

International VIEWPOINT

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Towards Serboslavia?

WITH the blockade of several Adriatic coast ports and the movement of troops towards Zagreb, the appearance of an internal interethnic struggle on Croatian territory has melted away; the Serbian regime, the Serb paramilitary groups and the Serb minorities in Croatia are points of support for a federal army, one of the last vestiges of a Yugoslav state in decomposition.

CATHERINE VERLA — September 20, 1991

THIS army obeys no civil authority because no such "Yugoslav" authority now exists. Like the putschists in Moscow, it is primarily defending its privileges, indeed its very existence, which is organically linked to the maintenance of a Yugoslavia, even if it be by force.

From the time that Slovenia and Croatia decided on separation, its strategy added up, through evoking the so-called "self-determination" of the Serbs of Croatia, to redefining the contours of a "little" Yugoslavia with frontiers redesigned to the benefit of a greater Serbia appropriating for itself a maximum of territory. The logic of Greater Serbia does not stop at those zones which have Serbian majorities.

This is not the case in any one of the "liberated" zones in Croatia; everywhere else, in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Serbs are in the minority, closely intermingled with other nationalities. A massive exodus is the "solution" proposed to those who do not wish to be part of Serbian territory, or who do not have the means of preserving "autonomous territories".

Moreover, the very identity of the Bosnian Muslims, the Montenegrins and the Macedonians risks being put in jeopardy by the establishment of a murderous "Serboslavia", which could only be maintained through permanent civil war. This Serboslavia will be in the image of the current Serbia, which has recentralized its territory to the detriment of the autonomous provinces of Vojvodina (with a large Hungarian minority) and Kosovo (with an Albanian majority), which have been brought to heel by force, purges, political and henceforth cultural repression.

Officially, the Serbian state of Milosevic is not at war and the Serbian parliament has not recognized those territories which have proclaimed themselves autonomous in Croatia or in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Officially again, the federal army is still "Yugoslav" and supposedly playing a buffer role between Croat and Serb ethnic groups which are fighting each other. Offi-

cially, finally, the right of self-determination (therefore of separation) is recognized for the different Yugoslav nations.

Sovereignty violated

But the sovereignty of the Croat state (or that of Bosnia-Herzegovina) is being violated in the name of the sovereignty of the dispersed Serb nation. The internal frontiers are treated by the Serbs as "artificial" or administrative (the Serbs reproach Tadjman, the Croat leader, for rejecting all of Titoist Communism apart from the frontiers of Croatia). But it is entirely the force of the army which allows this redefinition of frontiers, and not a negotiation between sovereign states guaranteeing the self-determination of their peoples.

The propaganda of the Serbian media, brought back into line by new dismissals and the nomination from above of journalists, tries to equate in the Serb consciousness an independent Croat state with the fascist wartime state Ustashe, and to link Croat national sentiment with nationalism.

This association has been greatly strengthened by the genuine nationalism of the new regime elected in Croatia, and the shattering declarations of Tadjman, congratulating himself for having neither a Jew nor a Serb as a wife. The Croatian leader of the Croat Peasant Party, Zvonimir Cicak (former leader of the Croatian struggles of 1971), at first opposed Tadjman, in a logic of association with the Serb intellectuals of Croatia like Milorad Pupovats who fight for the respecting of a double sovereignty; that of the citizens within the frontiers of the Croat state, and that of the national communities wishing to preserve their identity. But Tadjman has preferred to negotiate (in vain) with Milosevic than with the Serbian representatives of his state, and the Croatian parliament has only recognized too late the rights of minorities.

The major difference between the two is that the Serbs have been the dominant nation within the first Yugoslavia and have maintained to a significant extent a domineering attitude, with the material means to exert such a domination if the army chooses to put itself at the service of a Yugoslav or Great Serb oppressor project.

The blocking of the accords which envisaged Yugoslavia as a free union of sovereign states was the combined feat of the Serbian authorities, the army and the federal government of Markovic, at the time supported by the western powers. The intervention of the army, whatever has been its past logic, goes today in the sense of a real political coup d'état combined to a Great Serb logic. It expresses an alliance between what remains of neo-Stalinist "communism" in Serbia, and a section of Great Serb nationalism reclaiming the traditions of the Chetniks (the other section having chosen to place itself in opposition to Milosevic).

It is not yet possible to know how far the army will go, nor if its high command is really capable of controlling it. Some divisions have appeared in the recent past, but there have been widespread purges. The pursuit of the current army intervention can only lead to the spreading of the conflict throughout Yugoslavia, at the price of the lives of all its peoples. Such a dynamic cannot be halted through the intervention of foreign armies, which will only serve to unify the Serbian ranks; on the contrary it can only be stopped through a break with Great Serb logic, through its challenging from within.

Youth provide hope

The mass movement of Serbian youth last March represented a first hope that this might happen. Would nationalism push the logic of war to its limit, or would this logic be broken by a mass movement of Serbian youth, linking up with others in a refusal to participate in this dirty war? Some Serbian voices, a minority who had difficulty in making themselves heard, have already been raised in Croatia and Serbia to denounce the utopian and reactionary myth of the Serb nation/state as a form of realization of national rights.

Some Croat and Muslim figures have done the same in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in favour of the protection of multinational sovereign states. Only the free union of such effectively democratic states, respecting fully the rights of their nations and nationalities, can lead to the necessary withering away of frontiers, to the respect of individual and collective identities.

But for that to happen, it is necessary to finish also with the remnants of a bureaucratic regime which has also committed crimes in the name of Communism and which has sought to maintain to the end the power of the party/state, even if reduced to its army. ★

Clashes in Georgia

TWO and a half years after a murderous attack by Soviet troops on pro-independence demonstrators in the Caucasian republic of Georgia, it was the turn of the police of the nationalist president Zviad Gamsakhurdia to open fire on opponents on September 2, 1991.

COLIN MEADE

GAMSAXHURDIA's opponents stepped up demonstrations after the killings, demanding his resignation, access to the media and parliamentary elections. They accuse the president of a record of anti-democratic practises, as well as of political incompetence and indecision, expressed by his decision to disband the Georgian National Guard at the behest of the leaders of the Moscow coup attempt.

There is plenty of evidence of Gamsakhurdia's anti-democratic instincts; the victory of his "Round Table" coalition in the Supreme Soviet elections in October was followed by a takeover of the media, while opponents from the rival "National Congress" bloc have faced physical harassment. On September 18 opposition leader Giorgi Chanturia was arrested for "organizing anti-social actions" supposedly in collusion with former Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze.

In an inept response to central attempts to manipulate non-Georgian minorities in the Republic, in which Georgians make up around 70% of the population, the Gamsakhurdia government formally abolished the South Ossetian and Abkhazian autonomous regions, thus ensuring the firm hostility of the non-Georgian peoples of these regions to the fledgling independent state.

The post of president is endowed with formidable powers, including the right to nominate the prime minister, the chairman of the Supreme Court and generals; declare war; veto laws passed by parliament; and grant or revoke Georgian citizenship.

The president is a nationalist of the mystical romantic variety, keen to underline the Christian character of his country on the borders of the House of Islam, which creates additional tensions vis-à-vis the Muslim Abkhazians and the Azer-

bajani minority.

The strange incident of the abolition of the National Guard at the time of the coup, meanwhile, may be connected to the fact that it coincided with a major reshuffle by Gamsakhurdia of his government, and doubts about the loyalty of the Guard to himself. Indeed, some 15,000 Guards, under their leader, Tengiz Kitovani, sacked by the president on August 19, have announced that they are no longer under the president's orders.

One strand in the coalition of forces opposing Gamsakhurdia is a rival nationalist current headed by Giorgi Chanturia, leader of the National Democratic Party. This party and others were involved in an attempt to launch alternative elections for a National Congress in September 1990, arguing that the Supreme Soviet, in which Gamsakhurdia's party was to come to power, was a part of the illegal Soviet power structure. However the protests also seem to have attracted the support of intellectuals and media workers disturbed by the president's dictatorial predilections.

Moscow appeal for Labour Party

THE following appeal for the creation of a Party of Labour was issued in Moscow on August 28, 1991. Among the signatories are Nikolai Gontchar, president of the Moscow soviet, Boris Kagarlitski and Vladimir Kondratov, members of the Russian Socialist Party and deputies in the Moscow soviet, and Mikhail Nagaitsev and Tatiana Froleva, who are trade union officials in Moscow.

DOCUMENT

ANEW political situation has been created in our country. During the events of August 19 to 21, 1991, the people demonstrated their refusal to live like in the past and their determination to defend the elected authorities. Nonetheless the crisis in our country is not over. It is essential to find a rapid way to lift the economy out of chaos, re-establish normal economic relations between regions and enterprises, and to provide sufficient goods for the consumer market.

The dominant forces in the country,

The independence of the three Caucasian republics of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan is not yet assured, despite all the shocks the Soviet system has suffered in recent years. Central government troops continue to roam around areas of conflict, such as South Ossetia and the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan. This is clear proof that a purely nationalist outlook, which divides the peoples of the region against one another, is actually a severe hindrance to the establishment of national rights and sovereignty.

Furthermore, the Caucasus has historically been an area where Russian, Iranian and Turkish interests have collided; thus it is not only from Moscow that malign interference can be anticipated. The path indicated by history for the peoples of the Caucasus to achieve independence in peace is a union of the whole region, which can only be realized on the basis of secularism and pluralism. Voices calling for progress in this direction, however, have yet to make themselves heard. ★

whatever nuances one might find, are all united in their belief that the country's problems can only be resolved by very wide privatization, a massive appeal to foreign capital and the systematic defence of private entrepreneurs and the new possessing classes issuing from the old bureaucratic nomenklatura. The desire to create a "radiant capitalist future", expresses itself by the rejection of everything that can, in one way or another, be associated with socialism, including elementary social guarantees such as the right to work, free education and health care.

We consider that the unanimity of the victors is dangerous above all in the absence of opposition; without the representation of alternative positions

in the organs of power there will not be a real democracy. If the majority of the present ruling majority assume the objective of defending entrepreneurs, we state that our objective is before all else the defence of the wage-earning population.

The decades of the totalitarian Communist regime has brought discredit on socialist values and on the very idea of the emancipation of labour. But these values did not arise from the armchairs of intellectuals, they spring from the need for a political defence of the workers. The defeat of the CPSU at last opens the

European Communist parties implode

THE conservative putsch in the Soviet Union and its political consequences are an unprecedented trauma for all the Communist Parties. However, the August Days in Moscow were not a stroke of lightning in a clear sky for these parties. The events in Eastern Europe over recent years have already compelled these parties to make significant revisions. This process needs to be looked at as a whole and the recent events seen as a culminating step in the disintegration of this political current.

CLAUDE GABRIEL

possibility of creating an authentic left-wing movement that can give expression to this need.

Society needs a mass party that can defend:

- The right to work;
- The reform of the system of social guarantees;
- Economic democracy, workers' participation in the enterprises, in the making of decisions about their material situation and their conditions of work;
- The independence and guarantee of the rights of the unions in all the enterprises, whatever the form of property, as well as the ratification by our country of the international convention of the International Labour Organization;
- The development of collective and municipal forms of property, the transformation of the state sector of the economy into a decentralized social sector that is modern and efficient, capable of leading the country out of crisis;
- An end to the unregulated bureaucratic privatization of the former sector of "the property of the whole people" and a refusal to transform state monopolies into private monopolies;
- For the rights of the consumer and of independent domestic entrepreneurs;
- The democratic regulation of the economy, an indispensable condition for the establishment of civilized forms of the market;
- Integration into the world market in a way that upholds the interests of the national economy and not those of the international corporations;
- Self-management and a strong power based on representatives of the people as a counterweight to the power of the executive;
- For honest government, guaranteeing the separation of the activities of the state from the economy, and with a clear distinction between the social private sectors within the mixed economy;
- For real equality of women and for their possibility to fully participate in the life of society without this being to the detriment of their rights and obligations as mothers;
- For the rights of national, cultural and religious minorities.

We announce our intention to create a mass Party of Labour, founded on rank-and-file initiative. We reject the notion of the vanguard party. The Party of Labour must be the party that gives political support to the trade unions and workers movement. Only such a party can become an integral part of the international movement of left forces.

We are calling on all social forces, all union organizations conscious of the necessity of a political defence of the interests of the wage earners, and all citizens aware of the danger represented by a one-party system and who share the ideas expressed here to join this initiative. ★

THE decision of many of them a long time ago to present themselves as seeking a "national" road to socialism represented a first attempt to distance themselves from the Soviet model and permit the widest possible range of political alliances. The Eurocommunism of the 1970s was an important step in this evolution in relation to the increasing involvement of some European CPs in the institutions of their countries.

The social interests of a part of their bureaucracy ceased to be dependent on the "socialist camp", becoming increasingly tied to the emoluments of their own state. Almost everything could be found in the market of European CPs. The differences between, for example, the Italian Communist Party and the Portuguese or Greek CPs were great. Thus, when the era of *perestroika* arrived, the "socialist camp" was already far from monolithic.

The Gorbachev era, however, speeded up the crisis, the realignments and internal debates. And this has proved true whatever the previous positions of the CP in question.

Re-appraisal of history

Several factors work together here. In the first place, Gorbachevism provoked a reappraisal of history. Most of the leaderships found themselves compelled to change their balance-sheet of Stalinism and its consequences for the history of their own party several times. Each time, the changes took place under the pressure of the changes in the Soviet Union and the CPSU, which obliged them to go further in their self-critical reappraisal.

The mass mobilizations in Eastern Europe and the fall of the Stalinist regimes smashed the last remaining illusions among the rank-and-file of the CPs about the joys of living in a "socialist"

state. The leaders thus had to come up with a further round of explanations on the "distortions" of really existing socialism".

Finally, and notably for the CPs pursuing a line of reformist adaptation to their own state, the crisis in the USSR and the Kremlin's new international policy removed all hope of a convergence with Moscow around the big ideological and practical issues.

The last demonstration of this was during the Gulf war, when some of the CPs wanted to denounce the imperialist policy at the very moment when the Soviet leadership was voting in support of that policy at the United Nations. There was nothing left of the "international context" which had hitherto permitted them to justify their Muscovite connections on the basis of the fluctuations of peaceful coexistence and references to the existence of a "progressive camp".

Shattering identity crisis

In these stormy years, each CP has tried to survive this shattering identity crisis. Each one has adopted a tone dictated as much by national political factors as internal bureaucratic reasons. Numerous splits have taken place. Many parties have changed their name, some twice, such as the Swedish CP which became the Left Communist Party before turning into the Left Party, or the Dutch CP which is melting into the Green Left.

The conservative coup in the USSR has accelerated this upheaval. All those who had tried to stick the pieces back together again by promoting the image of Gorbachev as a "Communist reformer" have once again found themselves arriving too late. The father of *perestroika* no longer appears as the master of the situation and the media has had weeks of pouring out images of the "end of communism".

No party has escaped. On August 19, the political commission of the Portuguese party explained that the state of emergency "arose as an attempt to contain the process of a developing counter-revolution"; two days later they explained that they had "clearly defended the rapid return of the Soviet Union to institutional normality."

The Greek CP, meanwhile, started off denouncing "the opinion of the imperialist forces, the local conservative political forces and all those who are opposed to socialism."

The Spanish Communist Party condemned the Moscow putschists. However, this did not prevent them from experiencing an important internal debate. A minority, led by longstanding leader, Nicolas Sartorius, have relaunched their campaign for the dissolution of the PCE into the United Left (an amorphous coalition under PCE leadership) and for the PCE to abandon any reference to a change in the system. Sartorius has the support of Antonio Gutierrez, the current general secretary of the Workers' Commissions, and the leadership of the United Socialist Party of Catalonia.

The crisis in the German PDS is getting deeper. The party presidium's first thoughts on the coup were ambiguous to say the least — they expressed the hope that it could "prevent the break-up of the Soviet Union" and called on the new leaders to "use the power of the state on a legal basis". On August 25, the PDS condemned the coup, but the Communist Platform, which presents itself as a Marxist leftwing of the party, had previously justified the coup, since it "opened the road for the renewal of socialism". Not even the Italian PDS, and all the more the Movement for Communist Refoundation can escape the great political debate.

The effect of these events on the leaderships is not mainly a matter of independent political choices or "opinions". The apparatuses, where they have not already split as in Britain, Italy and Greece, are dividing once more along lines determined by political and material interests. Union bureaucracies, local councillors, the internal party apparatuses all split up and redistribute themselves around one basic question: how to survive?

The evident fence sitting or even support (in various shades and degrees) for the coup seen in some quarters were not due simply to thoughtlessness or stupidity. It is true that such positions have resulted in political disaster for those who took them — the leadership of the French CP being a case in point. But this is the

logical choice for some sections of the apparatus and existing majorities on party leaderships. The events in the Soviet Union are pushing ahead to an increasingly thorough balance sheet of the entire history of Stalinism, and thus of the "international communist movement".

These leaderships can either make further compromises with capitalism and social democracy or hold to the idea of the imperialist, anti-communist plot as the main explanation of the new situation in the Soviet Union.

Those favouring the former option want to disembarass themselves of the weight of the past and wipe clean the

democracy has just suffered a crushing defeat as a result of its assumption of responsibility for "restructuring" the "Swedish model", where the Dutch SP is not far from suffering the same fate, and where the French Socialist Party can no longer hide the smell of its putrefaction after nine years in power, the collapse of Soviet Stalinism is also going to upset the plans of those who have tried to use the word "socialism" to cover up their social consensus policies.

What will become of the CP militants? Is there a possibility that left currents will emerge capable of really confronting the Stalinist past? It has to be said that after several years of crisis and disintegration of many of the European CPs, this is not the direction in which things have gone. Certainly there will be individuals and groups of tens or hundreds in each country who will not be ready to abandon their commitment to militant activity. The revolutionary left will come across these orphans everywhere.

But the currents that have formed and will form themselves feel the pressure of the main tendencies at work in the international political situation; this has already led many to choose the road of realism at the side of the social democrats or the Green parties.

The French Communist Party, for example, has already experienced three waves of internal challenge, splitting the apparatus from top to bottom. However, none of them have tended to move to the left. In Italy the crisis has given rise to the MRC (see IV 209) and in Greece it has produced a movement a part of which has attempted a left critique of Stalinism. In Portugal, the internal opposition has resumed the offensive, and so on.

But the political direction of these currents is essentially determined by the level of activity of the social movements, by their victories and defeats. It is thus the relation of class forces that determines the realignment of those fractions of the old apparatuses seeking a future and above all of the rank-and-file militants who await the possibility of refinding the hope of socialism.

The recent events in the Soviet Union do not only involve Stalinism; they affect the entire epoch in the workers' movement opened by the October revolution. This means a startling break in people's political understanding.

Only big social and political tests, of a breadth equal to the events taking place, can give back mass credibility to a socialist project. This is the challenge that now confronts the revolutionary left. ★



"The party wants to dissolve itself." "The party is always right."

slate of their own history. They are on their way to social democracy, just as their counterparts in the Soviet Union have found their way to the market economy. The latter are concerned above all to preserve an "identity" which is in fact nothing other than the preservation of an apparatus.

Avoiding the real debates

The common feature of these two responses is a determination to avoid any serious debate on the history of Stalinism, on bureaucracy and on the thousand and one crimes of the Stalinist international. Amnesia afflicts both the neo-Stalinists and the neo-Social Democrats.

For the "Soviet shock" immediately raises the debate on socialism, the workers' movement, democracy and the search for new ideals and long-term goals. All these questions touch not only the former Stalinists but the whole of the workers' movement.

If the Stalinist Communist Parties were not democratic, can it be said that the social democratic parties are? If the CPs were at the beck and call of Moscow, the social democrats are totally under the thumb of imperialism!

At a moment when Swedish social

Controlling the labour market



THE political events of the last few months have revealed with great sharpness the problems of managing the new migratory flows in Europe. The Yugoslav crisis, the attempt made by thousands of Albanians to disembark at Bari (see IV 212), the European Community's negotiations with the three Baltic states and its great prudence in relation to the other Soviet Republics, are all directly connected to the regulation of the labour force in Europe. How are the diverse components of the labour market to be controlled in the "new Europe", especially when millions of individuals are progressively entering this market, following the political upheavals in Eastern Europe? From now on these will be crucial questions for European leaders, to start with those of the European Economic Community (EEC).

CLAUDE GABRIEL

IN MARCH 1990, *Social Europe*, the publication of the European Community, unambiguously outlined this new challenge¹. Beyond analyses of migratory fluxes, the underlying issue is the management of the labour market. How will it be possible to simultaneously increase to the maximum the free circulation of capital towards Eastern Europe whilst taking protectionist measures to control the circulation of labour?

This same review stressed that the reality of the current "migrations" is totally different from what was initially hoped for; today there is a "Community" labour force (composed of citizens of EEC states) which is increasingly less "mobile", including within the states of the Community, and an increasingly strong exterior pressure from the extra-Community "flood", notably coming from the Eastern European countries.

Little movement between EEC countries

Today, less than 2% of Community nationals live in an EEC state other than their own. There is nothing very astonishing in that. But it should be remembered that the "free circulation" of persons resident in the EEC, presented as a means of resolving the irrationalities of the national labour markets and thus ultimately a factor contributing to the reduction of unemployment, was among the founding

dogmas of the Single European Act.

This new "democratic right" was supposed, moreover, to exercise discipline on wages. The experts in Brussels have now discovered that there are many sociological parameters which hinder this mobility.

Two million unemployed in Poland

On the other hand, in less than two years, some millions of workers from Eastern Europe have been added to the European labour market. Whether they are unemployed (as are two million in Poland for example) or awaiting privatization or western investment, these men and women henceforth constitute an additional part of the available labour force which is dependent on the economic decisions of the European "centre".

This is not the least important of the questions that EEC leaders have to consider when they are confronted with problems like those of Yugoslavia, Albania or the Soviet Union. Already German unification has introduced several million extra people at the heart of the European labour market. In a country like France, while there has been a net decrease in immigration from North Africa, one of the highest relative rates of growth in the last few months has been that of Polish immigration!

Indeed, an important part of the dialogue between Brussels and Hungary, Poland and Czechoslovakia obviously concerns control of the migratory flows. For, while the western capitalists note their own national labour forces' lack of mobility, they are now seeking, in essence, to keep the available labour force of Eastern Europe where they are.

Other more long term considerations could lead the EEC countries, taking account of the relative shrinking of their active population, to plan for some controlled immigration from the East. But for the moment they must forestall the risk of a mass exodus. To stabilize this work force, particularly through investments by multinationals, would exercise, moreover, a downward pressure on wages in the West. The determination of the western European capitals to intervene in the Yugoslav crisis, the determination of the Italian government against the Albanian immigrants, the desire of the Community to propose very quickly some kind of partnership with the Baltic states and, in a non-contradictory manner, the fear of a break up of the rest of the Soviet Union are all signs of what is at stake. The market economy, yes... on condition that the stratifications and the segmentations of the international labour market are maintained as much as possible.

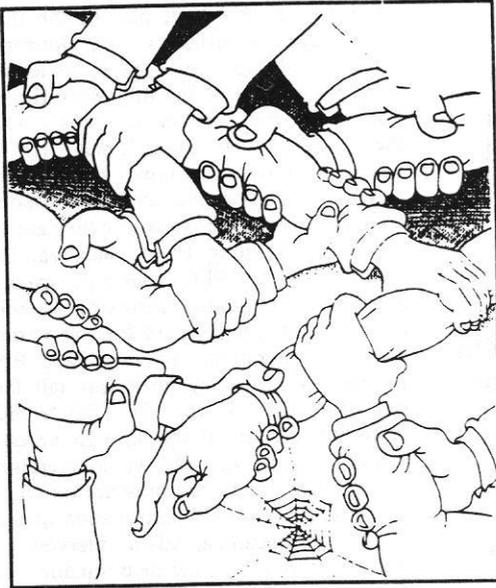
Increase in available workforce

There are two main reasons why this sudden growth in the available labour force on the market is unlikely to reproduce the situation of the Third World; on the one hand, we are here dealing with a relatively qualified labour force and, secondly, there is the prospect of integrating these countries into the immediate periphery of Western Europe (in association with the EEC, for example). This would form an intermediary level in the concentric circles of dependence.

Politically, European investors remain reluctant to take too many risks in these countries. The fear of an uncertain future, the risks of chaos and national conflict justify this prudence. Yet the project of a rapid restoration of the market economy means that a place in the international division of labour has to be found for these countries.

This will result from unequal exchange with the countries of the "centre". It will be determined by the volume of capital but also by its function; or, again, by the level of delocalization towards these countries of certain types of production. There is, consequently, an immediate link between the *form* of insertion of these countries in the market and the control of their labour forces as well as their mobility. The reluctance of private investors must then be partially compensated for

1. *Social Europe*, March 1990, Brussels.



by the voluntarism of European public finances.

But things become more complicated when account is taken of what is happening at the same time on the labour market in Western Europe. All Western European countries are experiencing an aggravation of unemployment². The perspectives of economic upturn are no longer sufficient to imply a substantial lowering of unemployment; the current bank rates policy, caused by the costs of German unification, has limited the boldness of investors; finally, and most importantly, the general reorganization of labour in industry engenders new phenomena, structural in nature, involving the lasting marginalization of a part of the workforce.

Increased unemployment likely

Thus, in Great Britain, despite the upturn in growth, the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) predicts a growth in the reduction of jobs. The official rate of unemployment is now 9.6%, against 5.9% in 1990.

In France, the situation is similar. A recent study showed that "overmanning [declared by the employers] affected 43% of the enterprises of more than 500 workers, 27% of those employing between 100 and 499 employees and 25% of those employing less than 100"³.

In negotiations with the countries of the European Free Trade Area (EFTA), and notably with the Swiss, one of the key problems is that of the right of circulation of the labour force inside the great Western European unit, the rate of unemployment being very different between the countries of the EEC and those of EFTA.

In the course of the difficult negotiations between Tokyo and Brussels concerning quotas of Japanese cars, what is

at stake is not only the protection of European firms. As the recent agreement between Mitsubishi, Volvo and the Dutch government attests, it is also about securing some thousands of jobs through direct Japanese investments in these states. The principal European countries have to simultaneously settle the question of unemployment in their own countries, the demand for jobs for the peoples of the Third World, to begin with those of the Mediterranean basin, and, finally, the insertion of Eastern Europe, now "free" to sell itself on the market, in the global management of the labour force.

We can already see the first damaging effects; for example the multinational ABB proposes dismissals at Mannheim, in ex-

West Germany, to assist a delocalization to Poland or even the ex-GDR. The competition between workers could then be very sharp. It will obviously be determined by the investments and industrial policies implemented. The place accorded to the countries of Eastern Europe in the hierarchy of the world capitalist market will be largely determined by the comparative advantages offered by these states; qualities and qualifications of workers, but also, reliability of the infrastructures and the administration. Such is the law in a world market in which 80% of commodities exchange between the most industrialized countries.

Minor role envisaged for Baltic States

A French politician, Lionel Stoleru⁴, explained recently: "Seeing that the Baltic states are close to Europe, and given their total economic invisibility, they must become members of the EEC. One can only offer them a minor role, perhaps not a chair with a right to vote, but they should be members of it. It is necessary that they link themselves to an international currency with a free convertibility, as is the case of the countries of the dollar zone in South East Asia, for example".

However, things will not be so simple; hourly labour costs are 127.3FF in Germany, as against 74FF in Ireland and 20.7FF in Portugal. This significant difference between countries with similar administrative structures, all members of the EEC, already offers opportunities to industries wishing to delocalize, without mentioning some of the more reliable Third World countries.

The solicitude offered to the countries of Eastern Europe, like all imperialist aid, is offered on the basis that what is given to one is not given to another. Investments made in Czechoslovakia will be investments which are not made

in Lithuania. Capitalism cannot give work to all, as attested already by the vast numbers without work in the Third World. The brutal discipline of the world market has nothing to do with the good "democratic" conscience shown in London, Paris, Brussels or Bonn. There will be no royal road towards expansion, nor true sovereignty, through making the labour of men and women a commodity whose price is determined by the Western economies.

It is frightening to hear the Baltic states already debating the possibility of "free trade zones" in the name of "regained sovereignty"; just like the mayor of Leningrad who has already evoked the same perspective for his region. What it amounts to is a competition to accede to some subaltern status in the world hierarchy. It is in this light that one should understand the importance which EEC leaders attach to avoiding political or military upheavals which de facto aggravate the mobility of the labour force. They wish to avoid the chaos of Yugoslavia, negotiate economic agreements with the Baltic states, support Albania if possible, and so on. The new doctrine of the "right of humanitarian interference" has been tailor made for this.

No free circulation of persons

The Schengen convention can limit the breadth of the flows of immigration, but it will not stop the free market from operating, albeit in clandestine form. The market will only open itself unevenly to the East. The capital market, the commodity market, that of services and that of workers will not follow the same rhythms. Indeed it is precisely this distortion that renders still more "dangerous" the possible free circulation of persons.

Far from any doctrine of democracy or the free self-determination of peoples, the attitude of the EEC is dictated by the imperious necessity of controlling henceforth the new European labour force market. It has been a supplementary factor in support of a reinforcement of the internal discipline of the Community and for a consolidation of economic and political union.

The Dutch European Commissar, Frans Andriessen, has already explained that it is necessary to combine "the deepening" of the Community with its "enlargement" to the association countries of its periphery. ★

2. Among the "founding" reports of the Single European Act, the Cecchini report estimated that the dynamic thus opened up would permit in time a positive balance of new jobs of between 1.5 million and 5 million. On the eve of 1992 it is evident that the first effects of "free circulation" are exactly the opposite.

3. *Le Monde*, August 7, 1991.

4. Lionel Stoleru, who was a minister in a right wing government, is now director of the newspaper *The European* and adviser to the Romanian prime minister Petr Roman.

Dutch unions react to government attacks

PREPARATIONS for what will probably become the biggest social struggle in the Netherlands for almost ten years are well under way. On September 17, strikes of two hours or more will take place throughout the country in both the public and private sector. The following weeks will see one-day lightning strikes each day in other plants and offices. New national days of action are scheduled for September 26 and October 7, and a national demonstration will be held in The Hague on October 5.

These are the culminating points in the first phase of a major campaign by a united front of the three main Dutch trade union federations, which has already provoked a crisis in the social democratic party, the PvdA (Partij van de Arbeid), one of the two parties in the coalition government.

ROBERT WENT

THE whole campaign is a reply to new attacks by the government on social security rights:

- Social security benefits for disabled workers (WAO)², which are now related to the income level before becoming unfit to work, will be drastically reduced. More than 800,000 people have a WAO-benefit. This is a direct consequence of the high productivity level of the Dutch economy — the second highest in the world. All those who cannot keep up with the work rhythms are pushed onto the WAO. If the government plans go through, at least 240,000 people will lose a part of their gross income, from 10 or 100 up to 2,000 guilders a month.³

New workers entering the WAO after July 1992 will only receive benefits temporarily, related to their previous income, depending on how long they have worked before becoming unfit to work. After that they will receive only the minimum social benefits, which, according to the calculations of the churches among others, is in fact below the poverty line.

- The other target of the action campaign is a government proposal to punish workers for getting ill. Every time a worker gets ill s/he will lose a day or two of their holidays, and many workers will get only 70% (now in most cases 100%) of their income during the first days of illness.

These plans, launched during the summer holidays, were met by a storm of protest from the trade unions, organizations of disabled people and from parts of the PvdA. But the government went on to

launch another attack, which has led to new protests and which will further strengthen the action campaign; this proposal also breaks the link between wages and social security benefits.

For a whole period there was a direct relation between income gains in the market and public sector and social security benefits. If wage negotiations led to an average rise of 4%, then social security benefits also rose by 4%. This link was broken in the 1980s, governments finding it too expensive especially after the dramatic rise in unemployment. The PvdA has claimed the re-establishment of this linkage as one of the few gains of its participation in the coalition government. However, after a fight between the CDA and PvdA that almost led to the fall of the government, the social democrats gave way to their coalition partner so that the government decided on, and defended in parliament, the breaking of the link.

Widening of income gap

Officially this has had no consequences for people living on social security this year, because tax measures have been taken to counteract the financial effects. But, especially now that inflation is on the rise again, it will mean a widening of the income gap between working people and those on social security.

Immediately after the announcement of the government's plans, a united front of the three main trade union federations was formed in order to resist the attack.

The FNV (Federatie Nederlandse Vakverenigingen), the biggest federation with over one million members, has traditionally had close links with the PvdA. The Christian federation, the CNV (Christelijk Nationaal Vakverbond), organizes over 300,000 people and has close links with the other government party, the CDA. The third federation, the MHP (Middelbaar und Hoger Personeel), which organizes 180,000 better paid higher and middle cadres, is participating for the first time in a campaign of action. The three unions together have printed 5.5 million informational newspapers which are to be distributed door-to-door throughout the country.

Action planned for queen's speech

The first big day of action is planned for September 17, when the government will present its budget plans for 1992 and the queen reads her traditional speech, written by the prime minister, from the throne. The unions have called on workers to get together during the queen's speech to listen to the presentation of the government's plans. Large-screen videos will be installed and demonstrations organized in many towns. Public workers in Amsterdam and dockers in Rotterdam have already decided on a 24-hour strike, stating that a 2-hour strike is insufficient. This has led to tensions between the trade unions, since the CNV and MHP already have a problem with the 2-hour strike and are not in favour of longer strikes in this stage of the campaign. In the days following September 17, new strikes and actions will be organized, culminating in a big demonstration in The Hague on October 5, the Saturday before parliament debates and votes on the government's budget proposals. Actions will continue during the week of the parliamentary proceedings.

What will happen if and when parliament votes through the proposals (probably on October 11) is not clear. The

1. The PvdA of former trade union leader Wim Kok formed a coalition government with the Christian Democrat CDA (Christen Democratisch Appel), led by Ruud Lubbers, after the elections of September 1989. The CDA is the biggest party in parliament, with four seats more (53) than the PvdA (49). The government is headed by Prime Minister Ruud Lubbers, who previously led two governments of the Christian Democrats in alliance with the right-wing liberals of the VVD (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie). Wim Kok, ex-chairman of the one million strong trade union federation FNV, is minister of finances and deputy prime minister.

2. WAO (Wet op de Arbeidsongeschiktheid) is the name of the benefit a worker receives when he or she is no longer capable of work. Special doctors decide how disabled you are. If you are adjudged "40% disabled" you get 40% WAO and are supposed to work for the other 60%. A person will also get unemployment benefit for the 60% if they are unemployed. Not surprisingly employers are not keen on hiring workers for less than 100% time and it is difficult to find a job if you are in WAO.

3. \$1 = 2 Dutch guilders (approx).

First day of action big success

THE THREE trade union federations organizing the campaign against the cuts in social security announced by the Dutch government estimate that more than 600,000 workers went on strike during part of the day on September 17, to listen to the queen's speech in canteens, classrooms and halls. Trade union leaders call this figure "historical" for the Dutch workers' movement, although it is less than the one million they predicted a week ago.

An estimated 100,000 people attended the central meetings organized by the unions; 30,000 in Rotterdam; 20,000 in Amsterdam; 10,000 in Groningen; 6,500 in Emmen; 1,200 in Schiphol in what was the first successful common trade union action ever at this airport. There was a 24 hour dock strike at Amsterdam, Rotterdam and Vlissingen. Throughout the day there were no trams and buses running in Rotterdam and Amsterdam and public transport in the rest of the country was hit by a strike during part of the day. The only place where the strike was a failure was in rail, where only a few workers went on strike, with the direct consequence that the original plans for train strikes on September 26 and October 7 will be rediscussed by the FNV union which had called for them. Intimidation by the employer, divisions between the main unions — only one of them called for a strike, the two others refusing to do so — and the after effects of recent rail strikes for safer work seem to have played an important role here.

Trade union leaders announced that lightning strikes will be organized from now on, among others on Friday September 27, the day before a special PvdA congress will probably decide to put its trust in Wim Kok and to support the cuts proposed by the government. The demonstration in the Hague on October 5 will be very big; all trade union members will get a free ticket in their mail to participate in this demonstration.

Meanwhile the atmosphere in the PvdA is changing. With many angry members having left or spoken out once in a meeting, congress delegations have to be elected, and more and more branch leaderships have decided to accept Wim Kok and his plans, to avoid a governmental crisis followed by an electoral defeat for the PvdA. The trade union leaderships, who had staked everything on rejection of the proposed cuts by the PvdA congress, are now without a strategy. Already some are beginning to say that a final vote by parliament has to be accepted "in our democracy" and will mean the end of the coordinated national campaign — this will then be replaced by much more complicated efforts to gain back what has been taken by the government in the usual contract negotiations. — Robert Went. ★

unions say they will try to get everything the government is about to steal back again, through the normal contract negotiations at the end of the year. But that is obviously not very simple; it is already impossible to do that for important sectors with a two-year contract; and it will be almost impossible for the public sector unions, who will be confronting the government in the contract negotiations. But, more importantly, such an approach would break up the united campaign into a series of fragmented battles by sector or even workplace.

Union leaders lack plan

It is already clear that the trade union leaderships have no plan to continue the fight after the parliamentary decision. Strikes against such a decision will almost certainly be ruled illegal by a judge, and the unions will not be prepared to challenge this with a stepped up fight. The problems looming for this later stage however do not hinder the development of a big campaign at present. An effort can be made to develop links between workers from various sectors and prepare contingency plans should the unions leaderships retreat or accept a compromise.

The main political victim of the govern-

ment plans is the PvdA. The initial launch of the plans led to an uproar in the party. Branch leaderships, chairs of districts and members of local elected authorities adopted motions condemning the new government plans and demanding that they be withdrawn. Party chair Marjanne Sint was on holiday and did not bother to produce an official party reaction. Party leader Wim Kok stated that the plans were "defendable" and himself went off on holiday. However, by the time they got back it was already impossible to stop the fast-spreading fire in the party. Within three weeks more than 500 members had resigned, bringing the total of resignations since the PvdA joined the government to more than 12,000 — one in eight of the former party membership of 98,000.

Support for the PvdA in the opinion polls is lower than ever. If elections were held today, the PvdA would lose half its parliamentary seats and would slide from being the country's second to fourth party. Small groups of members formed a committee "PvdA social again" others launched "Socialists in the PvdA". Trade union leaders with PvdA membership cards have demanded an ad in the papers calling for the PvdA to withdraw its support for the government plans.

All this of course was only a reaction to the plans launched in the summer. In general, PvdA members and voters are very unhappy with the performance of "their" government. The PvdA lost many votes in the two elections (regional and municipal) that were held since the social democrats came into government.

Even PvdA ministers find it hard to explain the difference between this "pink" government and the previous right wing governments. Social democrats have been co-responsible, or in some cases even mainly responsible, for a big rise in house rents, price rises for public transport and petrol, measures that make education increasingly the preserve of the rich and much else.

To stem the rebellion, the party leadership decided to organize a special congress in October, to discuss the future of the social security system. The PvdA leadership also decided that the government plans should be re-discussed and that some of the worst consequences should be tackled. Wim Kok himself presented these decisions of the PvdA leadership, to show that there is no disagreement between the PvdA ministers in the government and the rest of the party leadership. New negotiations were opened with the CDA, but as the Christian democrats refused to change essential points, only slight changes were made.

A new time bomb

Just before the final plans for the WAO were to be presented a new time bomb was set ticking in the government and the PvdA, again placed there by the CDA.

The government had to take a decision on the percentage rise in social security benefits for 1992. One of the handful of the remaining pet projects of the social democrats was attacked when the CDA minister of social affairs, De Vries, strongly supported by the leader of the Christian democrat's parliamentary fraction, proposed to scrap the link between wages and social security. Wim Kok said on TV that this was a step that he could not make "personally, politically and morally", and for three days it looked as if the government was about to fall. In the end, however, the PvdA caved in once again.

But at what price? An opinion poll a few days later showed that more than half of the PvdA's voters had lost confidence in Wim Kok; meanwhile PvdA branches resumed the adoption of anti-government resolutions. Another special meeting of the PvdA leadership came up with new initiatives to resolve the party crisis. Chairwoman Sint stepped down and a proposal by party leader Kok to move the special party congress forward, this time to September 28, was adopted. The agenda of the congress has also been changed. Kok states that he cannot function without the support of his party and that the con-

FMLN regrouping under fire

PRELIMINARY negotiations for a cease fire between the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN)¹ and the Salvadoran government broke down over the summer of 1991, around the question of purging the government army. At the Initiative of the Secretary General of the United Nations Organization (UNO), Carlos Perez de Cuellar², a meeting was organized in New York on 16-17 September 1991 between Salvadoran president Cristiani and some members of his government and the five representatives of the FMLN in the negotiations. To mark the occasion, the FMLN called a unilateral truce from September 13.

PAQUITA GOMEZ

gress will have to decide whether the party still wants to give him its "trust".

This is a clever trick, since it will divert attention from discussions on the attacks on social security or on whether the PvdA should stay in government. Left, critical, or still socialist PvdA members have the choice between two plagues: either to "trust" Wim Kok, meaning that the PvdA stays in government and ends up supporting the latest attacks; or to withdraw support for the government plans, and finish off the government with the risk of new elections in which the PvdA might lose half its votes.

How all this will end is not yet clear. What is very clear however is that the PvdA seems ready to risk almost anything in order to stay in government. For Kok the choice is simple. Either the PvdA proves that it is a "loyal governmental party" in good times and bad. Or the party may break with the Christian democrats, as it did in 1982 after a big campaign by the unions, led by Wim Kok himself, at that time the chair of the FNV, in response to an attack on the social security benefits of sick people by the late Joop den Uyl, at that time the leader of the PvdA.

After that experience the PvdA was out of government for seven years and its leadership wants at all costs to avoid such a situation arising again as a result of this congress or as a result of a campaign by the unions. Unrest in the party and a (temporary, they hope) loss of votes are acceptable to them to avoid a break with the government.

PvdA opposition weak

The party congress can of course decide otherwise, but the opposition in the PvdA is politically and organizationally very weak. And the PvdA today has no alternative party leader available in case Wim Kok feels the party does not "trust" him enough or takes decisions that he cannot work with.

As always the final outcome depends on the relationship of forces, on the real pressure that the mass movement can bring to bear on the government and on and in the PvdA, and on the relationship of forces between the trade union leaderships and combative sectors of the mass movement itself. It is therefore very important that the present campaign succeeds.

As in other countries, the workers movement in the Netherlands desperately needs more self-confidence and therefore new successful social struggles. The importance of the campaign goes beyond winning the concrete demands for which the fight has been launched. A massive campaign of strikes, demonstrations and other actions can prepare the ground for the new alignments, experiences and self-confidence that will be vital for the fight against the attacks of the coming years, including the consequences of the integration of capitalist Europe in 1992. ★

IN JULY and August 1991, the cease-fire negotiations broke down over a fundamental point: the need for a radical purge of the army and an end to its immunity — dramatically illustrated by the fact that the assassins of the six Jesuit priests at the University of Central America (UCA) in November 1989 are still unpunished³.

Nonetheless, a protocol indicating substantial agreement had been signed on April 27, 1991, between the government of the Alliance of National Reconstruction (the far right ARENA) and the FMLN, proposing the dissolution of the numerous forces of police repression (national guard, Hacienda police, and so on) and their replacement by a civilian national police; the submission of the army to the civilian government and a redefinition of its functions and powers; the independence of the judiciary and the nomination of a national attorney for human rights; and the setting up of a Commission of Truth, composed of independent personalities designated by the UN, charged with inquiring into violations of human rights since 1980.

United Nations observers arrive

Moreover, exactly one year after the signature of an agreement on human rights between the FMLN and the government, the team of UN observers for El Salvador (UNOSAL), charged with ensuring respect for human rights, was finally allowed to enter the country on July 26, 1991, despite the opposition of the army and the most reactionary sectors of the oligarchy.

The presence of this team of 90 people (50 civilians, 25 police functionaries and 15 soldiers), with a budget of \$23 million,

will perhaps have a restraining effect on the more barbarous human rights violations, but since its arrival it has been noted for its low profile.

Given the impasse in the negotiations and the army's rejection of a total demilitarization of the country, the FMLN now envisages, as the sole resolution of the armed conflict, a fusion of the guerilla forces and the governmental army, following a sweeping purge of the latter's high command, an important quantitative reduction of the two forces and a radical redefinition of the role of this new army, whose sole function would be territorial defence.

In this perspective, the FMLN has renamed its guerilla forces the "National Army for Democracy" (END) and has reorganized it with a military command and ranks corresponding in all points to that of the governmental army.

In June 1991, Carlos Andres Perez, the social democratic president of Venezuela, proposed that the FMLN — on behalf of Perez de Cuellar's "club of friends" for El Salvador⁴ — unilaterally lay down its arms, in the virtual absence of any democratic guarantees in return.

The Cristiani government obviously leaped on this proposal, which was emphatically rejected by the FMLN.

1. The FMLN is a politico-military front, composed of the following forces: the Salvadoran Communist Party (PCS), National Resistance (RN), the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP), the Revolutionary Party of the Central American Workers (PRTC), and the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL).

2. Before the interruption of negotiations in mid-August 1991, US Secretary of State James Baker and his then Soviet equivalent, Alexander Bessmertnykh, jointly wrote to Perez de Cuellar, asking him to personally intervene — seeking thus to illustrate the "unfreezing" of East-West relations.

3. See IV 174 and 175.

4. In which the Mexican and Colombian presidents and the head of the Spanish government also participate.

Faced with this pressure, the FMLN responded with the slogan "If the armed forces want our arms, they have only to win the war", and launched a major offensive from the departments it controls (Morazan, La Union, North Usulutlan, Cabañas and Chalatenango) in July 1991 — it claimed, at the end of July, to have inflicted 791 "losses" (dead and wounded) to the governmental army in the course of this month.

The army also launched several spectacular operations to attempt to "break" the morale of the FMLN; following the assassination, in April 1991, of FPL comandante Jesus Rojas and 13 of his companions during an ambush at Chalatenango, the comandante of the PRTC was assassinated.

This summer, given the refusal of the army to back down, the FMLN even floated the idea of a new far-reaching offensive of the November 1989 type, aimed at changing the relation of forces in its favour and relaunching the negotiations process.

Parallel to this, the spectre of a coup d'état by the most reactionary sectors of the army should not be excluded; but the United States (the principal backer of the Salvadoran government and army) is very much opposed to this, as it wants its model to maintain a certain legitimacy.

However the US' creature sometimes seems to escape its control; the Salvadoran army has become a true mafia, transforming El Salvador into a centre of the Latin American drugs trade following the dismantling of the Colombian networks; it takes rake offs from the smuggling which is endemic in the country; it blackmails industrialists to assure their protection and has even kidnapped some.

US Congress freezes aid

In 1990, following the massacres perpetrated by the army in November and December 1989, the United States Congress froze \$42.5 million of aid to Salvador, but, on the insistent demand of Bush, it has just unfrozen \$21.5 millions for "non-offensive" aid — between June 1990 and May 1991, the armed forces received \$48 million of military aid.

Like the immense majority of the population, the guerilla combatants have had enough of the war, but they remain sceptical as to what can be negotiated with the "brutes" of the governmental army.

To break out of this impasse, some militants want the FMLN to launch a final offensive — but if the FMLN should take power, what could it make of its victory, isolated in Central and Latin America, with a US economic boycott, if not a direct military intervention, a virtual certainty? The problems experienced by Sandinista Nicaragua have given rise to much reflection.

of a cease fire, once this first step is taken, the causes of the war in El Salvador will not for all that be resolved: the crucial question of agrarian reform, the genuine democratization of society, the impunity of the forces of repression, the right to work for all (unemployment now affecting more than 65% of the active population).

To resolve these problems, in the absence of a seizure of power by means of arms, the leadership of the FMLN wishes to secure, through negotiations, the opening of genuine political space for civil society, the mass movement and opposition (a constituent assembly, radio and television networks, trade union freedoms, and so on) which could lead towards a real change in society.

As José Diaz, a Jesuit at the University of Central America, puts it, El Salvador cannot achieve true democracy without social justice. Formal democracy exists already in terms of the institutions — division of powers, assembly, Supreme Court of Justice, and so on — but without a change of the relation of forces in favour of the people, all this will remain a dead letter.⁵ The FMLN wishes, for its part, to institute an economic, social and political democracy.

Some sectors of the FMLN believe today that the seizure of power can be realized in a political manner, at the presidential elections of 1994 — in which the FMLN plans to run against ARENA, inside a broader political alliance than its current actual forces, in which the Democratic Convergence⁶ and some sectors of the Christian Democracy could participate.

Parallel to the maintenance of armed pressure, the FMLN is then preparing for participation in political and parliamentary life — on July 29, 1991, comandante Shafik Handal, leader of the Salvadoran CP, announced in Mexico that preparations to transform the FMLN into a political party were underway, and that the organization would participate in the 1994 elections, even if the cease-fire were not signed.

To defeat the far right and its neo-liberal project in 1994, an alliance between the FMLN and the Christian Democracy seems indispensable. For this, it will be necessary to define an economic and social project around which different political and economic forces could regroup.

Left parties increase share of vote

The legislative elections of March 1991 produced an important modification of the Salvadoran political panorama⁷; the parties to the left of the Christian Democracy (DC) — notably the Democratic Convergence — obtained a significant percentage of the votes. On the other hand, the DC, which had not dared to ally

itself with the Democratic Convergence, for fear of losing votes, received its lowest electoral score ever.

For the moment, the DC's priorities are electoral rather than political, and it is seeking the centre ground, placing itself above the ideological melee — but the space at the centre is growing increasingly narrow.

In the face of the hammer blows of the Cristiani government against the public sector and the agricultural cooperatives, there has been a radicalization of the National Union of Workers and Peasants (UNOC), the mass component of the DC. The leadership of this organization has recently, for the first time, called for the demilitarization of society, a theme dear to the FMLN.

As for the General Confederation of Labour (the CGT, the trade union federation linked to the DC), it has openly opposed extreme privatization. The free market programme of the government represents a frontal attack on the social base of the DC — the middle classes and wage earners.

Today, the FMLN is strong enough to propose alliances and present pluralist and hegemonic positions. It already possesses a political structure in 12 of the 14 departments of the country. Contrary to the claims of the Cristiani government, the FMLN is more a political movement than a military organization: very many of its cadres will undoubtedly succeed in reintegrating themselves rapidly in civilian life and the mass struggle. Its political apparatus is very well structured; it already has more diplomatic representatives abroad than the Salvadoran government.

Models of alternative society constructed

If the perspective of the 1994 presidential election is important, the FMLN bases itself more on the conscious organization of the population against the ARENA regime, installing models of an alternative society in the zones it controls.

Since the signing of the 1987 Esquipulas Accords, the Salvadoran government has been obliged to allow the collective repatriation of the communities — essentially agricultural — which had fled the country during the great waves of repression in the years 1980-82.

These peasants, already well organized in the refugee camps in Honduras, Nicaragua or Panama, have returned to take possession of lands abandoned because of the conflict and establish "model" villages based on self-management.

Thus, for example at Nuevo Gualcho⁸, in the north of Usulutlan, 315 families repatriated from Honduras have functioned since March 1990 according to a system of combining family cultivation with a collective economy; half the land is divided individually according to the productive capacity of the families, and the

remainder is cultivated collectively, the people working three days a week for the collectivity, and three days on their lands. Nuevo Gualcho has already become self-sufficient, and is now trying to sell its surplus on the exterior market, to raise funds for the benefit of the community (construction of durable housing, development of the school and health centre, and so on). Clothes, shoes and tin for the inhabitants are made in collective workshops.

The inhabitants are organized by sector of habitation and by sector of work, general management being the responsibility of a leadership of eight people, presided over by a woman; each leader is elected and recallable at any moment. The goal is to create a pole of development which can restimulate the will to organize in the neighbouring communities, whose inhabitants profit already from the health centre and school at Nuevo Gualcho.

Of course, the authorities use all the means at their disposal to hinder these "subversive" projects; the army harasses the communities on a virtually daily basis; the government organizes the boycotting of the agricultural or artisanal products of the communities so as to financially strangle them; their schools and health centres are not recognized officially and receive no government aid, and so on.

Today, the FMLN is seeking to accelerate the repatriation of the communities exiled in Costa Rica or Belize, so that more of these symbolic projects can be launched. But, for the moment, communities like Nuevo Gualcho or Segundo Montes (a community of 10,000 people repatriated in the Morazano) still depend entirely on the financial aid of foreign non-governmental organizations.

The FMLN can, at present, guarantee the safety of these "islands of socialism" inside a country led by the oligarchy and the army, because of the relation of military forces and the presence of a structure like ONUSAL; its ultimate goal is to organize a significant sector of the population in this manner.

In the light of its perspective of a medium term cease fire, the FMLN has been preparing the demobilization of its combatants for a year now — it has even surveyed them to find out what they would like to do upon their return to civilian life. The FMLN is aware that it has at its dispo-



sal a force which can play a very significant role in the rebuilding of the country and the revival of agricultural production (20% of Salvadoran territory is today completely deserted and in ruins); its army, disciplined, conscious and organized.

Economic programme sketched out

Advised by European and Latin American economists and by Salvadoran academics, the FMLN has already sketched out economic programmes for non capitalist development on a national scale, envisaging, amongst other goals, the diversification of production beyond the traditional agro-export sectors of coffee, sugar and cotton, completely devalued on the world market.

Parallel to the movement of the repatriated communities, the popular peasant organizations are in the process of relaunching occupations of untilled land, faced with the incapacity of the government to resolve this crucial problem. They are also combatting the projects of ARENA, who wish to parcel out the lands distributed to cooperatives by the Christian Democratic government, under the demagogic slogan "All Salvadorans should become property owners".

Each stake is leased out for 30 years, but it is obvious that once the land of the cooperatives is divided, the peasants will be bankrupted in a few years and will be then expropriated ad hoc by the law — this measure seeks in fact to allow the big landowners to recuperate the lands which they had to give up during the agrarian reform instituted by the Duarte government. Beyond this, the government wish-

es to smash up what remains of collective organization in the countryside.

The peasant organizations have won some victories through these occupations, forcing some landowners to sell their land. But, when this is not the case, the occupants are turfed out by the extremely violent interventions of the army and the Hacienda police.

But the struggle in the countryside is not everything — the combination of the war and a "classical" rural exodus have meant that half the Salvadoran population now live in towns — the capital, San Salvador, now has 1 million inhabitants. A quarter of the inhabitants of the capital were affected by the earthquake of October 1986 (particularly the poorest layers); most of them have not been rehoused and now live in shanty towns, without any health services. It was these marginal and precarious neighbourhoods that were hit hardest by the November 1989 offensive; the habitations were bombed then burned

5. As an example of how Salvadoran "justice" functions; in June 1991, a huge scandal shook the Salvadoran oligarchy — 21 important industrialists (including two members of the President's family) were compromised in a major banking fraud involving \$15 million. Despite warrants for their arrest, all the suspects had time to put their affairs in order and flee the country.

6. Democratic Convergence was created in 1988, following the return from exile of the principal leaders of the Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR), the political ally of the FMLN, and Guillermo Ungo and Ruben Zamora of the Revolutionary National Movement (MNR), which is linked to social democracy. It has contested two elections — in 1988 and 1991 — and supports the majority of the demands advanced by the FMLN.

7. During the March 1991 general elections, the DC obtained 27.96% of the votes — barely half of its 1985 vote; ARENA 44.3%; the Party of National Conciliation (PCN, rightist) 8.9%; Democratic Convergence 12.6% — against 3.8% in 1989; and the National Democratic Union (the legal formation of the CP) 2.7%.

8. See *Pensamiento Propio*, no. 82, Managua, July 1991.

to the ground by the army, leaving their occupants once again on the street.

Faced with this, the popular urban movements have organized occupations of land and have met violent repression. Thus, on August 9, 1991, in the neighbourhood of Soyapango, in San Salvador, the national police, the anti-riot brigades, the Hacienda police, the first artillery brigade and a unit of parachutists — between 400 and 500 soldiers altogether — expelled a community of 300 families (1,800 people) which had occupied unused municipal land since March 1991, under the guidance of the Council of Marginal Communities (CCM).

Despite the presence of numerous Salvadoran human rights organizations, this expulsion was carried out in a military fashion, with tear gas and water cannons to convince the recalcitrant — seven members of the popular movement were moreover arrested and detained for several days. The members of this community have been "rehoused" in a totally unhealthy site on the outskirts of town.

The urban commandos of the FMLN responded immediately to this violent expulsion and growing property speculation — on August 12 and 14, construction sites in the residential quarters of San Salvador were blown up. Despite this incessant tension, the ARENA government seems to have gained some support among the population, particularly the urban dwellers who have less access to the FMLN media⁹.

A major propaganda offensive presents the guerillas as dangerous terrorists, responsible for all the evils of the country. San Salvador is covered with publicity placards, where, next to a photograph of a young girl who has lost a leg, the message "FMLN, the children have had enough of your bombs" is written; there are also numerous posters advertising the "struggle against drugs with the army", and so on.

Artificial growth rate

Beyond this, thanks to the colossal economic aid provided by the United States, and the repatriation of foreign currency by exiles (\$550 million a year), the government has succeeded in maintaining an artificial rate of industrial growth. Thus, the standard of living of those who have a fixed job (barely 30% of the active population) is higher than in the neighbouring countries; a Salvadoran teacher earns \$330, against \$80 for a Guatemalan, although the cost of living is around 20% higher. This situation responds to the aspirations of the urban middle classes, who are precisely those who are exposed to the full flood of government disinformation — the newspapers close to the regime and the audiovisual media are full of edifying formulas on human rights violations by the "terrorists" of the FMLN, and victorious army communiqués.

Having almost totally abandoned the countryside, the government is making strenuous efforts to transform the capital into a modern and luxurious shop window, with a profusion of commercial centres, chains of foreign restaurants, leisure parks, and so on. Despite this, the vigour of the popular movement is evident in the profusion of political and trade union graffiti throughout the town centre.

The November 1989 offensive was followed by significant repression against all the components of the popular movement. The most significant of these, the National Union of Salvadoran Workers (UNTS) which, since February 1986, has united nearly all the workers' and peasants' trade unions to the left of Christian Democracy, as well as organizations for the defence of human rights like COMADRES (which represents the families of the disappeared), has had nearly 1,300 militants arrested, around 80 murdered, and had to function for four months in semi-clandestinity.

Following this experience and the upheavals in Eastern Europe, this federation entered a period of reflection and elaboration, from which it concluded that the trade unions had neglected their role as bearers of the social and economic demands of the workers, instead defending exclusively political positions, and following too closely the line of the FMLN.

To remedy this, the UNTS is now concentrating on the organization of general assemblies, sector by sector, to define the concrete demands of each category of workers, and find the best method of combatting the neo-liberal project of the government, which aims to privatize everything nationalized by the DC.

Following the closure by government decree (against the will of the national assembly) of the Institute for the Regulation of Provisions (IRA) and the dismissal of its 1200 employees, the UNTS organized a demonstration of civil servants in San Salvador on August 12, 1991, which attracted 12,000 people from the capital and its periphery. The IRA, established by the Duarte government, existed to control prices and the distribution of basic food products.

After its election, the Cristiani government, partisans of the "free market" and of "laissez-faire", removed all the prerogatives of this organization, which rapidly became an empty shell, under the pretext of struggling against the corruption which prevailed under the rule of the Christian Democrats.

This closure of a nationalized enterprise — which followed that of the Institute of Urban Housing (IVU), responsible for the construction of cheap housing — is the prelude to the privatization of the majority of public services (telecommunications, electricity, water, hospitals, education, and so on).

ARENA wishes to reduce the assets of

the state to a minimum, in line with neo-liberal conceptions but also so that, if the left is victorious in the 1994 elections, it will find itself in charge of the army and police alone. Privatization is also intended to concentrate power in the hands of the oligarchy and the army.

The demonstration of August 12, hailed as a success by wide sectors of the media, was followed by a general strike in the civil service on August 19, which was supported by 50-90,000 civil servants and municipal employees (the private sector employs less than 400,000 people). During this day of action, the centre of San Salvador was the scene of a rally at which the trade unions and human rights organizations explained the reasons for their struggle.

These two initiatives form part of a more global programme of struggle developed by the UNTS, which seeks to make the population aware of the problems posed by privatization; massive dismissals first, then higher prices for services which should be provided by the state — indeed the sale of certain sectors to US imperialism.

The UNTS is also leading a campaign for the defence of the purchasing power of wages. ARENA has liberalized prices and suppressed the protectionism introduced by the DC (which was already far from adequate), and consumers now find themselves at the mercy of the manufacturers and the agricultural speculators.

In the past two years, the prices of milk, cooking oil, cereals and beans have doubled. The government technocrats claim, with the aid of a rigged price index, that inflation was only 23% in 1990, despite the increase in the price of petrol derivatives caused by the Gulf War¹⁰ — they argue that therefore wage increases are not justified.

The FMLN knows that a military solution to the conflict which would be favourable to it is a more than improbable hypothesis. In addition to the tiredness of the people and even its own combatants, there is now an unfavourable regional and international context that has provoked numerous debates inside the Salvadoran revolutionary movement.¹¹ In this context, the choice made by the FMLN, to encourage the development of the popular and trade union movement, is essential. The outcome of the negotiations with the government depends as much on the relationship of forces in the social and political domain as in the military field. In the eventuality of a cease-fire, the role of the mass movement would be still more determinant. ★

9. According to a survey reported by the *Bulletin of the ANN*, number 246, July 17, 1991.

10. The Salvadoran army, preoccupied with its own battles at home, sent no troops to the Gulf, unlike its Honduran equivalent. But the Cristiani government generously offered the US Army the equivalent of \$5 million of its best coffee to supply GI bases in Saudi Arabia.

11. See IV 206.

Sandinistas hold first congress

THE CONGRESS was prepared through 1,374 assemblies in which more than 47,000 members and affiliates participated, representing 43% of the total membership. According to the official report made to the congress, the FSLN has 110,000 members, out of a total Nicaraguan population of about 3.5 million.

This is an impressive figure if compared to the 600,000 members of the Brazilian PT, the principal anticapitalist party in Latin America (Brazil has a population of 132 million).

It seems that following the electoral defeat there has been a wave of people joining the Front. While this is partly due to an easing of the conditions for joining the FSLN, it is nonetheless true that this wave of adhesions is also evidence of the vitality of the FSLN in a socio-political context where it is more useful to have a UNO (the governing right wing coalition) card to keep a job in the public service, or to obtain a loan or a license as a small trader.

The loss of governmental power has moreover obliged the FSLN apparatus to slim itself down drastically; the number of fulltimers has fallen from 3,400 to 200.

Experience of opposition beneficial

Despite these difficulties, the experience of opposition, implying as it does a divide — a “de-fusion” — between the Front and the state apparatus has been rather beneficial for the Sandinistas, leading to a revitalization of the structures at different levels, and a greater freedom of action for the Sandinista mass organizations.

On the other hand, in the light of the statistics on the composition of the congress, it appears that the Front lacks “young blood”; less than 6% of the delegates were aged less than 26 years whereas the majority of the Nicaraguan population is less than 18 years old, only 17.5% of the delegates were women and agricultural and industrial workers were under-represented.

The congress, at which more than 500 delegates participated, was a forum for lively discussion but its main function from the point of view of the leadership was less to hold a true debate than as a pedagogic exercise with regard to the base.

There were some hundreds of interventions, but these related only indirectly to the challenges confronting the Front and the masses. The preparatory debate was couched in sometimes violent terms, notably in the Sandinista press and in the other

THE first Congress of the Nicaraguan Sandinista Liberation Front (FSLN) took place in mid-July. Present at the congress was Eric Toussaint, a member of the Belgian Socialist Workers Party (POS/SAP — Belgian section of the Fourth International), who sent us this report.

ERIC TOUSSAINT

media (see IV 206). In the course of these pre-Congress debates, the “moderates” defended the thesis of the “social pause”, the entente with the Chamorro-Lacayo government and support for its economic measures (austerity, privatizations, and so on). They criticized the untimely strikes led by the Sandinista trade unions and claimed to be thus preparing the ground for a Sandinista electoral victory in 1996.

The concessions that they envisage would permit the maintenance of Sandinista control over the army, which would guarantee the legal return of the Front to power in 5 years. Amongst the “moderates” can be found Humberto Ortega, head of the army, Sergio Ramirez, head of the Sandinista group in the National Assembly and new member of the national leadership, Victor Tirado Lopez, one of the 9 comandantes, Edmundo Jarquin, vice-president of the Sandinista parliamentary group, Herty Lewittes, ex-minister of tourism and Martinez Cuenca, formerly responsible for economic policy.

Danger of electoralism

The opponents of this so-called line of “co-government” argue for the need to intransigently defend the living standards of the masses, jobs and the revolutionary conquests. They argued that there was a danger of the FSLN’s becoming an electoralist party.

This debate was not central to the congress, only being reintroduced in a roundabout way at the end for example in a speech by Humberto Ortega. The principal protagonists of the debate which preceded the congress remained silent.

Why? Between April and July 1991, there was a clear radicalization in the speeches of Daniel Ortega (see IV 209) in response to the incessant attacks of the bourgeoisie which accelerated the process of dismantling of the revolutionary state. From this verbal radicalization, the FSLN then passed to action; it constituted a Front of Popular Struggle in which the community movement in defence of the urban property reform played a new role.

Nonetheless, the mobilization was insufficient to stop the parliamentary UNO group from passing decrees on the ownership of housing. The parliamentary Sandinista group withdrew from the national assembly in mid-June.

This withdrawal, for an undetermined period, united the Sandinista ranks. It allowed the FSLN congress to reaffirm its unity, which constitutes an element of strength.

But to the extent that the congress participants have not debated and defined a clear and coherent orientation in opposition to the attacks of the bourgeoisie and attempted to reconstitute a hegemonic revolutionary bloc, the contradictions which have run through the Front in the pre-congress period are going to deepen. The more so in that the withdrawal of the Sandinista parliamentary group from the national assembly has not put an end to the policy of dialogue with the counter-revolutionary ruling coalition.

A conflictual alliance

Indeed, the leadership of the FSLN maintains a conflictual alliance with the head of government, President Chamorro, and her eminence grise Lacayo. Chamorro and Lacayo disagree with the aggressive anti-Sandinista attitude of the UNO parliamentary group, where a majority alliance is emerging between Alfredo Cesar, UNO president of the national assembly, and the partisans of Vigilio Godoy, vice-president of the republic. The fact that the Sandinista parliamentary group has withdrawn from the national assembly diminishes the legitimacy of the latter and reinforces the executive, which favours a *progressive* dismantling of the revolutionary conquests.

For its part, the FSLN leadership wishes to make concessions to the executive to undermine the unity of the UNO and thus to scale down the attacks of the latter. The Chamorro-Lacayo duo seek for their part to mollify the FSLN while putting the finishing touches to the counter revolution. What we are currently witnessing is then a war of position rather than a war of movement. Nonetheless the elements of insta-

bility are such that the situation could change after the congress.

Introducing the congress, the national leadership of the FSLN presented a written balance sheet of the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua in general, and the last few years in particular.

This document merits being studied in depth. It constitutes a genuine aid to the comprehension of the Front's strategy, despite evident gaps. Correctly, the balance sheet says that "with this report one will have an instrument for better understanding and evaluating the efforts of the FSLN and its action in the struggle to open a new horizon to the people of Nicaragua".

Ebb of revolution explained

The text puts forward a pertinent explanation of the ebb of the revolution: "the policy of aggression against Nicaragua, practiced by successive US governments... led to a militarization of the economy and of society. The FSLN fell into practices foreign to the democratic tradition of Sandinism, accentuating the vertical character of the Front.

"On the other hand, the profound economic and social crisis which the socialist countries have entered diminished the capacity of the Sandinistas to face up to the diverse effects of the war".

The document forcibly insists on the justice of the self criticism made at the Sandinista assembly meeting at El Cruceiro in June 1990, under the pressure of important social struggles: "Independently of the fact that certain of our internal problems have objective roots, we must submit ourselves to criticism as a necessary condition for the elimination of these problems, and, moreover, because, in very many cases, they have been reinforced by attitudes and personal or collective styles. The national leadership assumes the principal responsibility of not having corrected in an adequate manner these practices and, in certain cases, of having reinforced them".

Practices mentioned by the leadership include authoritarianism, the absence of sensitivity in the face of the positions and concerns of the rank and file, the stifling of criticism, the bureaucratic styles of the leadership, sectarianism in the mass organizations, the excessive professionalism of the party structures, the preference given to those with administrative responsibilities, and so on.

The part devoted to the errors of the Sandinistas in relation to the peasantry is particularly interesting. It allows the FSLN to begin to understand why a part of the peasantry, notably at the level of the poor peasants and small proprietors, passed to the side of the Contras.

Since the election defeat, the insistence on the need for dialogue and common action with the peasant base of the Contras is a positive factor.

The principal weaknesses of the text reside in what is not said. There is a total absence of reference to the generalized arming of the civilians as a means utilized by the revolution to defend itself and consolidate its conquests. And this is not by accident, because in its new programme, the FSLN advocates the total disarmament of the civilian population.

This constitutes the abandonment of a vital part of the revolutionary conquests. Nothing is said either on the balance sheet of the Sandinista Defence Committees which, if they have finally disappeared, played an essential role in the popular mobilization up until 1984-85.

Nothing is said on the absence of a policy of workers' control in the factories, the service enterprises or in agriculture.¹

In fact the balance sheet of the Front, like its new programme, limits the democratic horizon to the bourgeois democratic institutions which, if they constitute a formidable advance in relation to a century of oligarchic dictatorship, constitute also a limit to social and political democracy.

One of the errors of the FSLN in the last few years has consisted in refusing to further develop democracy.² Moreover, the balance sheet of the FSLN contains no criticism of the IMF-type measures of economic and monetary adjustment introduced by the Sandinista government, above all from June 1988, and pursued by the UNO government.

This has allowed a number of Sandinista leaders to support the economic policy of Lacayo and congratulate themselves on its success in terms of stabilization of inflation at the price of economic recession.

Leadership elected as team

One of the most hotly debated subjects during the congress concerned the leadership. The outgoing national leadership (Dirección Nacional — DN) succeeded in convincing the congress participants to proceed to the election of the new national leadership as a team.

The old leadership has thus been reelected, without really changing because the two new members, Rene Nunez and Sergio Ramirez, functioned already as part of the leadership, the first as secretary of the DN and the second as head of the parliamentary fraction.

The outgoing DN wished to thus reaffirm its unity and avoid the non-election of certain of its members who had been heavily criticized by the rank and file. After the vote, Daniel Ortega, who became general secretary of the party, promised that at the next congress the members of the DN would be elected individually.

The continuation of this verticalist behaviour was underlined when, during a break in the congress, Daniel Ortega addressed the mass meeting in Revolution

Square to commemorate the 12th anniversary of the revolution and proposed that it ratify the composition of the new leadership, at a time when the congress had not yet begun to vote on the question.

On the other hand, in a new sign of the FSLN's vitality, the latter attributed genuine powers to the Sandinista assembly, powers comparable to those of a central committee.

The composition of the new Sandinista assembly is particularly interesting, with the leaders of the popular organizations winning the most votes. Several moderate Sandinista leaders and/or close advisors of the Comandantes were not re-elected.

Internationalist thread expressed

The internationalist thread in Sandinism was enthusiastically expressed at different moments of the congress, in particular during the speeches of Osmani Cienfuegos, member of the political bureau of the Cuban Communist Party, of Lula, president of the PT, and of Joaquin Villalobos, member of the general command of the Salvadoran FMLN.³

This internationalist orientation was also present in the balance sheet of the leadership and in the positions taken by Daniel Ortega.

The congress decided to call a rally of international solidarity in Managua in October 1991. This initiative should, we hope, permit the revitalization of solidarity with the Nicaraguan, Central American and Caribbean revolutions. ★

1. The writings of the Sandinistas in favour of workers' control are very rare. See in particular "Workers' Control in the Private Enterprises" in "Participatory Democracy in Nicaragua", CIERA editions, Managua, undated.

2. See the resolution of the 13th world congress of the Fourth International in *International Marxist Review* no. 11/12.

3. Numerous international delegations from more than 40 countries were present. Representatives of social democratic parties from France, the Spanish state (the latter left the congress to protest against the presence of a delegation from Herri Batasuna), Sweden, Germany, and the Dominican Republic were present.

The French delegate argued for a much closer relationship between the FSLN and the Socialist International but did not convince the congress. The Communist Parties of Cuba, the Soviet Union (a member of the CPSU's Political Bureau), China, Vietnam, North Korea, France, the Spanish state and several Latin American countries were represented.

Also present were representatives of the Brazilian PT, the Tupamaros of Uruguay, the PUM, UNIR and Communist Party of Peru, the Mexican PRD and PT, the FMLN of El Salvador, the UNRG, BS and PTID from the Dominican Republic, AD-M19 and UCELN from Colombia, and the Lavalas organization from Haiti. Three sections of the Fourth International were represented, the Mexican PRT, the French LCR and the Belgian POS.

The far left from the imperialist countries was virtually absent; apart from the aforementioned sections of the Fourth International, there was only the Mao-Stalinist PTB from Belgium and the MK-LKI from the Basque country. Also present at the congress were Verigio Cerezo, the former Christian Democratic president of Guatemala, and representatives of the Mexican PRI, the Bolivian MIR which is currently in power, the Libyan regime, and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Electoral fraud and free trade

CONTRARY to the claims of the Mexican government, which have been widely reproduced in the international press, the elections to parliament and half of the senate of August 18, 1991, were among the most fraudulent in Mexican history.

International Viewpoint talked to Edgar Sanchez, a member of the leadership of the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT — Mexican section of the Fourth International), who was a candidate in these elections on the Socialist Electoral Front (FES) slate, about the current social and political situation in his country. The interview was conducted by Paquita Gomez in Mexico City on August 22, 1991.

WERE the elections of August 18, 1991 as clean as the government media has been claiming?

The government decided to have recourse to fraud on the grand scale in the aftermath of the presidential election of July 1988, when the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) suffered an important setback at the hands of a formation around Cuauhtemoc Cardenas¹. The population came into the streets to challenge fraud during the elections, and the election of the PRI's candidate was called into question; the PRI also lost ground in the parliament and senate, where a significant number of opposition deputies were elected. For the first time since the 1930s, four non-PRI senators were elected.

In order that such a situation should not arise again, the government entered on a three-point strategy. Firstly it relaunched the satellite "rump" parties designed to divide the opposition; in 1988 these parties had gone in with Cardenas. A first success was gained by supporting the Party of the Cardenist Front for National Reconstruction (PFCRN), which took this name to sow confusion among Cardenas' supporters.

Then, the PRI established a political accord with the National Action Party (PAN — a party which has existed for 50 years and which is the traditional party of the conservative right). This was quite easy, since the present PAN leadership shares the same economic programme as the Salinas government. Finally, it decided to electorally defeat Cardenas' Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

To this end the PRI set about organizing a new fraud. In 1990, it organized a census of the whole population which arrived at some surprising conclusions: in the states where the PRI had been defeated in 1988, the population had stopped growing, while in those where it had kept con-

trol, growth continued and had even become more rapid. These findings did not tally with the normal tendencies of demographic growth; thus, according to official figures, the population of Mexico City is no longer growing, although it is known the world over that it is one of the fastest growing cities on the planet.

The second stage of the fraud took place in 1991 at the time of the drawing up of the new electoral lists — a central demand of the opposition, but which the government turned to its own advantage. In the course of this process, the number of voters fell significantly; according to the census, some 46 million citizens should have the right to vote; however only 39 million appear on the electoral lists. Interestingly, it was in the strongholds of the opposition that the voters disappeared.

The fraud continued when it came to distributing the voters' cards. According to official figures only 36 million Mexican came to get their cards. The government has tried to explain this as a result of the citizens' electoral apathy. However, many people who the PRT was hoping to run as candidates, and who cannot be suspected of a lack of interest in the political process, were unable to get their cards. Thus, Rosario Ibarra, one of our candidates for a senatorial post² only got her voting card on the eve of the poll. At least ten million Mexicans of voting age were unable to vote.

Fraud was still being practised on election day. We realized that it would be less blatant than in former times, and the government was banking on a low turnout. This was in the PRI's interests, since with only 35% of the votes they got the majority of the seats. Furthermore, the government can manipulate the abstention figures to produce new votes for the PRI.

In 1988 many opposition representatives went into the voting booths to observe the balloting and the count; this did not happen in 1991. The government



took advantage of this fact to revert to its old ways, including: the "carrousel" (a bus full of PRI partisans who go around all the voting stations in a particular city); voting *tacos* (whereby each member of a government union receives ten or 15 voting slips, but instead of putting them in one at a time they are all stuffed in folded together); election breakfasts (PRI members offer a substantial breakfast to whole districts and then take them to vote in a group).

The PRI also prevented opposition representatives from entering the voting stations and some people were prevented from voting. In the stations where there were no opposition representatives, the PRI took all the votes and shared them out with the "rump" parties.

■ So what was the real result of the election?³

We expected that the PRI would regain lost ground, above all because of the problems of the PRD and PAN. But the vote was so fraudulent that it is practically impossible to discern the real votes. In any case, the PRI was able to get more than two thirds of the assembly seats.

■ Will this "overwhelming victory" for the PRI lead to the constitutional

1. In the July 1988 presidential elections, the PRI claimed more than 50% of the votes after unprecedented fraud. Cuauhtemoc Cardenas — a presidential candidate who had broken with the PRI — was officially credited with 31% of the vote. The results led to a significant movement of popular protest.

In January 1989, Cardenas founded his own party, the PRD, pulling in the Mexican CP, far left organizations, some members of the PRT and many intellectuals.

2. Mother of a politically "disappeared" person, Rosario Ibarra de Piedra heads the Eureka Committee, which defends Mexican political prisoners, "disappeared", exiles and victims of harassment, as well as the National Front against Repression (FNCR). She was the first woman to be presented as a candidate in a Mexican presidential election, being the PRT's candidate in 1982 and 1988.

3. The official results are PRI, 61.5%; PAN, 17.7%; PRD, 8.3%; PFCRN, 4.4%; PRT, 0.6%.

changes that Salinas needs to facilitate his liberal economic reforms?

Changes to existing laws and the constitution are indispensable for the carrying through of the Free Trade Treaty between the USA and Canada⁴. The composition of the parliament elected in 1988 obliged the PRI to negotiate with certain opposition groups in parliament, since the ruling party no longer had the two thirds of the deputies needed to introduce legislative and constitutional changes. Now they have enough deputies to pass what they want.

■ In the past year the cost of living has risen rapidly. Has this anything to do with the Free Trade Treaty?

The population's living standards had already fallen significantly by the end of the reign of De La Madrid, but things have got even worse under Salinas. He has succeeded in halting runaway inflation, but only by making terrible cuts in social spending.

The Free Trade Accord is the foundation stone of Salinas' policy. In his view, Mexico will soon become a developed country, but to do this it must first expose itself fully to world competition and thus fully remove the customs and trade barriers that currently protect Mexican production. Of course this is a delusion. Our country cannot compete with the United States. Perhaps this treaty will make us part of the developed countries, but only in the sense in which Harlem or Puerto Rico are.

The only thing Mexico has to attract foreign capital is cheap labour, meaning the establishment of yet more *maquiladoras*⁵ which will compete with similar regions in Taiwan or Hong Kong. Salinas' team is gambling with the health and future of Mexicans, since they are allowing polluting factories, which would be forbidden in Canada and the USA, to be set up here.

To achieve its aims and get into the good books of imperialism, it is absolutely essential that the government modify the national labour law, thereby wiping out all the conquests of the trade unions and the wage workers, and suppress collective agreements and the few existing social benefits.

The Free Trade Treaty has already led to enterprise closures and factory bankruptcies owing to exposure to North American competition. Many nationalized enterprises have been privatized. All this plays a role in the unprecedented deterioration of the Mexican population's living standards, illustrated by the recent appearance of cholera here.

■ Why do you think that the PRI was able to win back even more votes than can be explained by fraud?

With the aim of re-establishing the consensus broken in 1988 and control over the population, the PRI government set up, after Salinas' election, a "solidarity

Violent struggle for land

ON June 30, 1991, Hector Montes Parra, a member of the General People's Worker and Peasant Union (UGOCP), and of the PRT (Mexican section of the Fourth International), was murdered by a group of hired killers at Nopaltepec in the state of Veracruz. It seems certain that the killers mistook their target, intending in fact to murder his brother Margarito Montes Parra, a national leader of the UGOCP and a member of the PRT's political committee, who has received many death threats.

This murder follows that of 10 other members and regional leaders of the UGOCP in the valley of Papaloapan since January 1991. In this region the organization has been conducting a bitter land struggle with occupations of large properties and demands for genuine land reform.

The big landowners, whose interests are threatened, have used murder as a way of discouraging the organization and the resistance of landless peasants. They are all the more violent since, given the coming into force of the Free Trade Treaty with the US and Canada, much is at stake in control of these fertile lands. ★

programme". This thing is a gigantic swindle.

Following IMF advice, the government's economic policy consists of reducing as much as possible public spending on sectors considered "unproductive", such as health, education, employment, housing and so on. At the same time as carrying out these brutal cuts, it has embarked on a programme which has a basically ideological function.

This is a programme for collaboration between the government and the population: the inhabitants of a neighbourhood put forward a project for building houses, fresh water supplies and so on and undertake to provide the labour and some of the funds. The government, under the so-called solidarity programme, comes up with the rest of the cash. However, the amount invested is far less than under the old social programmes.

The point of this programme is to polish up the state/PRI's image and to present it as paternalistic and all-powerful. The social needs are no longer considered as an obligation of the government to its people, but as a product of the government's goodness of heart. The radio and TV are full of spots on the solidarity programme with slogans of the type: "together we are stronger" and the like.

This was used by Salinas to obtain the legitimacy that he lacked when he took over as president. He used the programme to visit all corners of the country, giving out property titles, opening building sites and so on.

This gigantic propaganda effort — together with the inability of the opposition, above all the Cardenists, who were basing their hopes on false electoral calculations, and were incapable of mobilizing the population — meant that it was predictable that the PRI would regain ground. But the spectacular results of the PRI were for the most part dependent on fraud.

■ Will the government go as far as

to privatize the Mexican oil industry, which is a symbol of Mexican nationalism?

The search for and exploitation of oil is constitutionally considered as a national right, protected from private interests. However, now anything can happen, including the complete abandonment of the last conquest of the Mexican revolution, the non-re-election of the president of the republic.

There have been rumours that Salinas' team is considering his re-election. However, this is a very sensitive question; it was one of the sparks for the Mexican revolution in 1905 when the dictator Porfirio Diaz refused to recognize his defeat at the hands of Francisco Madero. The mere fact that the Salinists can consider such a proposal is a sign of their confidence. However, in my view, if they try this there will be a huge scandal and probably a new split in the PRI.

■ How would the population react to the privatization of the oil industry?

A reaction is possible. However, the oil industry has given rise to one of the most powerful unions in the country, upon which rests one of the country's most corrupt and repressive union bureaucracies. One of the Salinas' government's first acts was to imprison these "rotten" leaders who had seemed above the law and then to destroy their power. This was a very popular battle and Salinas took advantage of the fact to inflict defeats on the union. The whole affair has undermined national pride in the oil industry, which has become identified with corruption and abuses of privilege by the union bureaucrats.

■ The supporters of Cardenas' PRD seem very demoralized by the result of the election in which they gained only 8% of the vote.

Even without the fraud, the PRD's vote has dropped. The July 1988 elections created a mirage; Cardenas believed that

he could form a new party on the basis of the significant number of votes he got in that election. He did not understand that it was the fact that he represented a break with the PRD that led the majority of the voters to support the opposition, without feeling any strong positive attraction for this or that opposition party.

This had become clear as early as summer 1989 in the state of Lower California on the US frontier. In 1988 Cardenas' coalition, the National Democratic Front (FDN), defeated Salinas. Little more than a year later, the PRD was confident of winning the election for governor. The PRI did indeed lose, but it was the PAN that won, not the PRD.

This did not mean that the majority of voters had suddenly swung right. In 1988 people thought that the PRD was their best bet to overturn the PRI, while in 1989 they put their money on the PAN.

In 1988, with the exception of the PRT and a number of other small groups, the entire socialist left decided that it was necessary to take the electoral road to getting rid of the PRI and that, therefore, an alliance with Cardenas was indispensable.

The latter, meanwhile, believed that he could besiege the central government by winning local elections, the 1991 legislative elections and finally the 1994 presidential election. Many people also believed religiously in this perspective. However, in reality the votes for Cardenas in 1988 did not in any way represent voter support for the PRD as a party.

A whole series of local election results showed that the PRD was incapable of bringing out Cardenas' personal vote, even though Cardenas himself put a lot of energy into the election campaigns. Even where the PRD was set to win, the PRI held on by fraud. Rather than mobilizing its supporters, the PRD leaders made gentle noises of protest and then gave way, looking to do better in the next election. But in fact, the PRD has simply encountered setback upon setback.

Its low score on August 18, 1991, is the logical culmination of this process. There were intense discussions in the PRD about who would be the candidates in the districts where they won in 1988, and which they expected to hold onto without difficulty. In fact, they did not win any of the 300 districts. They do still have deputies, but, as with the left before 1988, only thanks to pooled votes and the workings of proportional representation.

■ **Some PRD leaders continue to hold out the possibility of a joint candidate with the PAN in the presidential election in 1994. Others say that the PRD should abandon the electoral terrain, given the PRI's grip.**



PRT and FES militants protested against the election fraud by removing their shirts, to show how they had been skinned by the PRI

There are two schools of thought in the PRD. One of them defends a continuation of the electoralist policy. They see an alliance of the whole opposition, including the PAN, as the only way to defeat the PRI.

An alliance of this kind has already been seen in the state of San Luis Potosi on August 18, 1991, during the election for governor. However, if the PAN is going to accept such a joint candidacy, the candidate will have to be nearer to the right than to the nationalist currents; that is, not Cardenas.

The latter has been sending out mixed signals. He has been proclaiming high and loud that there has just been the biggest electoral fraud in Mexico's history, even graver than the one that stole the election in 1988, and that it is impossible to continue to play a game with these rules. However, if he really meant what he says, then the PRD should boycott the Chamber of Deputies. This contradiction was also apparent in 1988; while Cardenas denounced the illegitimacy of Salinas' election, his supporters took their seats in parliament.

As in 1988 the PRT says that parliament should be boycotted. However, we are in a position of weakness since we did not win any seats. Even so, this is the only way to put an end to the vicious circle.

■ **How did the PRT's own electoral campaign go?**

The appearance of neo-Cardenism⁶ in 1988 was a real earthquake for the socialist left, which had left its mark on all the social movements from 1968 and 1988. Most of this left fell into line behind Cardenas. The opportunism and careerism that were running rampant on the left

were the determining factors here. Between the end of 1988 and the start of 1989, most of the socialist groups dissolved in order to participate in the creation of the PRD, which is a nationalist party.

The PRT lost its civil registration in 1988⁷ and thus had less possibilities to present itself as a socialist pole of reference on the national level.

Then new social struggles developed in which socialists took part or even led. But their political level has declined to the benefit of Cardenism and the PRD's "catch all" electoral image.

The PRT fought to get back its registration at the end of 1990. It wanted to recapture the ground lost by the socialist left, since it knew that the Cardenists were losing steam. Our party was concerned lest people who had got involved in the Cardenist project become demoralized in the absence of any clear left alternative. However, we knew that we were not strong enough to do this all by ourselves.

Our idea to solve this problem was the creation of the Socialist Electoral Front (FES), which aims to regroup all the militants of the socialist left, who had been dispersed at the end of 1988.

However this project encountered many prejudices and sectarian reflexes. Many people, above all from the PRD, were

4. See *International Viewpoint*, no. 208, June 10, 1991.

5. The *maquiladoras* are assembly plants set up in Mexico's free trade zones. See *IV* no. 196, December 10, 1990.

6. Lazaro Cardenas, father of Cuauhtemoc, was president of Mexico between 1934 and 1940. He presided over the nationalization of the oil industry. He strove to bring the major part of Mexican workers and peasant organizations into his Party of the Mexican Revolution (ancestor of the PRI).

7. Registration is granted to political parties which have obtained more than 1.5% of the votes. It gives parties access to political subsidies.

opposed to our effort to register, since they believed that this would adversely affect them.

However, it seems to me that we have experienced a certain success. The PRT got (according to the fraudulent official results), 140,000 votes this time, compared to 80,000 in 1988. In my view, without the fraud, we would have got the 1.5% needed to remain on the register.

We feel, on the basis of this experience, that it is possible to develop a radical socialist option and raise questions somewhat against the stream — putting up a prostitute as a candidate for the representative assembly in the federal district is not something which is specially likely to attract votes (see accompanying article), in difficult conditions, with little time and few resources.

The FES could certainly have done better. However, we only got our registration at the end of January 1991. Furthermore, many people needed to go through the experience of August 18, 1991 to get Cardenism out of their system and begin to once again consider the need to build a new socialist regroupment.

■ Who is involved in the FES apart from the PRT?

The FES groups together militants who cannot be considered to be in the orbit of the PRT. These include members of three neighbourhood organizations formed after the 1985 earthquake in the popular districts to demand decent rehousing.

There are also people with other political backgrounds, especially in the Mexican Socialist Party (PSM — the Communist Party). These are former CP leaders who, in 1989, opposed their party's dissolution into the PRD; they started up a magazine.

This current has much aided the FES' credibility, making it clear that there was a genuine coming together of different currents. Many former CP militants also took part in the campaign. Indeed some former CP members left the PRD to work in the FES campaign.

This was the case in Yucatan state where the whole PRD committee, except two people, came over to us and conducted an excellent campaign. The same thing was seen in less spectacular form in the states of Jalisco and Hidalgo.

From the beginning we were aware that there should be no attempt to hurry things along to the formation of a new party. First it was necessary to go through experiences of joint work. We have many questions to discuss with these comrades.

Furthermore, of course, between 1988 and 1991 the whole world situation has changed with an impact on the world socialist movement. We need to discuss all this and seek for new answers. They have abandoned Stalinism and are confronting the problem of the need for democratic socialism.

This holds out the possibility for a

fusion. For the moment we have reached agreement on the need for an independent working class voice in the face of the bourgeoisie. All the FES' members have expressed their belief in the need to continue joint work.

This will without doubt go beyond an

electoral front to form a political front seeking to develop a common line in the social struggles and the mass movement. Perhaps all this will end in a new party, but this is a long term process in which perhaps some steps have already been taken. ★

The prostitute's campaign

CLAUDIA COLIMORO, a candidate for the Representative Assembly of the Federal District of Mexico on the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT — Mexican section of the Fourth International) slate, was in the news during the 1991 election campaign. This feminist, who has fought hard for contraception and abortion rights¹, is also a prostitute involved in urban struggles, who demands the legalization of her profession. Here is what she has to say.

I AM 35 years old and have three children. I started working as a prostitute when I was a secretary at the social security, at a moment when I had big money problems during the illness of one of my children. I was working more than 12 hours a day at the office and, furthermore, was obliged to gratify the sexual desires of my boss to keep my job. I soon realized that I could make much more money as a prostitute.

Four and a half years ago I got involved in the struggle against AIDS; it was vital that the other girls should know about the causes and consequences of this terrible disease. This was very difficult work and we had no money since we had no institutional support. We founded the civil association Cuilotzin, which fights for health care and civil rights for prostitutes of both sexes as well as street children.

Cuilotzin organizes many information meetings about AIDS and its prevention; we work with the National Anti-AIDS Coordination (CONASIDA), which provides us with condoms which we distribute free to the prostitutes. Today the girls refuse to go with a client who will not agree to use a condom. We have achieved very positive results, and, as vice president of Cuilotzin, I have even received the visit of representatives of the World Health Organization (WHO).

Thanks to our efforts there is now a hospital which interests itself in the medical problems of prostitutes and examines them regularly, not only to detect the AIDS virus, but also hepatitis B and other contagious diseases. The hospital also carries out free gynecological and buccal tests for prostitutes; free operations are provided for them and their children.

Cuilotzin also takes up the cause of domestic employees who suffer sexual harassment and violence at the hands of their bosses.

We want to win the recognition of the rights of prostitutes and its legalization. Pushing it into clandestinity is a proof of hypocrisy and "double standards" in society, and means that the girls are unscrupulously oppressed and exploited by officials.

In Mexico, prostitution is controlled by laws passed 56 years ago which are completely obsolete. Prostitution is illegal and clandestine and that means that prostitutes have no rights.

It would be a much better situation for them to be legally recognized, even if they have to pay taxes on their earnings, than to be at the mercy of corrupt officials and police.

The legalization of prostitution would also permit a more effective control of AIDS. The current AIDS legislation is in fact the 1934 law on syphilis with that word replaced by AIDS throughout.

Following our denunciations, people who blackmail and exploit prostitutes can be punished or sacked, or even condemned to prison terms.

We have also won the right to nurseries for children of prostitutes who work during the day. In November 1990, after a meeting between prostitutes' representatives and members of the Health Ministry, the Provida² movement went and destroyed the two existing prostitutes' nurseries. They continue to function, but now in places known only to prostitutes.

We are currently setting up a project for children living on the streets where they sell bits and pieces or do deals. They are especially vulnerable to prostitution and drugs. We do not want to shut them in inhuman orphanages; we are hoping to set

up canteens and open nightshelters, to give them free education and technical training that will help them to find a proper job.

We have a similar project for prostitutes. We don't intend to teach them to sew or embroider, or to do crochet and cross-point. They must have real choices so that they can get well paid jobs when they decide, out of age or fatigue, to leave this profession.

In Mexico women work for pitiful wages. In the frontier zones for example, the women who work in the *maquiladoras* drudge for 15 hours a day and still don't earn enough to live, and have to work as prostitutes at the weekend — this is true for about half of them.

As long as such low wages are being paid, and in the absence of real social security for all and crèches, women will continue to become prostitutes to eat and feed their children — 95% of prostitutes are mothers.

Since I am also a feminist, I took part in the National Convention of Women for Democracy in March 1991 which brings together 40 organizations, movements and women's unions. The Convention proposed me as a candidate for the elections and looked for a party that would put me on its list.

Violent attacks from the right

We suffered various rebuffs, but the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) and the Socialist Electoral Front (FES) accepted at once. This cost them votes and provoked violent attacks from the right, above all from the Party of National Action (PAN) and the Provida movement. For, apart from calling for the legalization of prostitution, a systematic campaign against AIDS, and sexual education at all levels, I also called for the liberalization of abortion.

Provida produced photos of a completely dismembered foetus of at least eight months and I was described throughout as a "aborter" along with Rosario Ibarra and other feminist candidates of the PRT.

This work with the PRT has been very important for me, since, although I am not a militant, I agree with many points of its political platform, including free sexual choice, the right to organization, the rejection of violence against women, democratic rights, the legalization of abortion and the reappearance of the disappeared.

My election campaign was very difficult.

At the start, journalists treated me in a friendly enough way, comparing me more or less to *la Cicciolina*³; later they realized that I was serious and absolutely

determined to make myself heard and see prostitution legalized so as to break the power of the corrupt authorities.

Then, I was attacked fiercely, since I said loud and clear that every woman on the planet can end up a prostitute, and that blessings and white dresses only serve to hide the fact that one belongs sexually to a man.

During the campaign I got to know about the needs of prostitutes throughout the country. Their rights are systematically violated. For example recently there were two police operations in Queretaro where all the girls and transvestites were arrested, stripped and spattered with paint. We

oppose these periodic onslaughts by the authorities in districts where prostitution takes place; prostitutes are citizens like anybody else.

In Mexicali, every two weeks the prostitutes are taken to a health centre where they are massively dosed with a type of penicillin, even if they do not have any sexually transmissible disease. This weakens their body's defences.

In the state of Sonora, during AIDS tests, the heads of the health department have been insisting that people give their names, addresses and date of birth, although AIDS testing is meant to be anonymous, secret and free. After a struggle we finally put a stop to this.

When I went to do a meeting in Lower California, a conservative daily in Tijuana wrote that the PRT fills its ranks with prostitutes and homosexuals with AIDS.

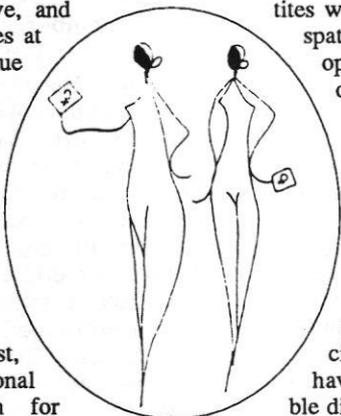
This was the first time that a prostitute has been a candidate in an election in Mexico, and it is clear that many women voted for me; however there was such massive fraud by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that we did not win any representation. In the polling station where I voted with my son in the presence of several journalists, there was not a single vote for the PRT by the time of the count...

I wanted to win because I want the media to finish with their horror stories and their double standards and in order that our voice should be heard. I am a voice for those that have none. ★

1. A violent debate on the legalization of abortion erupted when, in 1991, the congress of the southern state of Chiapas, which has a big Indian population, decided to legalize it, without doubt for eugenic reasons. Under pressure from the church and conservatives, the state retreated.

2. The "Provida" movement, inspired by American "pro-life" conservatives, is violently opposed to abortion and has been prepared to use force in pursuit of its campaign.

3. *La Cicciolina* is an Italian pornographic model who won a parliamentary seat on the Italian Radical Party ticket.



250,000 turnout for US labour rally

DEMONSTRATORS and organizers alike rejoiced in the size of the turnout in Washington D.C. on August 31 in response to the call by the AFL-CIO trade union federation for Solidarity Day 2. The idea behind the call was to mark the decade of labor abuse since the massive demonstration of labor solidarity in the nation's capital on September 19, 1981, and to send a message to the employing class and the politicians in the Democratic and Republican parties that working people have been browbeaten for too long.

FRANK AND SARAH LOVELL

EVEN though fewer union members marched down Constitution Avenue this time than ten years ago, the marchers numbered in the hundreds of thousands, estimated by the US Park Police at a quarter million. Despite the 95 degree heat, the huge crowd was festive and an atmosphere of a gigantic family picnic prevailed.

A special issue of *AFL-CIO News*, the biweekly national publication of the 14-million member federation, asserted: "As with Solidarity Day ten years ago, we march for fairness, equity and opportunity and against the forces of reaction and greed who assert 'economic rights' over human rights."

AFL-CIO President Lane Kirkland echoed the tone of this statement. He said: "We are here to remind our elected representatives that they were put there to serve, not the faceless marketplace, but

the aspirations of real people." These aspirations, as summarized in the AFL-CIO slogans, include the following: health care reforms; labor law reform; civil rights and equal rights guarantees; federal investment in education; protection of US manufacturing industries; "fair trade" agreements with other countries to replace recent "free trade" treaties; federal funding of city and state governments; workplace safety and health; environmental cleanup; and legislation to protect the right of strikers to return to their jobs.

The massive demonstration for these general objectives was officially endorsed by a coalition of more than 180 religious, environmental, civil rights and union organizations, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Labor Council for Latin American Advancement, American Jewish Congress, National Organization for Women, Women's Strike for Peace, Friends of the Earth, National Wildlife Federation and Young Social Democrats. Members of the coalition have their own agendas in addition to the demands of the AFL-CIO leadership, and some different interpretations of the demands.

Contrasting moods

This, then was the official face and surface appearance of the demonstration. But the composition and contrasting moods of the demonstrators presented a different picture.

We arrived at the offices of the Communication Workers of America (CWA Local 1180) in Lower Manhattan at 5.30 am to board a bus to Washington. The Local had chartered eight buses and several motor vans. One of the first people we met at the union was a young woman telephone worker, one of a hundred or so who came early. She had a bundle of *Labor Notes*, a nationally-circulated monthly publication that tells what's happening in the unions. She gave us a copy which proved to be a useful guide to a better understanding of the occasion.

The great majority of Local 1180 members who made the trip were Black. On our bus, the majority were women, also several well-behaved children. In Washington the CWA had set up a large tent where lunch was served before the march, which began promptly at noon. Other unions also had tents where free food and refreshments were served to their members.

Small groups gathered to talk about where they were from and their changing conditions of work as they waited for contingents to form and join the march. Almost invariably in these groups someone was there who had been at the 1981 demonstration. Naturally, the two demonstrations were compared and contrasted. We were reminded that ten years ago the unions had taken over the Washington subway system and everybody rode for

free for the day. There were no closed turnstiles to create bottlenecks, causing long lines outside the Metro stations. Everything moved more easily and quickly that time, even with more demonstrators at hand.

Another difference was the political attitudes and economic expectations expressed then and now. During the past ten years union members by and large have learned that not much can be expected from the political structure in this country, and their faith in the economy is shaken. This was expressed in signs carried by the marchers, and by their conduct.

The first large contingent leading the march consisted of thousands of members of the American Federation of State, Country and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), all wearing green T-shirts and carrying a variety of signs against the massive layoffs of public workers and for national health care reform to cover the 37 million in uninsured families of the working poor and unemployed in this country. Other very large contingents were the United Steel Workers, United Auto Workers (both with delegations from every state), the International Union of Electrical Workers, Local 1199 hospital workers of New York, the Communications Workers, the American Federation of Teachers, the Teamsters, United Mineworkers and the many others that comprise the AFL-CIO. Each union had its own distinctive color and the marchers wore red, blue, green, yellow, white T-shirts with the names and logos of their different unions.

The miners wore their camouflage combat suits and carried signs in support of the main AFL-CIO demands, but they also raised their own demands for mine safety and conducted themselves in a more determined and disciplined way than the other contingents. A teacher in the New York University system remarked that the miners did not come to Washington for a picnic and obviously had a more important mission in mind.

This observation prompted a question as to how the intent of an unregimented group like the miners can be detected simply by their conduct and appearance in the line of march. His answer was that their demands were more decisive than most others and that their determination was reminiscent of the angry demonstrations of public workers last spring in Albany, the New York state capital, against severe cutbacks in social services and education and the impending layoffs. That same sense of urgency, the realization that

Teamster reform

BIG changes are underway in the International Brotherhood of Teamsters union, known worldwide for its connections with organized crime. Its June 1991 convention accepted a series of rules changes, including the right to vote for top officials and to ratify contract supplements, and quadrupled strike pay.

And, instead of the union's officers being chosen behind closed doors, three slates of candidates were nominated for the union's top offices. They will face a one-member, one-vote election in December.

Many of the organizational changes came as part of the 1989 agreement between the US government and the Teamsters which ended the government's racketeering lawsuit against the union. One consequence of this agreement was that convention delegates were elected by members, with the result that some 300 committed reformers — organized around the Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU) movement which has campaigned for the reform of the union since 1975 — were among the 1,900 delegates.

According to a supporter of the reform ticket, TDU Organizer Ken Pfaff, "for the first time in the history of the union, officers must consider the opinions of their members. The rank and file have started to call the shots and by the end of the year we can be in the driver's seat."

(Information from *Labor Notes*, August 1991). ★

something must be done to stop the drift into unemployment and poverty, is what set the miners apart — this combined perhaps with their distinctive combat suits. Many of the same public workers and teachers who demonstrated angrily in Albany marched in Washington behind tame slogans and in a different mood. This certainly confirmed the truism that the general character of a demonstration is determined by its organizers and conditioned by the demands they raise.

The union contingents included a high percentage of Black and other minority workers, and women workers. This contrasted sharply with the many massive antiwar demonstrations in Washington since the 1960s which were largely white, and consisting mostly of students and others from the middle class. Union marchers at this demonstration were of all ages from retirees to young apprentices. And they came from all over the country.

A small United Transportation Union (UTU) contingent representing railroad workers, marched. But the rail unions were nowhere prominent or featured in the demonstration, which is curious because at the moment they are the sector

of organized labor under most serious attack from the government.

Why weren't railroad workers given special attention? And why was not the entire labor movement called upon to pledge solidarity with them in their present struggle to save their unions? According to an article in *Labor Notes* by Peter Rachleff entitled "Anger grows over rail contract disaster; 40,000 jobs lost" one top union official, Richard Kilroy of the Transportation Communications Union, and also president of the AFL-CIO's Transportation Trades Department, was kicked out as president of his union at its convention in July after he had connived with the rail carriers and government boards to bring on the contract disaster.

Another rail union president has since been kicked out by angry members, and two more are expected to get the same treatment soon. This may explain why there were no enthusiastic expressions of solidarity from the speakers stand for the embattled railroad workers. Today they are in a similar situation as the air traffic controllers (PATCO) in 1981, one of the triggers of the first Solidarity Day demonstration. And, just as the top union officialdom failed then to help the PATCO strikers, so now, ten years later, they are prepared to sacrifice the railroad workers.

In organizing and publicizing Solidarity Day 2 the top AFL-CIO officials talked about seeking to redistribute wealth and win a voice for labor in government. Their special issue of *AFL-CIO News* cited Labor Department data showing a decline in average real wages of 21.1% since 1979. It demands "social and economic justice... job opportunities... decent wages and working conditions." It says "These are the goals that should be part and parcel of the economic policies of the nation."

Without exception the demonstration

agreed that this is what they want. Their problem is how to get it. As the country continues its decline and multinational corporations and banking consortiums continue to skim off an increasingly large share of wealth, the unions lose members and political influence. But if the union movement hopes to reverse the downward economic trend and redistribute the national wealth it must find solutions to the problems of the economic system and mobilize its members politically. This is what the union bureaucracy is incapable of doing.

Just as the speeches at the rally avoided both the problem and its solution, so the scattered chants and slogans of the marchers were misdirected or inadequate. One of the most repeated chants was "Bush has got to go".

Silent marchers

Since there was no follow up response on how Bush can be made to go, the implication was that he must be replaced by a Democratic party candidate in the 1992 presidential election. A group of silent marchers (as many were) carried signs which said "One Republican Party is enough", implying that there is no difference between the two anti-labor parties and it might be stretched to mean that labor ought to have its own party.

The absence of leadership in the face of the present crisis of the labor movement was unintentionally exposed by a large contingent of auto workers. They came with squad captains carrying bullhorns and prepared to make a noise. Their leaders had failed to tell them what to shout, so they did what they are accustomed to do. They shouted "UAW, UAW, UAW" most of the way down Constitution Avenue.

For Lane Kirkland and other top officials the impasse remains only an embar-

LABOR NOTES

Is an independent monthly bulletin, sponsored by many local labour leaders, that aims to "put the movement back into the labor movement".

It holds annual conferences to discuss labour-related issues, the last of which brought together some 1000 delegates.

Labor Notes can be obtained from 7435 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, Michigan 48210, USA. An overseas subscription is \$15 a year. ★

rassment. The depth of labor's crisis has not yet penetrated their consciousness. They remain steadfast and complacent in the harness of the Democratic Party machine.

In response to questions earlier this year on the labor party issue, Kirkland told the *Los Angeles Times* labor writer, Harry Bernstein, that union leaders are unhappy with the treatment they are getting from the Democrats in Congress. When House Democratic leader Richard Gephardt supported Bush' request for "fast track" authority to negotiate the administration's "free trade" treaty with Mexico, labor leaders denounced him and the Democratic Party.

Democrats criticized

The president of the Missouri AFL-CIO, Gephardt's home state, said: "Basically, the Democratic Party has not delivered on a national basis. As time goes on, the feeling from working people may be that they should articulate their own concerns." The head of the St. Louis Labor Council was more pointed. He said: "I have heard more about a labor party or a labor-farm coalition than I have in the past 15 years." But this was soon forgotten. Kirkland still thinks labor party talk is "a formula for wandering in the political wilderness." Some contingents in the Solidarity Day parade carried signs demanding "off the fast track", a demand rejected last June by large majorities of both Democrats and Republicans in Congress.

Leading Democrats were invited to address the Solidarity Day rally, but none came. New York governor Mario Cuomo and New York City mayor David Dinkins accepted but both sent regrets the day before the rally.

The organizers had to be content with Jesse Jackson and Geraldine Ferraro, sufficient to demonstrate that union officials still look to Democratic Party politicians for answers to the social and economic problems of the country and its workforce.

Evidence mounts that working men and

230,000 railroad workers

walked off their jobs on April 17 in response to massive attacks on their working conditions, including for example, a proposal to extend the area in which rail workers can be ordered to work to up to 900 miles. The changes were presented as recommendations by a government-appointed Emergency Board.

The strike was solid from the beginning, but barely 18 hours after it began, Congress ordered it ended. The 400-5 vote in the House of Representatives was matched by "unanimous consent" in the Senate, where only Kennedy and Hatch were present. President Bush was awakened to sign the bill into law.

In fact, a "compromise" had already been arranged behind the backs of the workers by their unions — the appointment of a new Emergency Board, whose terms of reference include a "presumption of validity" for the original Board's findings, that is, the original recommendations will stand unless specifically rejected.

While awaiting the new Board's recommendations, managements have been approaching different sectors of railworkers with offers of separate deals. However there is much anger among railworkers about the behaviour of their union leaderships and some activists are discussing calling a national rank and file conference this autumn.

(Information from *Labor Notes*, June 1991) ★



women are fast shedding illusions in the Democratic Party. Polls taken of union members for Labor Party Advocates, a recently formed group headed by Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), show that workers in all parts of the country favor the labor party idea.

In CWA Local 1180 for example, a poll a year ago showed that 49% of the membership agreed that "its time for the labor movement to build a new political party of working people that would be independent of the two major political parties." Some 62% agreed that "both Democrats and Republicans care more about the interests of big business than they do about the interests of working people."

Labor Party Advocates

Labor Party Advocates reports steady growth since it started membership recruitment early this year. It issues a regular bimonthly progress report and expects to call a constitutional convention when 5,000 local union leaders have signed up. Hardly anyone in unions today actively opposes the labor party idea, except top officials and some hangers-on who get paid to distribute political literature for Democratic politicians. But neither is there a popular groundswell to immediately set up a Labor Party structure and field working class candidates in coming elections.

The most popular sign and chant of the march was "No more scabs" and "scabs have to go". This refers to legislation to outlaw the "permanent replacement" of strikers which is sponsored by the AFL-CIO. It is something almost every union member can relate to personally. Those who

do not yet have firsthand experience of strikebreakers crossing picket lines can readily understand that chances of winning strikes will improve if "replacement workers" cannot be guaranteed permanent jobs.

The same Gephardt who only last June was denounced for his "betrayal" of labor's goals is now the guiding hand in support of this anti-scab bill, Workplace Fairness Bill, as it is officially titled. According to a *Labor Notes* article: "Gephardt, along with the rest of the House Democratic leadership, made sure Congressional Democrats ignored pleas from Eastern [airlines] strikers, voted to break the rail strike, rammed through the free trade, fast track authority for Bush, and helped to ditch a Canadian-style health care plan for one so weak it was approved by the American Medical Association."

This is the leader to whom labor officialdom and its Washington lobby looks for favors. He has no trouble convincing other Democrats to vote for bills the labor lobby wants enacted when they all know this legislation faces certain veto when it reaches the desk of the president.

When all the speeches were over and the demonstrators were heading for the subways, we got on the wrong line which took us to the Pentagon. A group of miners was with us. They at least had no faith in politicians. They have been beaten, fined and imprisoned by Democratic party sheriffs, judges and congressmen in their states. And they have learned that when they organize to elect one of their own, it is possible to defeat the corrupt

political representatives of the coal barons. In both West Virginia and Kentucky union officials running on union write-in tickets have defeated entrenched Democratic incumbents in the state legislature and other elective offices.

On the way back to our bus at RFK stadium, we talked with other demonstrators from Indiana, members of the International Union of Electrical Workers (IUE). One of them had been at the 1981 Solidarity Day demonstration.

He remembered that the subways had been free that time. Another of the group said that this might be a sign that the unions have lost some of their influence in Washington. He said that their local union had protected wages and working conditions pretty well during the past decade, but the owner and founder of the Franklin pump company where they worked had recently died at age 94. "A fine gentleman," he said.

Good employers

This reminded us of the AFL-CIO's basic organization policy which is to collaborate with "good" employers; union members are taught that if business isn't well managed and financially successful the workers will be out of jobs.

On the bus back to New York we met another demonstrator from AFSCME District Council 37, very proud of her union. She is near retirement age, works as a biochemist and lives in a lower middle class community, the Stuyvesant Town development. She told us that without the unions life in this country would be much worse.

Another passenger was a retired member of the Teamsters union also just returning from Washington. For him the demonstration showed what working people through their unions, can do. "No one got hurt, no one got robbed, no one got shot, and everyone had a good day," he said. And this may have been the sentiment of most demonstrators, including those who understand that these demonstrations — organized the way this one was, more to ask favors than to make demands — are the best way the union movement has of lobbying Congress. At least the basic aims of the union movement are publicized, and for a change, millions of people have a chance to hear what unions stand for and hope to accomplish.

As always there were also those who came with the intention of helping to bring about badly needed changes in the lives of working people without having to beg politicians who are only interested in their own welfare. They share the confidence of many that a new day is coming. ★



An opaque congress

THE 7th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) took place from June 24-27, 1991. In August, the National Assembly implemented its decisions. The Political Bureau and the government underwent big shake-ups. But there has been no change in the official line. The leadership of the country has stated its intention to press ahead with the liberalization of the economy, reinforce the autonomy of the state organs in relation to the party structures and reduce the weight of the administrative apparatus. At the same time, however, the VCP's monopoly on political power is to be maintained and any talk of pluralism was denounced.

PIERRE ROUSSET

V IETNAM's international isolation has further increased with the developments in the Soviet Union, and this has led Vietnam to draw closer to China both diplomatically and ideologically. However, none of these mighty problems has been openly discussed, either at the CP Congress or in the Assembly. The 7th Congress expressed neither the party's internal tensions nor the changes taking place in civil society.

By stifling debate a year ago, the VCP leadership obtained a docile Congress. While the façade of unity will not have resolved the differences, it has postponed their expression for a period. From the outside, it is very difficult to estimate the real balance of forces, the state of the internal contradictions or the political dynamic that they give rise to. Nonetheless a certain number of basic questions can be posed.

The 1,176 delegates at the Congress adopted two Central Committee Reports, some amended statutes and the documents submitted for the preparatory discussion: "The Platform for National Construction in the Period of Transition to Socialism" and "The Strategy of Socio-Economic Stabilization and Development up to the year 2000".¹

These documents contain some passages of self-criticism. The leadership recognizes once again that after the 1975 victory the "party committed serious mistakes in its strategic choices and in its choice of means for arriving at socialism."² It also notes that the crisis gripping Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union is the result of the accumulation of similar errors on the part of the "fraternal parties". The platform on development strategy paints a sombre picture of the situation in

the country: "the country remains in a state of under-development... there is significant inflation... cultural, spiritual and moral life is less healthy... corruption is growing along with other social ills and social justice is not respected; confidence in the party leadership and its ability to manage the state has been weakened. This reality in part results from the many years of war; however, the main reason is that we have constructed socialism according to a model mainly characterized by dogmatism, a lack of creativity and voluntarist subjectivism."³

Critical notes

But these critical and self-critical notes have not been the occasion for any profound critique of the leadership's orientation or the party's place in society. There is, for example, no discussion on the "leading role" of the VCP. As the Political Programme notes this role was essential in the victory in the wars of liberation. But a whole number of questions that flow from the documents' own account of the situation are not addressed, including: what has the party become after 15 years? What is its real relation with the population? What is the weight of the bureaucracy within it?

The multitude of amendments that came

1. These documents have still to be respectively "altered", "amended", "perfected", indeed "completed" by the new Central Committee (*Nouvelles du Vietnam*, number 199-200, July 17, 1991, p. 5). The quotations contained in this article are taken from the documents as they stood before the introduction of the amendments during the Congress and by the CC. The Vietnamese CP claims a membership of 2.1 million, in a country with a population of 68 million.

2. Quoted by Hoang Giang, *Chroniques Vietnamiennes* number 10-11, Spring-Summer 1991, p. 19.

3. Quoted by Lê Hùng, *Đoàn Kết*, number 433, April 1991, p. 39.

4. Jean-Claude Pomonti, *Le Monde*, June 25, 1991.

up in the pre-Congress discussion have not led to any overall debate. While the final versions of the resolutions are not available, it seems clear that the disagreements within the apparatus and the pressure of discontented militants have only led to formal changes. Thus, for example, the name of the political platform was changed from "The Platform for the Construction of Socialism in the Transition Period" to "The Platform for National Construction in the Period of Transition to Socialism". Apparently this change required "hard negotiations" between the "orthodox" who want more state direction and the "pragmatists" who are demanding more economic liberalism.⁴ However its real importance remains unclear since the debate on economic policy remained on a very general level.

Nobody pretends that there is an easy solution to the problems of development in Vietnam. But this is the very reason why basic questions have to be raised. In fact, however, there is a yawning gap between the gravity of the national and international situation as reflected in the texts and the nature of the discussions on orientation.

The new political bureau

1. **Đô Muoi** (general secretary)*
2. **Lê Duc Anh** (army general, Central Committee member responsible for foreign affairs)*
3. **Vo Van Kiêt** (president of the council of ministers)
4. **Đào Duy Tùng** (CC member responsible for ideology)*
5. **Đoàn Khuê** (army general, minister of defence)
6. **Vu Oanh** (CC member responsible for mass organizations)#
7. **Lê Phuoc Tho** (CC member responsible for agriculture)*#
8. **Phan Van Khai** (deputy prime minister)#
9. **Bùi Thôn Ngô** (divisional general, minister of the interior)#
10. **Nông Duc Manh** (of tay stock, president of the CC's nationalities commission)#
11. **Pham The Duyệt** (secretary of the Hanoi federation)#
12. **Nguyễn Duc Binh** (director of the Nguyễn Ai Quốc Institute)#
13. **Vo Trân Chí** (secretary of the Ho Chi Minh City federation)

* Also members of the Central Committee Secretariat.

New members of the Political Bureau.

Members of the outgoing PB not re-elected: Nguyễn Văn Linh (former general secretary), Võ Chí Công, Nguyễn Đức Tâm, Nguyễn Cơ Thạch, Đông Sơn Nguyễn, Nguyễn Thanh Bình, Mai Chí Thọ. Trần Xuân Bách was expelled from the PB in March 1990. ★

The outstanding feature of the congress was silence.

In the main the documents limit themselves to repeating the line in force since the VCP's 4th Congress in 1976 in the form of pious wishes: it is necessary to set all the resources to work, harmoniously develop all the regions and components of the economy (that is to say the five forms of property: state, collective, private, individual and family), and to industrialize the country while improving living standards...⁵

It seems that the Vietnamese leadership hopes to draw inspiration from the experience of the four Asian "dragons" notably South Korea and Taiwan. This is a model of development which combines a strong state and authoritarian government with a closely supervised expansion of the market economy. This raises questions about how to transfer such a "model" to a non-capitalist society and, in the prevailing international conditions, how to inject a big dose of capitalism into a non-capitalist society and how to do it while avoiding some of the constitutive elements of the model such as the denial of human rights, political and anti-union repression and rampant growth in social inequality.

Cynical souls

The realism of such perspectives is questionable. They would require an exceptional rate of growth throughout the 1990s for which there is no evidence. According to Phong Quang: "Cynical souls in Vietnam have summed up the strategy adopted by the 7th VCP Congress as: 'a programme for the construction of primitive capitalism under the dictatorship of the proletariat.' While the primitiveness of this capitalism is already visible, its efficiency is less obvious."⁶

The leading bodies of the VCP have been re-elected: a Central Committee of 146 members, a Political Bureau of 13, a CC Secretariat of 9 members and a Control Commission of 9 members. This is where the Congress' decisions have most significance, since it is these bodies that will define the real content of the decisions taken. In fact, the delegates allowed themselves to reject three CC candidacies proposed by the leadership, including those of the Ministers of Trade and Finance.⁷

The turnover of CC members was relatively low — 29% compared to more than 50% in 1986. On the other hand there were very important changes in the Political Bureau (PB); eight of its 13 members are newcomers, with seven of that body's previous members failing to be re-elected. Among them

● Nguyễn Cơ Thạch, former Minister of Foreign Affairs. He is paying for his independent attitude, for the failure of the opening to the West (the USA is maintaining its embargo and blocking lines of credit) and for the hostility felt for him by the Chinese leadership now that normaliza-

Laos

LAOS' National Assembly met in mid-August. It adopted the People's Democratic Republic's first constitution. Kaysone Phomvihane was elected head of state. He replaces Prince Souphanouvong, who has resigned, and the interim head of state, 82 year old Phoumi Vongvichit. Kaysone was formerly prime minister, a post now to be filled by Khamtay Siphandone.

Kaysone Phomvihane is also the president of the Revolutionary People's Party (the Communist Party), a function to which he was elected in March 1991 at the party's 5th Congress, having been its general secretary since 1955.

The constitution talks only of "people's democracy". Kaysone declared to the National Assembly that, "If socialism remains our objective, it is a distant, very distant, objective." In this country of some 3.5 million people the regime has entered on economic reforms far more radical than those in Vietnam, in the name of "restructuring". Its main partner in this is Thailand via whom most of Laos' trade takes place — a chain of mountains makes communication with the Vietnamese ports difficult.

However, despite its display of political flexibility, Laos remains a part of the Indochinese bloc (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia) and a one party state. Indeed, during the 5th Congress, Kaysone called for "a growth in the leading role of the party throughout society" (*Le Monde*, August 16, 1991). ★

tion of relations between Hanoi and Beijing is underway.

● Mai Chí Thọ, former interior minister, who is compromised by too many scandals. His departure and that of Nguyễn Đức Thâm, responsible for organization, seems to mark the decline of the group around Lê Đức Thọ, who died in October 1990 and who controlled the mechanisms for nominations in the apparatus for many years.

● The former general secretary Nguyễn Văn Linh has been named adviser to the Central Committee along with Võ Chí Công (and Phạm Văn Đông who did not previously belong to the PB).⁸

● Also worth a mention is Trần Xuân Bách, who was thrown off in March 1990 for criticizing the leadership's immobility too openly.

The new general secretary of the VCP is 74 year old Đỗ Mười. According to his official biography, he was born in 1917, was active from 1937 and became a member of the Indochinese CP in 1939. After taking on responsibilities in a series of provinces he became a candidate PB member in 1955 and a member in 1960. He became vice-prime minister, once more becoming a PB candidate in 1976 and a member in 1982. Four years later he entered the secretariat before becoming president of the Council of Ministers.⁹

As ever, there are no women on the PB. On the other hand, for the first time, there is a woman on the CC secretariat: Trương Mỹ Hoa. This led the new general secretary to commit a blunder by effectively naming Trương Mỹ Hoa as head of the Union of Vietnamese Women. A national assembly deputy from Ho Chi Minh City, Ngô Ba Thanh publicly took Đỗ Mười to task, insisting that the Union could choose its own leader. Mười made a partial retreat: Hoa became the candidate rec-

ommended by the party for this post.¹⁰

The new PB appears to be dominated by conservative ideologues such as Lê Đức Anh and Đào Duy Tùng with a minority of economic liberals such as Võ Văn Kiệt and Phan Văn Khải. The CC Secretariat is also dominated by conservatives.¹¹ The departure of Mai Chí Thọ does not mean a loosening up of the PB's policy. Several of the new members — including Nguyễn Đức Bình, Nông Đức Mạnh (and Nguyễn Hà Phan from the secretariat) made notably hardline speeches in which they denounced democratization in the name of security.¹²

The most interesting development is the promotion of general Lê Đức Anh to the number two spot. Like Đoàn Khuê, he is a serving general and directly represents the armed forces in the PB.¹³ Both are considered to be conservatives; the army has been taken in hand and the less "orthodox" high-ranking officers removed.

The political rise of Lê Đức Anh is all the more significant in that from now until the end of the year he will be the president of the state council, that is, head of state. The National Assembly is preparing a con-

5. See Lê Hùng, *Đoàn Kết*, number 434, April 1991.

6. Phong Quang, *Đoàn Kết*, number 434, dated May 1991 (but published in July 1991, after the holding of the Congress), page 35.

7. A total of 68 candidates were directly proposed by the delegates, but of these, only the minister for health was elected. Murray Hiebert, *Far Eastern Economic Review (FEER)*, July 11, 1991.

8. A member of the Political Bureau elected in 1986, Phạm Hùng died in 1988.

9. *Nouvelles du Vietnam*, op. cit., pp. 6-7.

10. *FEER*, August 22, 1991, p. 7. Trương Mỹ Hoa, already vice-president of the Union of Women, was previously on the Control Committee.

11. Nayan Chanda, *Asian Wall Street Journal Weekly (AWSJ)*, July 8, 1991.

12. Nong Duc Manh, of tay origin, is the first leader originating from an ethnic minority to be a member of the PB as such.

13. The members of the leading bodies are all classed according to a hierarchical rank.

stitutional reform aimed at centralizing authority with a more compact government which can exercise more effective control over the provinces. The position of head of state, which is presently largely symbolic, will become the main centre of authority.

It seems that the armed forces are today less discredited and unpopular than the other branches of the state and certainly much better regarded than the political police. As the spearhead of the liberation wars of 1945-75 and then of the Sino-Indochinese conflicts which broke out in 1978-79, there is a risk that the army will be turned by the PB into an instrument of internal repression. How far such a transformation, if attempted, can succeed is one of the most serious questions raised by the present direction of the VCP. It is a question whose answer cannot be known in advance.

The Vietnamese armed forces today find themselves in a very difficult situation. Taking into account the economic crisis and the abrupt ending of most Soviet aid, the defence budget has had to be considerably reduced. Some 70% of this budget is to be devoted to feeding and housing of personnel and only 30% to the purchase and maintenance of arms.¹⁴ Despite this, soldiers endure miserable conditions. According to Lieutenant General Dam Van Nguy last January: "the living standard of our soldiers everywhere in Viet-

nam is too bad, too terrible, and has produced a negative impact on work, study, training and combat preparedness." This had led to a growth of corruption, the stealing of equipment, desertions and the involvement of the ranks of the armed forces in smuggling.¹⁵

The number of service personnel has been cut from 1.2 million in 1979 to 600,000 now; the former soldiers are often now unemployed. Military units have been partially reconverted to economic production. The reserve corps has 3.5 million members and there is also a significant militia force.

The behaviour of the armed forces confronted with the crisis of the Vietnamese regime and the changes in the international situation — many cadres having been educated in the USSR — is a basic issue for the future. The key political positions are in the hands of high-ranking officers from the first revolutionary generation, often today become "conservatives." But what about the younger generation? There have already been challenges, albeit muffled, notably from the south of the country.

It is hard to evaluate the ultimate impact of the Soviet crisis on the Vietnamese regime. At the time of the Moscow coup, the PB preferred discretion, although it is certain that some leaders welcomed Gorbachev's overthrow and the attempted seizure of power by those they consider their

close "friends". In the immediate term in any case the failure of the coup d'état will mean a further hardening in Hanoi and a deepening of the rapprochement with China.

Everything about the world situation — from the Gulf war to the Soviet crisis — must be worrying for the Vietnamese leadership and increase its security paranoia. The list of invitations to the 7th Congress shows the extent of Hanoi's isolation. There were only four "fraternal delegations" present: the CPSU (before its quasi-dissolution after the failed coup), the Lao Revolutionary People's Party (see box) the Revolutionary Party of Kampuchea and the Cuban CP.

The turning inwardness is all the more pronounced since Washington has made it clear that Hanoi will have to pay a high price for the normalization of relations. Despite US promises, the embargo has been maintained after the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Cambodia.

Rapprochement with China

It seems probable that an agreement on Cambodia will be signed soon under United Nations auspices and that in consequence the relations between the two governments will relax. Vietnam would then be able to negotiate with financial organizations such as the International Monetary Fund and trade more easily with countries such as Japan, Australia and France. But the lesson will not be forgotten by the conservatives, who had reproached Nguyễn Cơ Thạch for the illusions he had fostered on the speed with which an opening to the West could be carried through.

Seen from Hanoi the present evolution of the international scene must be hard to understand. Most of the members of the PB are not familiar with the West. Nayan Chanda has noted that "the party's leadership is conservative as well as inward-looking, judging from the fact that only three of its members — the reformers — have travelled to non-socialist countries."¹⁶ This striking provincialism is a serious political handicap; a Vietnamese official confided to journalist Murray Hiebert: "None of the top leaders understands the international situation. Not only is this a weakness, it is a real danger."¹⁷

To escape from its isolation, Hanoi has turned towards China, 13 years since the break of relations. At the end of July, Lê Duc Anh made a secret journey to Beijing to present the results of the 7th Congress with which the Chinese leadership has

From *Doàn Kêt* to *Diên Dân*

THE editors of *Doàn Kêt* have announced that they can no longer continue the "pluralist" editorial policy embarked on a year ago. In 1990, the Permanent Bureau of the General Union of Vietnamese in France (UGVF) decided to hand its journal, *Doàn Kêt*, over to its editorial team. It recognized that the problems confronting this publication could "only find an answer in the framework of the reorganization of the Union into an assembly that respects its pluralist character."

Since then the magazine has provided high quality coverage of Indochina, published many critical documents both in Vietnamese and French and denounced the repression meted out to their authors.

However the run-up to the 6th UGVF Congress has seen a tightening of the reins. The published documents outlaw all "pluralism" from the Union's internal life and states the aim of the organization as being to "develop good relations with the Vietnamese state". This is a retreat from the resolution adopted by the UGVF's previous congress in 1988 which called on the Union to "be a part of the movement for democratization of political life and for more social justice."

According to the editors of *Doàn Kêt*, intolerance inside the UGVF has grown to the point that they have decided to "surrender the title to the Union" and start a new publication, the *Diên Dân* (Forum), which will continue on with the whole of the editorial team of *Doàn Kêt*. The *Diên Dân* "defines itself as an independent journal in the sense that it does not speak for any political organization." The team in charge "brings together various sensibilities and aims to preserve that plurality as part of its wealth. *Diên Dân* wants to be an open place, a meeting point, a forum...for democracy and development." It will notably address "the basic problems of Vietnamese society."

Most of the new monthly will be in Vietnamese, but the editorial team envisages at the same time the distribution of a French-language informational letter.

For information write to: *Diên Dân*, 193 rue de Bercy, 75582 Paris, Cedex 12, France. ★

14. According to general Lê Duc Anh, then Minister of Defence, in December 1989. Cited by Murray Hiebert, *FEER*, June 13, 1991.

15. *Ibid.*

16. *AWSJW*, op. cit. p. 2. The three "reformers" mentioned are Vo Van Kiet, Phan Van Khai and Vo Tran Chi.

17. *FEER*, July 11, p. 10.

18. Murray Hiebert, Tai Ming Cheung, *FEER*, August 22, 1991, p. 8.

stated it "agrees completely."¹⁸ This is hardly reassuring for those in Vietnam who cannot forget that the Chinese road led to the massacre in Tiananmen Square.

The two CPs who were yesterday enemies at war are going to meet to officially mark the reconciliation. For a period the Vietnamese regime can benefit from this change of alliance. Economic relations are developing rapidly with the giant neighbour. China's weight is such that it cannot simply be ignored either on the regional or international levels — we should not forget that China has nuclear weapons and a right to veto as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Forming a bloc with Beijing can thus reduce Hanoi's isolation. But there will be a price to pay, which is already apparent on the ideological level. And Beijing has never been inclined to treat the Vietnamese as equals.

Following the logic of turning inwards, the VCP leadership seems intent on stifling debate in the post-Congress period just as it did with the preparatory debate, now using the formal authority of decisions taken.

Đào Duy Tùng, the no. 4 in the PB, declared in his closing report that: "The congress has debated and analyzed that the absolute majority of our people have supported the party renovation line, recognized our party as the sole political organization to lead the society, rejected political pluralism, multi-partyism and opposition parties and maintained that our forces of dictatorship are firm and strong."¹⁹

Praising unanimity

The Voice of Vietnam also struck the same note, praising the unanimity of the congress and declaring that the debate was closed: "The high unanimity of all the congress delegates over the approved documents has confirmed the unshakable strength of a party that has been tested through countless objective events of history. At a time when the international situation is full of changes, the socio-economic crisis in the country has not ended, and the enemy both outside and inside is still day and night attacking us in an attempt to destroy the party leadership, the high unanimity of the congress has a particularly great significance... Although it is impossible not to have some differing views, the main stream of the congress was determined and agreed on by the absolute majority of the delegates.... It can be said henceforth, we no longer have to debate and weigh which direction we should follow, but we should seek all ways to the best and most favourable implementation of the documents..."

There is obviously little likelihood that Vietnamese society can agree to conform to the image of itself handed down by the VCP leadership. ★



MOROCCO

Abraham Serfaty released

ONE of Africa's longest serving political prisoners, the Moroccan Abraham Serfaty, was released and expelled to France on September 13, 1991. Serfaty, a "Jewish Arab militant" (in his own words) and a founder member of the clandestine Marxist group *Ilal Amam*, had been imprisoned by the regime of Hassan II since 1974 (see *IV* 199, February 4, 1991).

His release follows an international solidarity campaign in which his French wife Christine played a prominent role, and undoubtedly reflects pressure from a French Socialist government which has become increasingly embarrassed by the appalling human rights record of its North African ally. The release also comes on the eve of the arrival of a team of United Nations observers in the western Sahara to oversee the referendum on self-determination for this area.

As recently as July of this year, Hassan II had said that Serfaty could not be released until he recognized Moroccan sovereignty over western Sahara, and shortly before his release Serfaty had announced his intention of launching a hunger strike until his right to see his wife, ended in July, was restored.

The pretext finally given for his release and expulsion was the discovery that he was in fact of Brazilian and not Moroccan nationality, an allegation he emphatically denies. Now 65, Serfaty has affirmed that he maintains all his former political opinions, including his commitment to self-determination for western Sahara. He has also drawn attention to the several hundred other political prisoners who continue to languish in the royal dictator's jails, in particular the "living dead" of the prison at Tazmamart, where inmates are kept in perpetual darkness in conditions Serfaty described as being "as horrible as Auschwitz". ★

SOUTH AFRICA

The coup and the SACP

A WEEK after the failed coup in Moscow, the South African Communist Party (SACP) issued a statement declaring that information on these events was still too imprecise to be commented on. Thus, the

SACP leadership was adopting a wait-and-see policy.

However, the Natal branch broke discipline. There the CP openly backed the coup, explaining that it was needed because Gorbachev threatened to destroy the Soviet Union, and do harm to the international socialist movement.

Finally, the SACP adopted a statement denouncing the coup as unconstitutional. Meanwhile, the party journal *Umsebenzi* has criticized Gorbachev for being more interested in preserving his presidency than in saving the socialist project. The SACP has also condemned the outlawing of the CPSU as an anti-democratic measure as well as the dissolution of the party proclaimed by Gorbachev. ★

JAPAN

Trotsky Institute

THE Trotsky Institute of Japan was founded in Tokyo on May 19, 1991. The aim of the Institute is to collect, preserve, study and disseminate documents and articles of Trotsky.

The Institute was set up in the wake of the International Trotsky Symposium held in Tokyo last year (see *International Viewpoint*, No. 197 December 24, 1990). It is sponsored by Sovietologists, historians, independent left activists and Japanese Trotskyists.

The Institute's director is Yoshinobu Shiokawa, a former leader of the radical *Zengakuren* students' movement in the late 1950s and a former leader of the Japanese Revolutionary Communist League.

The Library has already gained a collection of books about Trotsky, known as the Oya-Shiro (Kyoji-Nishi) collection, after the late Kyoji-Nishi, one of the founders of Japanese Trotskyism, whose family donated the collection to the Institute.

The Institute will publish a quarterly magazine, the first issue of which is to appear in the autumn. Interest in Trotskyism is growing within the rank-and-file and intellectuals circles of the Japanese Communist Party, and the Institute can play an important role at this time.

The Institute's address is Trotsky Institute of Japan c/o Akebono Mansion 203, 1-22-21, Higashi-Nakano, Nakano-ku, Tokyo 164, Japan ★