on trumped-up charges; the legitimization of an aggressive Serb nationalism in Serbia; official tolerance (again in Serbia) of crude attacks on the LCY's nationality policy; the trial of four Slovene intellectuals in military courts; putsches in Vojvodina, Kosovo and Montenegro; and the bloodshed in Kosovo.

The industrial working class and public-sector workers responded to the leadership's impotence in the face of the growing economic crisis with strikes: between 1980 and 1985 their number doubled (from 235 to 696); it then rose to 851 in 1986 and to 1,685 in 1987. In that year, Milosevic came to power in Serbia and the army became restless. Meanwhile, a democratic alternative was offered by the western republics: in 1988, Slovenia quietly legalized opposition; in 1989 the Slovenian and Croatian Leagues of Communists opted for multiparty elections. The military party has described this as an act of betrayal. Yet, in the words of Ivica Racan, leader of the League of Communists of Croatia (now the Party of Democratic Change) all the party did was to return its mandate to the people.

The multiparty elections of 1990 did not lead to a sharp break with the past. In Serbia and Montenegro, the ruling Communist parties won overwhelming majorities. In Slovenia, a non-Communist coalition, DEMOS, won the elections, but the leader of the Slovenian Communists (now party of Democratic Change) Milan Kucan, became the republic's president. In Macedonia, no party gained an absolute majority; despite the strong showing of the nationalist VMRO, the Macedonian assembly elected Kligor Gligorov, an old Communist, as its president.

In Croatia, the main Croatian nationalist party — the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) — won almost two-thirds of the seats, but key positions — including that of the president — went to ex-Communists. Croatia's president Franjo Tudjman was thus able to say recently that there are more people sitting in the

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Croatian parliament with partisan war documents dating back to 1941 than in any other such body in the country. Only in Bosnia-Herzegovina did the nationalist parties win outright: the joke goes that the elections were in effect a census, since Croats voted for the Croat national party, the Serbs for the Serb one (Serb Democratic Party) and Moslems for the SDA. In Kosovo, Albanians refused to take part in the elections, having declared themselves independent from Serbia last November; their demand was for democratic elections to their own institutions.

Despite elements of continuity, the sense of political dislocation is great, due to the combined effects of the change of administration, the dismantling of the previous socio-economic system and the depth of the economic recession. Whatever happens to Yugoslavia, there is little doubt that its heirs will continue to be unstable for some time to come. This is primarily because a power vacuum has been created at the very base of Yugoslav society, with the near-complete absence of parties representing the working class.

Steep rise in industrial unemployment

The dismantling of the system based on social property and the vertiginous rise in industrial unemployment has dramatically weakened this class, which is only beginning to organize itself at the trade-union level. Its resistance is at present obfuscated by the siren calls of the various national flags, just when the state of permanent tension is aiding authoritarian tendencies which will sooner or later be targeted against it. This is why a speedy and democratic political settlement at the all-Yugoslav level is of the greatest interest to the country's working population.

The greatest obstacle to such a settle-

ment has been Slobodan Milosevic's regime. This is how a Belgrade independent weekly *Vreme* (March 4, 1991) describes its tactics. "Slobodan Milosevic is undoubtedly the central figure in Yugoslav negotiations, not because of his contribution or initiatives, but because of his hostile stance to all dialogue — his evident desire to make any agreement seem impossible.

"Thus, for example, he used the [anti-Croat] demonstration of women [held in Belgrade at the end of February] to make it difficult for Tudjman and Mesic to come [to a scheduled meeting of the Federal presidency]; then, when they did not come, he pressed for negotiations to take place without them.

"Milosevic agreed to join the [inter-Yugoslav] talks unwillingly and only under pressure from domestic and foreign public opinion, but he clearly believes that his aims cannot be achieved that way. Recent events have strengthened the sovereignty of the republics as well as the legitimacy of their borders, while republican presidents are increasingly behaving as his equals.

Least desirable partner

"Milosevic, who lacks all diplomatic and negotiating skills, is also harvesting the bitter fruits of a politics which, over three years, has made Serbia the least desirable partner in Yugoslavia. Apart from [Montenegrin president] Momir Bulatovic, he cannot convince anybody that he does not wish to dominate. He is also burdened by the dead weight of the Communist ideology, rejected in four of the six republics....

"The link between the two parties [the Socialist Party of Serbia and the League of Communists — Movement for Yugoslavia] is evident. The LC-MY relies on the army whose help Milosevic is increasingly seeking — despite the fact that this is undermining his position as Serb national leader. The LC-MY, on the other hand, cannot count on winning elections anywhere in Yugoslavia, not even in Serbia. This party and its leaders probably harbour no illusions in this regard, but this does not prevent them from acting ever more aggressively and with open ambitions.

"Their only chance lies in the army taking power, following which the LC-MY would take the place once occupied by the LCY. This project of renewal of Communist power is, of course, hopeless. Yet Serbia's conduct in the negotiations suggests that it is counting on this option. The fact that it is not taking them seriously argues that it is relying on the power of the army. In its attempt to renew socialist Yugoslavia, the army would ensure that all Serbs live within the same state, which is what Milosevic says he wants. Yet a military coup d'etat would spell the end of Milosevic and of the dream of an all-Serb state." ★

Referendum resolves nothing

THE March 17 referendum on the maintenance of the Soviet Union saw a vote of 75%, on an 80% turnout, in support of Gorbachev's proposition in favour of a "renewed union". According to Gorbachev's spokesperson, Grigory Revenko, this vote opens the way for "concrete steps towards privatization of small enterprises, acceleration of land reform and a search for a solution to the problem of property."

COLIN MEADE

CONCRETE steps are indeed on the way, with steep price rises scheduled for the start of April, including an estimated 250% increase in the price of meat, 200% for bread, 100% for sugar and increases also on items such as post and telephone charges and children's goods. The rises are to be offset by compensatory payments.

Before Gorbachev's referendum the three Baltic States held their own referenda on independence, in each case winning overwhelming support in their own republics for that goal. In Lithuania, on an 85% turnout, some 90% were in favour of independence. The figures in Estonia and Latvia were, respectively, 83% and 88% turnout and 77.8% and 73.6% in favour. Constitutionally, since a vote of two thirds is all that is required for separation to be permitted, that should settle the issue as far as Lithuania is concerned. However Gorbachev decided to exercise his special powers and ruled the poll out of order.

Furthermore, in the weeks before the vote, demonstrations of hundreds of thousands took place in Russian cities in support of Russian president and leading opponent of Gorbachev Boris Yeltsin, while the voters in the Russian federation supported the proposal that there should be a directly elected Russian president (assumed to be Yeltsin).

In the face of these impressive displays of opposition strength, the Soviet leader-

ship's "success" in the referendum has been to underline the degree to which the Communist Party apparatus continues to control most of the Soviet Union, and give its opponents a sobering glimpse of the real balance of forces.

The active opposition to the old order is strong in some of the non-Russian republics — in the Baltic States, in Moldavia, in Armenia, in Georgia (where the referendum did not take place) and Western Ukraine; in the big cities — Gorbachev got only 50% support in Moscow and Leningrad; and among the miners of Ukraine and Western Siberia, who launched openly political strikes during the referendum campaign, calling for Gorbachev's resignation. Outside of these areas, however, the party's writ still runs.

A man for all seasons

Furthermore the opposition is united only by the fact that it is in opposition. Its figurehead, Yeltsin, can only hold together his diverse constituencies by being all things to all people.

Thus, this protagonist of Shatalin's crash 500-day plan to introduce a free market economy can also oppose price rises when they are decreed by his political opponent; supported by miners in the Donbass, who would be laid off in their thousands if their industry was exposed to world market forces, during the referendum campaign he nonetheless continued to speak out for a rapid transition to a free market economy.

On the question of respecting the right to national self-determination, Yeltsin is equally ambiguous. According to him "no matter what the results of the referendum, the union will not fall apart." He looks to "a union of republics under a collective leadership" — not what the nationalist governments in the Baltic states have in mind at all.

Nonetheless, perhaps scenting a coming attempt by the Gorbachev leadership to coopt or retreat behind his more "moderate" opponents — including Yeltsin — the Western press agrees in seeing the latter as one of the big winners of the referendum. On his recent visit to the Soviet Union, United States Secretary of State James Baker made a point of meeting Yeltsin as well as nationalist leaders.

According to *New York Times* commentator Leslie H. Gelb, Mr. Baker's visit presents an opportunity to "promote reconciliation between Mr. Gorbachev and the democratic opposition...."

"The first step for US diplomats is to gauge whether the reformers and nationalists now harbour thoughts of taking power the old-fashioned Russian way — by revolution — and to dissuade them from that course" (*International Herald Tribune*, March 14, 1991).

But neither repression nor political combinations will halt the advance of the country's crisis. ★