

# International VIEWPOINT

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## *The turn of the workers?*



**ROMANIA: The return of the miners**

**SOVIET UNION: Workers and "Democrats"**

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA: Towards dependent capitalism?**

**HUNGARY: "People loathe the new parties"**

**PLUS: Janette Habel on CUBA after the Soviet pullout**

**AND MORE...**

# Contents:

**ROMANIA 3**

REVOLT of miners reveals profound instability of regime — but who will ultimately benefit? — *Livio Maitan*

**SOVIET UNION 5**

AS THE victorious “democrats” turn towards authoritarianism, how long will the working class remain on the sidelines? *David Seppo* analyzes the balance of forces

**Plus**

Calls for a Party of Labour attract trade union support — *Poul-Funder Larsen*

**And**

Leader of Marxist Platform in CPSU explains why he supports the Initiative for a Party of Labour — *Document*

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA 11**

EASTERN Europe’s strongest

economy falters as full scale privatization begins — *Peter Annear* foresees islands of modernization in a sea of backwardness

**HUNGARY 13**

“THE government has lost all moral support” — *Tamas Krausz*, member of Hungary’s Left Alternative, explains how workers are beginning to fight back

**CUBA 14**

U.S. imperialism closes in for the kill following Soviet withdrawal of troops and aid— can CP congress meet the challenge? — *Janette Habel*

**Plus**

Cuban Communist Party’s response to mounting isolation — *Document*

**INDIA 18**

WOMEN combat communalism and violence — interview with socialist feminist activist *Trupti Shah*

**MALAYSIA 20**

NEO-COLONIAL government pushes export-orientated industrialization as basis of “national self-determination” — but immense hidden costs are borne by the people — *Jim Stockton*

**MADAGASCAR 23**

MASSIVE wave of popular mobilizations threatens another African dictator, but the opposition leaders will not meet the people’s aspirations — *Francis Cazals*

**SWEDEN 25**

SOCIAL Democratic adoption of pro-free market policies laid basis for rightwing victory in recent elections — *Dick Forslund*

**Around the World 27**

- Zaire ● Mauritius
- Denmark
- Fourth International
- Haiti

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# The return of the miners

IT IS useful to begin by recalling the principal events since last autumn. On October 18, 1990, Romanian prime minister Petre Roman announced a liberalization of prices, to be spread out over a year, and a currency devaluation.

Just before that Eugen Dijmarescu, the Minister of the Economy, with Adrien Severin (one of the key figures of the reformist government team), had decided to replace the factory managers who had been elected by the workers after the overthrow of Ceausescu. This had provoked energetic protests on the part of not only the miners, but also the union confederation that was close to the government.

New tensions and conflicts arose several months later. In mid-March, 1991, Romania had signed an agreement with the EEC and on the first of April a second phase of price liberalizations was supposed to have begun, which, according to the agreements, would have involved very sharp rises in the price of basic foodstuffs (on the order of 300%).

The unions organized a demonstration of 15,000 people in the capital and demanded the cancellation of the second phase of the liberalization, the suspension of the "liberalization" reforms, and the possibility for the workers to become stockholders in their own factories. President Iliescu, with the support of the presidents of the two chambers, proposed putting off until the first of June the new phase of price reforms, but the government opposed this under pressure from international institutions.

## Mobilizations for anniversary

Trade union actions and opposition party mobilizations followed in June 1991, on the anniversary of the police repression and the intervention of the miners on University Square (see IV 188, July 2, 1990). But on this occasion the government scored some successes. The demonstration organized by the opposition ended in failure, as did the general strike called for June 19 by the National Union Confederation (NUC) (the previous day, the railworkers had called off their actions which had been denounced by the government as "illegal").

In July of this year conflicts broke out on the Parliamentary level. The government introduced a law for the privatization of commercial firms and defeated nearly all the numerous amendments presented by the deputies of the opposition. In response, the elected officials of the Liberal Party, of the National Unity Party,

**THE clashes between miners and government forces in Bucharest at the end of September again revealed the profound crisis of the regime installed in Rumania after the overthrow of Ceausescu. This article is written as the miners return to their coalfields and negotiations are being conducted in Bucharest for the formation of a new government, which will certainly not be an easy task.**

**LIVIO MAITAN**

of the three Social Democrat Parties, and of the two Ecological Parties left the meeting hall. Iliescu again tried to mediate, but the government refused.

## Repercussions within Front

All of these events had had repercussions on the power block itself. The differences between Iliescu and Roman had become more and more open and, more generally, conflicts had broken out within the ruling National Salvation Front (NSF), for example, on the occasion of its congress in the month of March. At the congress itself, certain figures, including vice-President Cladiu Lurdache, had refused to accept leadership positions.

In June, some members of the NSF accused Petre Roman of having "confiscated the leadership" of the organization and of having betrayed its economic and political program. They announced the creation of a new movement, the NFS Social Democrat (NSF-SD), led by the

former NSF Secretary of Propaganda, Velicu Radina, who is said to be ready if need be to support the Presidential candidacy of Iliescu against that of Roman. The NSF-SD accused the latter of advancing "liberal and non-Social Democratic" reforms and declared itself opposed to the restoration of capitalism under any form whatsoever.

Earlier, a conflict had broken out at the Parliamentary level with the formation of an independent group of ten deputies and three senators called NSF May 20 (the date of last year's elections which continue to form a point of reference for the dissidents).

June also saw new developments on the trade union plane. On June 7, five union confederations — the Alfa union cartel, the Fides confederation, Hercules, and the Transport union confederation Transtar — formed a united confederation, the National Union Confederation (NUC). The NUC — which has about three million members — denounces the under-utilization of the country's economic potential, demands an emergency government and advocates the transfer of State enterprises to the people in the form of vouchers (the government opted for vouchers to be placed in a stock exchange, involving up to 30% of the property).

## New union bloc formed

On the fifteenth of that month three other confederations — the National Confederation of Construction Workers, the Confederation of Industrial Machine Workers and the Confederation of Energy Sector Workers — formed the National



Union Bloc (NUB). The NUB fights against unemployment, for the improvement of Social Security and for an acceleration of privatizations. We can add that from the end of last year organizations of the unemployed, which are called unions, but are actually a combination of unions and hiring agencies, have been formed.

Also in June, apart from the aborted general strike of the 19th, there were strike calls that were supported; warning strikes of rail workers, the strike of the workers of the FAUR metallurgy plant, that of the taxi drivers in Bucharest and that of the metal workers of the Craiova factory.

Finally, in the month of August, the government presented a new law on privatizations — with stormy debates in Parliament — and the national agency on privatizations drew up an initial list of thirty state firms destined to be auctioned off (*Financial Times*, September 5).

### Conflicts and crises

In conclusion, during the last twelve months, Romania has seen conflicts and crises at every level, in the context of an economic situation that has not ceased to deteriorate. It is sufficient to mention that the GNP has fallen 10%, and industrial production 20%, that exports have fallen 46% while imports have risen 54%, and that inflation is well above 100% (it is predicted to reach 130% this year).

This inflation has, among other things, had the effect of wiping out the wage gains that had been obtained by the miners (which included the reduction of the work week from 36 to 30 hours). But it is unemployment in particular which has become a real nightmare. According to the daily newspaper *Avenaru*, it had reached 120,000 already by the end of 1990, and has grown since then. By the end of this year it is expected that that figure will rise to a million, but unions as well as government agencies estimate that it could reach a million and a half.

On September 25, thousands of miners from the Jiu valley, the most important mining region in the country, arrived in Bucharest where they were later joined by thousands more of their comrades. Thus began the sequence of very combative mobilizations in front of government buildings and the Parliament, incursions into these buildings and street demonstrations.

The miners proclaimed a general strike. Severe clashes with the forces of repression occurred until the very day the demonstrators left (there were officially five deaths and 130 wounded). The threats of Petre Roman had no effect, nor did those of Iliescu (the latter had, however, adopted a very prudent attitude, becoming increasingly himself the target of the demonstrators' slogans). At several points the union leaders, especially the miners' leader, Miron Cosma, and the NUC leader

### Bulgarian miners move into action

ANOTHER sign of the increasing combativity of the Eastern European working class was the Bulgarian miners' strike in mid-August. On August 14 strikes broke out in many of Bulgaria's mines in support of demands for wage increases and a clear government policy towards the mining industry. The strike ended on August 23 with a tentative agreement between the coalition government of Prime Minister Dimitar Popov and the Federation of Miners, a member of the independent trade union confederation *Podkrepa*.

There has been increasing disquiet among the two leading Bulgarian trade union federations — the other one is the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria (CITUB), which, with 2,000,000 members, is twice as large as *Podkrepa* — about the effects of the government's market "reforms". Economic policies supported by the International Monetary Fund have led to a drop in living standards which, according to official figures, amounted to 49.6% in the first half of 1991.

It is estimated that some 27,000 miners, or one third of the total labor force in the Bulgarian mining industry, participated in the strike. The government initially took a hard line, saying that the wages of strikers would not be paid and questioning the legality of the strike. They were supported in this by all the major political parties, who are agreed that economic reform should continue unabated. Finally, on August 22, a compromise was reached between government and *Podkrepa* representatives, laying a basis for further negotiations on wages and the future of the industry; the chairman of the Central Strike Committee said that the agreement "satisfies practically all our demands". ★

Eugen Tamas, who called for the end of the mobilizations, were cast aside by the miners.

### Students support miners

Moreover, the workers and students of Bucharest quickly involved themselves in the miners' actions. This is particularly significant in the case of the students and their leader, Munteanu, who had been one of the targets of the miners in June 1990 and seems to now be pro-Monarchist. In another spectacular reversal, the congress of the Christian Democratic Party applauded the miners' leader, to whom the president of the party himself, Cornelius Coposu, expressed his solidarity!

What were the demands of the miners? They can be summarized in the following way; abolition of the law on the liberalization of prices, a return to the price policies concerning basic foodstuffs and other basic goods, readjustment of wages in line with the cost of living, the rehiring of the 4,000 miners laid off during the course of the preceding months and participation of a miners' delegation in the negotiations for the formation of a new government to replace that of Roman whose departure they were demanding.

The results obtained so far are far from satisfactory. There were some compromises. Iliescu, who made a brief tour of the mining regions hoping to regain some of the miners' confidence, announced that Roman had in fact resigned and that the consultations for the formation of a new government would begin immediately. At the same time he has begun to "closely examine" the demand for the readjustment of wages.

Now new conflicts will no doubt develop with the oppositional parties as

well as within the NSF, shaken by the quarrel between Iliescu and Roman (who accused the President of having "allied with outlaws"). In any case, it is not very likely that the new government will be willing or able to satisfy the demands of the miners or of the workers in general or to improve in any way the economic situation.

Whatever its composition, it risks becoming in large measure paralysed and the target of attacks coming from all directions. As for "aid" and international investments, it is certain that the different international institutions and foreign investors will be even more prudent than before (the EEC has already decided to put off discussions that had been planned).

### A contradictory situation

The Bucharest events have shown once again the contradictory situation that the Romanian working class finds itself in. It has considerable social weight and can count on strong union organizations. In the heat of mobilizations it plays an objectively hegemonic role. But in the absence of an overall political alternative and of a truly independent organization, it will remain on the defensive, fighting rear guard battles, and risks being drawn into orientations and positions that go against its essential interests.

Thus the other social forces intervening in the current context — whether at the side of the miners in the streets of Bucharest, or trying to exploit their intervention to settle inter-bureaucratic scores — will no doubt have more influence than the working class on the political and economic choices to be made in the coming months and years. ★

# The hard road ahead

**THE MONTH** since the abortive coup of August 19-21 has shed little new light on the central puzzle — its astoundingly inept organization and execution. Having announced their coup, the leaders seemed at a loss about what to do next. One popular theory is that they had been led to believe that Gorbachev would join them. Another theory points to behind the scenes maneuvering by Yeltsin's people with the putschists. In the absence of hard evidence, which may never emerge, both remain pure speculation.

DAVID SEPPO

**T**HERE IS more clarity, however, about the nature of the contending forces in the coup. The Soviet and foreign press present these as "Communist hardliners" versus "democrats".<sup>1</sup> But from the point of view of their programme, there was nothing particularly "Communist" about the putschists. And programmes aside, they did not even attempt to cloak themselves in the party mantle — the party's leadership and central apparatus themselves do not seem to have been directly involved in the coup. This, however, did not stop Gorbachev from resigning as party leader and calling for its dissolution. Nor did it prevent Yeltsin and other republican leaders (some of whom were still party leaders when the coup occurred) from suspending its activities. This was done without any semblance of due process and in the absence of any pressing emergency.

The 15 million party members, completely disoriented by the party leadership's liberal orientation and its toadying to Gorbachev, offered no resistance, meekly accepting the violation of their political rights. Yet this is the party that the "democrats" had been portraying as an all powerful organization, the chief threat to the freedom and well-being of the Soviet people. Interestingly, a poll conducted in Russia found that only 19% of the respondents held the party as such responsible for the coup.<sup>2</sup>

The goal of this anti-communist campaign, besides discrediting socialism by association, is to divert popular attention from the important questions; where is the country going, what sort of society is being built, who is benefitting from the socio-political arrangements and process presently at work, who is accumulating wealth and power?

The wait-and-see attitude adopted during the coup by the great mass of the population reveals profound doubts about how these questions are being answered in

practice. Although "democratic" candidates have won some large electoral victories over the past two years (Yeltsin received 57% of the vote in Russia in June; Popov, mayor of Moscow, received 65%), there appears to be little genuine popular identification with the liberal politicians or with the political structures they head. Although the liberal press hails the coup's defeat as "popular revolution", the "real October", the evidence points to the conclusion that most people did not feel directly concerned by events, let alone participate in them.

The citizens of Suzdal, a small tourist town about 120 kilometers from Moscow, voted 70% in June for Yeltsin. But neither the people nor the local soviet displayed any overt reaction to the coup.<sup>3</sup> The city soviet could not even assemble a quorum to discuss the situation<sup>4</sup> (in October 1917, workers from this region rushed to the defence of the Moscow

soviet against White forces and played a key role in its victory).

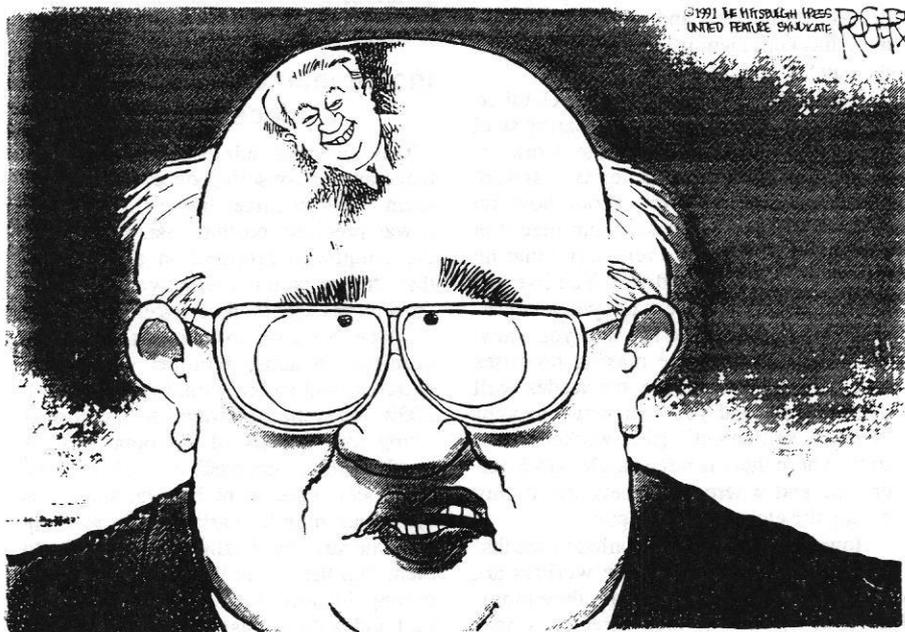
At Moscow's ZIL truck factory, a journalist found "political aloofness". "In my opinion", offered one of the workers, "the collective was not for or against. These events did not concern people".<sup>5</sup>

A barber in a state shop not more than 100 yards from the barricades where the three men were killed continued to work throughout the coup.<sup>6</sup> A doctor in a trolleybus had this to say to a journalist seated next to him: "You spent the night there [at the barricades]? Well, there are enough people squabbling over power. We are working". The director of a Moscow factory: "Yes, I have passed through the centre and saw the tanks. Well, so what? I don't have time to waste on trifles. My suppliers haven't sent me paper in two days".<sup>7</sup>

At the giant "Red October" metallurgical plant in Volgograd, the director refused to heed the urgings of the factory's group of local soviet deputies that he declare a strike. He told them that a strike would have disastrous effects on the factory and, besides, the political benefit of such a strike to Russia was not evident. When, following the coup's defeat, the "democrats" demanded his dismissal, the workers organized a petition campaign in his defence and threatened a political strike. The threat was rescinded when a judge found that there were no grounds for criminal charges.<sup>8</sup>

It seems that it is one thing to vote for

1. I use the term "democrats" in quotation marks, because this is how the Soviet liberals label themselves. Some of them are, indeed, democrats; others are merely "market democrats".
2. *Moskovskie novosti*, no. 30, 1991, p. 2.
3. *New York Times*, September 16, 1991.
4. *Trud*, September 13, 1991.
5. *Trud*, September 14, 1991.
6. *New York Times*, September 17, 1991.
7. *Nedelya*, no. 36, 1991.
8. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, September 14, 1991.



5

"democrats" and another to actually mobilize in their defence. In elections, people have tended to orientate themselves in "ideological" terms, without immediate reference to their concrete interests. Moreover, the "democratic" candidates appear as the only serious alternative to the discredited old regime. But on the level of concrete politics, when there is a real risk of oppression and loss of income, the approach has always been more down to earth.

On this level, there is a widespread feeling that there is not much to choose from. Economic dislocation grows worse, and the future under the "democrats" holds out the prospect of further immiseration. Election results aside, in the nine and a half months of 1991 preceding the coup, of the almost 4,000 letters sent to the liberal daily *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, only 1,500 fully supported the "democrats".<sup>9</sup>

At the ZIL factory, the words "order" and "chaos" kept cropping up in a journalist's conversations with workers. The trade union committee chairman of the forging shop explained: "People have been brought to despair. They waited for the great day; wages have been doubled. But who benefitted from the rise? The speculator! Women's boots cost 200 rubles, but we buy them for 1,000. Like most goods, they pass through the unclean hands of third and even fifth persons".

### Roots of social adversity

"People understand", concluded the journalist, "that the present social adversity is predetermined by the whole preceding bureaucratic-distributive system... But you can also hear complaints addressed to the new administration, not only Gorbachev's, but now also Yeltsin's: when will an end be put to this lawlessness [*bespredel*] that is very far from a civilized market?" The ZIL workers here were much more worried about the planned privatization of the factory, about which management has kept them in the dark, than about the coup.<sup>10</sup>

The journalist who visited Red October, which makes 30% of the ball bearing steel in the country, described the workers' mood in the following terms: "Before striking, you think first about how no trade union and no strike committee will feed your family. You remember that no authority ever defended you. You live in a permanently defensive state; you are beaten down by everyday life and you know full well that all those making promises and calling you to the barricades will deceive you, and you will return to your 'French settlement' [the workers' district] where there is not a single public telephone and where the streets are lit only during the election campaigns".

6 However, the journalist failed to see that despite these conditions, the workers are neither passive nor apathetic; they mobilized in defence of their director, whom

they saw as defending their enterprise during the coup, against the "democrats".

Despite all the above, and regardless of the "democrats'" social programme, the question remains: did not the Supreme Soviet and other elected bodies merit active support as democratic institutions? That is no doubt true. The reasons for the weak popular mobilization remain the key question raised by the coup. Only the future will give a definitive answer to it. Perhaps people did not take the coup, which only lasted three days, seriously. Moreover, the putschists, concerned with maintaining an air of constitutionality, did not dissolve the soviets. But it is also clear that the enthusiasm for parliamentary democracy has waned among the population in the absence of any credible political alternative with which people could identify.<sup>11</sup>

Such an alternative does not exist at present. The bureaucracy's hiding behind the red flag for almost 70 years had already done much to discredit socialism. Yet until around 1989 there was still considerable popular support for a "socialist path of development", however vaguely that was conceived. This has been largely undermined by the past two years of stagnation and absolute economic decline under a central government led by Gorbachev, the head "Communist", as well as by a massive anti-socialist propaganda campaign.

In these conditions, the workers experience with the "democrats" would make almost anyone cynical about electoral politics. Ivan Silaev (who spent almost all his adult life as a "Communist" bureaucrat), until recently Yeltsin's prime minister and now head of the union government, admitted a few days ago that "we kept trying to prove to ourselves and the citizenry that the transition to the market is something akin to an easy, pleasant stroll. Everyone would be protected and secure, and things would only get better. But life is not like that!"<sup>12</sup>

### Incompetence and conscious deception

This forthright admission of incompetence and/or conscious deception did not seem to bother Silaev in the slightest. Yet it was precisely on that basis (as well as the ubiquitous propagation of the view that "there is no alternative") that the "democrats" got themselves elected.

Silaev went on to say that while the neediest, invalids, families with many children, and so on, would be supported, 100% indexation of wages to the cost of living for the bulk of the population is "unthinkable, impossible". This must have been a recent revelation, since less than four months earlier, at a meeting with the striking Kuzbass miners, he told them that they were "perfectly correct in putting forward such high demands".<sup>13</sup> Full indexation was one of the miners'

demands. It was also a central demand of the Byelorussian workers, whose strike was greeted with enthusiasm by "democrats".

It is possible, of course, that most workers, weighed down by the burdens and insecurities of everyday life, are simply apathetic about political life. Even in April, except for Byelorussia, there was little response to the miners' call to support their political strike for the resignation of the central authorities. However, it seems more likely that this lack of response has the same explanation as the failure to mobilize against the coup; why go to the trouble and risk when there are no attractive alternatives. It is easier for coal miners to nurture the illusion that the "democrats'" market system is a real alternative for them (though a closer look at their independent union's draft collective agreement reveals a vision of the market that is a far cry from that of the liberals) since natural resources are one of the few goods produced in the Soviet Union that would be competitive on the world market (though even how the miners would really fare is open to debate).

As for the Byelorussian workers, their strikes in April and May were in large part a holdover from an earlier period; the Byelorussian political structures had still not been liberalized. They did not, it seems, strike during the coup.

### Orgy of presidential decrees

Even on the level of purely formal (as opposed to substantive) democracy, it is not at all evident that the "democrats" offer a clear alternative to the putschists. Yeltsin's orgy of presidential decrees following the coup left many genuine democrats, in Russia as well as in other republics, wondering. After the emergency had passed, he unilaterally suspended newspapers, took over Union ministries, institutions and enterprises, and threatened to review the borders of republics seceding from the union.

He also asserted his intention of creating a centralized administration in Russia, one that would be much more powerful than the Union centre has been over the past years, with appointed governors in every region and autonomous republic. He used the ambivalent position adopted by elected leaders of many regional soviets to purge people hostile to his policies and he sent out his appointed commissars to many others.<sup>14</sup>

As one Russian observer has noted,

9. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, August 28, 1991.

10. *Trud*, September 14, 1991.

11. *Trud*, July 13, 1991.

12. It is worth noting in this connection that the "democrats" have not yet bothered to enact an effective recall mechanism. This was one of the demands of the miners' political strike of July 11, 1991. *Trud*, September 9, 1991.

13. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, April 4, 1991.

14. *Financial Times* (London), September 24-25, 1991; *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, August 27, 1991.



"Everyone remembers how a year ago, while travelling across Russia, Yeltsin promised sovereignty to virtually every telephone pole: 'Take as many rights as you want'. Instead, the regions of Russia found themselves under the strict control of the Russian centre. As in the French Revolution, presidential commissars are being sent out to the localities with broad powers. Elected to the Congress of People's Deputies on the old slogan of 'All Power to the Soviets', the Russian president acquired tremendous constitutional power, which was then — well before the latest crisis — supplemented by emergency powers. Yet, even these powers are being exceeded".<sup>15</sup> Parallel to this, the executives are usurping the powers of the elected soviets in cities like Moscow and Leningrad which are headed by "democratic" mayors.<sup>16</sup>

The reorganization of the Union government following the coup was conducted without concern for the Supreme Soviet and the constitution, let alone democratic process. These are only "transitional" arrangements, but no one knows how long the transition will last and how many irreversible changes will be introduced in the

meantime. The new Presidential Council, the effective government that includes Gorbachev and the leaders of the other republics still members of the Union, has already received the popular nickname GKChP-II.<sup>17</sup>

The powerful four man Council for Management of the National Economy includes the (former) prime minister of Russia, the head of the Moscow city executive, a liberal economist and the head of an employers' association. There are no representatives of workers' organizations. Of the four, three are career (formerly Communist) bureaucrats, and only one holds an elected post, having been elected by the voters of one of Russia's several hundred districts.

As one liberal legislator put it: "This is a presidential putsch, a real presidential putsch. But thank God it is one without tanks"<sup>18</sup> Of course, the Supreme Soviet that enacted the existing constitution was elected in rather less than fully democratic circumstances. But even that servile body begins to look good against the background of what is happening now, when there is not a single remaining opposition daily in Moscow (ironically,

only a few months earlier, Gorbachev repeatedly cited the constitution as the reason why he could not discuss with the miners their demand that he resign).

A few days after the "democrats'" victory over the "hardline Communists" a liberal journalist wrote in *Izvestiya's* weekly supplement: "Yes, in Russia we need a harsh, and in many ways, authoritarian government. The President of Russia will soon have to confront that which is more dangerous than any elite junta — unemployment, the immiseration of millions of people. Destructive strikes are inevitable and explosions of violence are possible. In these circumstances, it will be necessary to do unpleasant things — to forbid, maybe even to disperse, to introduce order".<sup>19</sup>

### Advocates of authoritarian rule

This statement is not exceptional. Many "democratic" ideologues and politicians do not hide their admiration for general Pinochet and his "Chilean miracle".<sup>20</sup> In this, they are in full agreement with the "Communist hardliners" who also advocated authoritarian rule "for the transition". It is perhaps with this eventuality in mind that the Russian government is now creating a National Guard. Although it claims to have been saved from the coup by popular mobilization, it has rejected the idea of a volunteer citizens' militia in favour of an elite, strictly professional force. Wages in it will be set at 2,000 rubles, or about five times what an average factory worker earns.<sup>21</sup>

As for republic-centre relations, the new arrangements do appear more equal, in the sense that the form of participation of individual republics in the Union is left up to the republics and republican laws will have precedence over those of the Union. Moreover, in the transitional "parliament", the upper chamber, in which each participating republic will have one vote, will be predominant. But it remains to be seen how workable this will be in practice.

Economic separation would be disastrous for all the republics, though much less so for Russia, which produces almost two thirds of the net output of the former USSR and controls the bulk of the natural resources and export earning production (one can, of course, legitimately ask why these should belong exclusively to Russia,

15. N. Preobrazhenskii, "The First Skirmish", *Socialist Alternatives* (Montreal), no. 1, 1991.

16. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, June 26, 1991.

17. GKChP is the abbreviation of the deposed junta. *New York Times*, September 10, 1991.

18. *Gazette* (Montreal), September 8, 1991.

19. *Nedelya*, no. 25, 1991. Compare this with what Lech Walesa let slip a while ago in Warsaw: "Very often I have doubts whether evolution from the communist system is possible. [...Perhaps Poland needs] tough, strong, revolutionary methods — with fear [!] — to reorient the economy." *Wall Street Journal*, September 18, 1991.

20. *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September 1991, p. 12.

21. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, September 14, 1991.

when they were developed jointly by all the republics).

This means that whatever formal arrangements exist, Russia will generally be able to impose its will. This is also why Yeltsin is so interested in maintaining the Union headed by Gorbachev; he hopes it will make Russian dominance less obvious and more palatable to the other republics.

The Russian leadership has somewhat retreated from the menacing gestures and noises it made following the coup. Nevertheless, its appetite for power is evident. And it is not about to abandon the policy of trying to build popular legitimacy on nationalist appeals. The appointment of Silaev, formerly Yeltsin's prime minister, to head the Union government is a clear sign of Russia's predominance in the new Union. Nor do Yeltsin's authoritarian centralizing measures within Russia itself bode well for Russia's relations with the other republics. On September 13, Yavlinskii, the liberal economist in the Council for the Management of the National Economy, presented a draft of a new economic treaty which was purposely left vague to avoid raising objections from nationalist forces in the republics. He warned, however, that Russia was quite prepared to go it alone. This amounts to a virtual ultimatum to the republics, as none of them can go it alone.<sup>22</sup>

It should also be remembered that the creation of more equal relations among republics does not necessarily mean that their citizens will enjoy increased democracy. Georgian president Gamsakhurdia's increasingly authoritarian rule demonstrates that the local elites' temptation to exploit nationalist sentiment as a substitute for democracy and a popularly-orientated social and economic policy will be very great.

### Tightening the screws

In Russia, Yeltsin is tightening the screws on the autonomous republics. The Baltic governments have used the coup's aftermath to accelerate their purge of "undesirables", that is members of the Communist Party and "non-indigenous" peoples. There is growing pressure there to deprive of their citizenship people who cannot trace their family's residence in the republic back to 1940, or at least "to economically stimulate them to go home".<sup>23</sup>

The Lithuanian government used the coup to dissolve the local soviets of two predominantly Polish and one Russian district for six to twelve months. These elected bodies were accused of supporting the putschists.<sup>24</sup> Their real sin is their opposition to Lithuanian independence — they fear that their minority rights will not be respected. The Lithuanian government's rehabilitation of Nazi war criminals (hundreds of thousands of Jews were murdered by Lithuanians during the war)

is not a comforting signal to the authorities.

If the workers, with the exception of a part of the miners, did not mobilize in support of Yeltsin, the same cannot be said of Russia's new bourgeoisie. True, the speculators continued through the coup to sell goods at prices out of the reach of ordinary citizens. But business is business. On the other hand, 1,000 hamburgers were sent over from Macdonald's to the hungry defenders of the "White House" by the private insurance company "ASKO". "ASKO" was established in the fall of 1988 and already has assets of 51 million rubles. After the coup, it donated a quarter of a million rubles to "the families of the three victims, the soldiers who defended the 'White House', the journalists and the others who showed courage"<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, the private bank "Delovaya Rossiya" donated one million rubles to a fund "for the liquidation of the consequences of the coup"<sup>26</sup> The "Atlant" bank, the "Rezerv" insurance company and a third business initiated a fund for the creation of a Russian National Guard. "Rezerv" alone gave 100,000 rubles, its owner adding that, "of course, the Supreme Soviet will decide how to use these funds"<sup>27</sup> (considering the massive tax evasion that is commonly practiced by private businesses, these donations are hardly generous<sup>28</sup>).

The workers may have doubts, but these people obviously see Yeltsin's victory as their own. Nor do the "democrats" seem worried about accusations that they are being bought.

Over the past months, the new bourgeoisie has lost much of its earlier bashfulness. According to the paper *Tochka zreniya* in July 1991 there were 15,000 ruble millionaires in the Soviet Union. There is even a Young Millionaire's Club.<sup>29</sup> When on August 28 Yeltsin gave the mayor of Moscow powers to freeze or cut prices, the president of Moscow's private commodities exchange (where even the guards are said to pick up an extra 100,000 rubles or so each month by putting buyers in contact with sellers) threatened a "business strike" which would see the capital's private sector move to Petersburg and other cities.

He warned that Moscow would be left "a graveyard in which Popov and Luzhkov [respectively mayor and chairman of the city's executive committee] will be governing masses of unemployed".<sup>30</sup> This bravado is still very far from reality, but it reflects the growing self-confidence and ambition of this rising stratum, which feels — justifiably — that it has debts to collect from the "democrats".

### Political potential of workers

While one should be realistic in assessing the political potential of the workers in the near future, it would be extremely

hasty to conclude from the preceding analysis that the path is now wide open for the new bourgeoisie and its political representatives. Despite their bleating about a "popular revolution", the "democratic" leaders are not blind to the significance of the population's failure to mobilize in their support.

A week after the coup, liberal economist Yavlinskii (best known as author of the "500 day plan" and the "Great Bargain" though his real talent appears to lie in selling himself to whoever is in power) and Silaev, Yeltsin's former prime minister, held a press conference. Yavlinskii told the reporters that the country must use the victory to forge ahead with the transition to a market economy. But he was immediately contradicted by Silaev, who said that the Russian people were tired and that there could be no question of shock therapy.

In this respect, a recent headline in the *Wall Street Journal*, the conservative newspaper of the US business class, is instructive: "Poland's Shaky Switch to a Free Market is a Warning for Soviets: Strikes, Recessions and Malaise Leave Many Rethinking the Road to Capitalism". And Russia is politically far from Poland. Not even the personality cult being built around him can turn Yeltsin into a Walesa.

### Nationalist sentiment

Despite the cultivation of nationalist sentiment, neither Russia, the Ukraine, Kazakhstan nor Byelorussia, that is the main industrial regions, have movements enjoying popular legitimacy even approaching that of Solidarnosc. Unlike Poland, the working class here has not been broken by political repression and long years of economic collapse and insecurity. The workers may not yet be in a position to formulate their own programme, but the labour movement remains the *only organized social force* in society. This is a minority of the working class, but experience shows how quickly even unorganized workers can mobilize and create their own organizations.

Most workers chose not to intervene during the three day coup in August. The significance of this failure to mobilize will become clear only in the months to come. In any case, this was only an episode in what will surely be a long series of social and political struggles and upheavals, the outcome of which it would be foolhardy to predict. ★

22. *Gazette*, September 18, 1991.

23. *Komsomol'skaya pravda*, September 14, 1991.

24. *Trud*, September 14, 1991.

25. *Trud*, September 7, 1991.

26. *Rabochaya tribuna*, September 7, 1991.

27. *Trud*, September 14, 1991.

28. E. Shestakov, "Zagadochnye nevidimki", *Nedelya*, no. 37, 1991, p. 8.

29. *Gazette*, July 13, 1991.

30. *Financial Times*, September 13, 1991.

# Soviet trade unions back Party of Labour

AT THE end of August a declaration calling for the formation of a Russian Party of Labour (*Partiya Truda*) was launched in Moscow (see IV/213 for text). Among the signatories of this document were some well-known socialists — including Socialist Party leader, Boris Kagarlitsky and Andrei Isayev from the Anarcho-Syndicalist current — together with leaders of the Moscow Federation of Trade Unions (MFP) — including its chairman Niko Goncher, who is also a chairman of the Moscow City Council.

This is the first time that leaders of a mass workers' organization (MFP organizes 90% of the workers in Moscow Province, where 16 million people live) have endorsed an initiative for creating an independent political force subordinated neither to the apparatus nor to the pro-capitalist currents.

POUL-FUNDER LARSEN

**T**HE absence of independent working class organizations is obviously the key problem as attacks on the living standards and democratic rights of workers are mounting.

The Initiative for a Party of Labour can be a first step in overcoming this problem; though it is clear that re-building an alternative needs time given the political dominance of the liberals and the lack of recent militant traditions in large parts of the Soviet working class.

The disintegration of the bureaucratic structures of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) has given rise to the curious situation that there exists neither in Russia nor in most other republics any sizeable political parties. Liberals of various breeds have a power base in Democratic Russia and the Movement for Democratic Reform.

But while the first is a heterogeneous conglomerate of different pro-capitalist forces, the second is still only an empty shell with a series of prominent leaders at the top. But their following remains tiny and scattered, with the biggest of them, the Democratic Party, numbering at most a few tens of thousands of supporters.

However the situation of the socialist forces also leaves a lot to be desired.

None of the left-wing organizations have made a breakthrough. The Socialist Party, the Marxist Workers Party, the Green Party and the Confederation of Anarcho-Syndicalists (KAS) remain comparatively small organizations with a certain influence in some sectors and regions, but in no position to challenge

the liberals.

Nor have the socialist forces in the CPSU managed to win a mass following. After the coup most of them have decided to leave (see following interview with Alexander Buzgalin), while various conservative currents — and even some centrist forces, including a group around Roy Medvedev — are trying to "refund" the party.

## Hopes for a real step forward

In this context of a divided and relatively weak left wing without strong backing among workers, the Party of Labour initiative can represent a real step forward. Over the past two years, there have been other, less ambitious, attempts to unite the left forces: at the founding conference of the Confederation of Labour in Kusbass in May 1990, and later the same year around the letter "On People's Self-Management" signed by leaders of several left groups. However, none of these initiatives promoted much activity.

The new and promising aspect of the Initiative for a Party of Labour — and at the same time the big unknown — is the participation of prominent leaders of the Moscow branch of the official trade unions. Before and throughout most of the *perestroika* years, the official trade unions have been an integral part of the system.

But with the decline of the apparatus and the emergence of strong and increasingly dominant pro-liberal currents with-

in the bureaucracy, the position of the trade unions has become fragile, while at the same time pressure from below has mounted as living standards drop.

This was clear in the miners' strikes of 1989, which in many regions by-passed the existing union structures, but it has also been evident in many recent local disputes. The official unions have tried to improve their image by changing names — hence the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) — and by pursuing an alliance with the Yeltsin camp, but this is likely to create more problems as the economic "shock therapy" draws closer. The questions remain: how strong are the progressive forces in the unions today, and will the leadership of the Moscow trade union be able to draw other groups of both leaders and rank-and-file members into the process of building the Party of Labour.

There have been several attempts at setting up independent unions outside the framework of the FNPR (and the all-union Confederation of Unions, the VKP). By far the most influential of these, due to its membership, militancy and strategic position, is the Independent Union of Miners (NPG) founded in 1990. While the leadership of this union has been following Yeltsin there are also forces which stand for a more independent and militant line.

## Corruption scandal in miners' union

The liberal leadership of the NPG was recently shaken by a large corruption scandal involving its president, Pavel Shushpanov, who was forced to resign. This is likely to have strengthened the position of the militant layer in the union — the attitude of which will be very important for the new Party of Labour, given the vanguard position of the miners.

The Party of Labour project is still in its early stages and faces immense challenges, but one can hope that the fears expressed by the liberal *Moskovskiy Novosti* ("Moscow News"), no. 37, 1991, come true: "Considering the prospects of the new party, the slight post-putsch allergy to socialist ideas should not be exaggerated.

"Tomorrow when the national economy is being resuscitated, including by painful means, unemployment will rise, and living standards will sag, which will change many people's attitude towards socialist ideas and the parties promoting them.

Below we publish an interview with Alexander Buzgalin, a leader of the Marxist opposition in the CPSU who has expressed his support for the Party of Labour project. In the next issue of IV we will publish an interview with the editor of the Moscow trade union's newspaper, Andrei Isayev, one of the originators of the project. ★

# "We are not conspirators"

IN THE last issue of *International Viewpoint* we published an appeal for a Party of Labour Issued by a number of well-known socialist personalities in Moscow. Support for this initiative has also come from a minority of the Marxist Platform in the CPSU. In the following interview, which appeared in *Pravda* on September 20, 1991, Alexander Buzgalin, a founder of the Marxist Platform, talks about this tendency's perspectives.

## DOCUMENT

“WE are not conspirators” — this was the comment by Dr. A. Buzgalin. “On September 9, the Soviet press agency TASS distributed a report about an illegal meeting of Communists. *Pravda*, judging by the note in its number of September 11, has conscientiously avoided spreading this misleading report. I and my colleagues are grateful for this.”

### ■ So what in fact happened?

In actual fact, what was taking place was a meeting of the coordinating committee of the Marxist Platform. The majority considered that a new party of Communists was needed. This current in turn had two groups within it. The first, in my view, inclines towards the centralist positions of A. Prigarin's Communist Initiative. The leader of the others is A. Kryuchkov. They put the accent on democracy and not only on socialist choices and communist perspectives.

A minority (among them myself) supported the initiative by leaders of the Socialist Party, anarcho-syndicalists and Moscow trade unionists for the formation of a Party of Labour. The aims of this organization are the defence of the interests of the wage earners, and the development of producers and territorial self-management.

■ How do you see the general situation of the Communist movement today, after the suspension of the activities of the CPSU? Meetings of the Central Committee and the regional and civic committees are suppressed. The apparatus has disintegrated, and the CPSU has disappeared from sight. Should we accept the ban and remain silent?

Leave? Does the possibility of disappearing from political view attract you?

The answer cannot be given in two words. The CPSU has not been a real party for 60 years. It was no more and no less than one of the most important props of the bureaucratic system. “Ordinary” Communists were nearer to the ordinary citizens than to the party/state nomenklatura. Nor was the CPSU in reality ideologically monolithic. You could find everything there, from Nina Andreeva [a hard-line neo-Stalinist] to Boris Yeltsin. In crisis both neo-Stalinists and liberal democrats have left the party.

The collapse of the apparatus has paralyzed the CPSU. Now the paralysis is passing. The fingers and toes of the CPSU are beginning to stir, and, in the spirit of the times claim the right to absolute independence and to go their own way.

Firstly, there has already appeared the Democratic Party of Communists of Russia (DPKR), with the Vice-President as its leader. In accord with the thinking of its organizers, this party in essence aspires neither to be Communist nor even social democrat and will become a traditional liberal democratic organization. Apart from this, the DPKR can become a centre of attraction for careerists.

Then there is the diametrically opposite tendency of conservatives (the Communist Initiative), who in fact want to recreate the old centralized structures in unreconstructed form, as well as the neo-Stalinists of Yedinstvo (“Unity”).

Thirdly, there is the initiative of the leaders of the Marxist Platform.

Finally, there are the supporters of the creation of a Party of Labour.

■ Why have you decided to support the Party of Labour option rather than the organization of a new party that would appear as a successor of the CPSU?

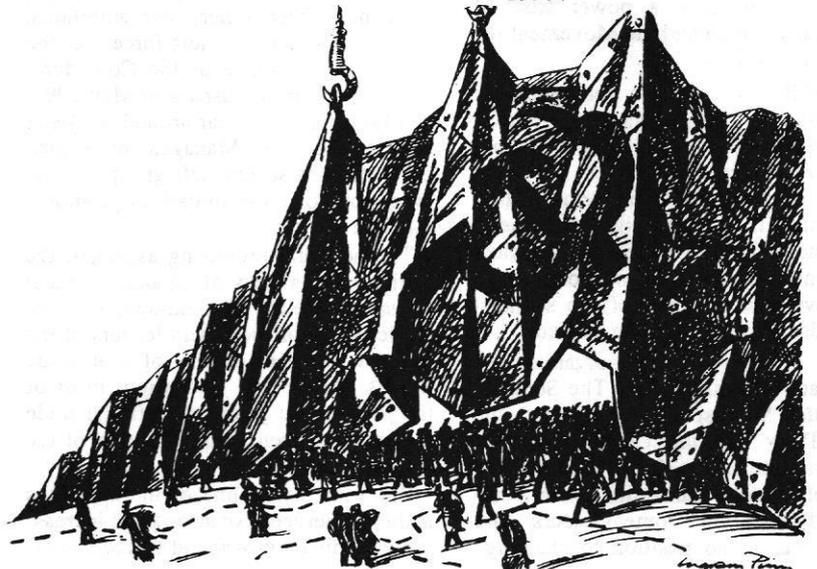
Some members of the coordinating committee of the Marxist Platform support the initiative for the creation of a new party — the Union of Communists — which hopes to represent the better traditions of the CPSU. Unlike these comrades I think that the CPSU has been terminally discredited by the bureaucratic policies of its leaders and the conformism of the majority of its rank-and-file members. The problem of forming a left opposition can only be met by another party.

However we agree with them in the sense of not wanting to break with traditions of support for social justice, democracy, humanism and the friendship of nations that have been built up within the Russian socialist movement in its century long existence. These traditions need to be continued and given new life in a new historical situation.

The problem of creating a left, that is, a democratic socialist opposition, cannot be resolved either by reviving the CPSU or by creating a new Communist Party. And without such an opposition even a very fine democracy will degenerate into a dictatorship or some other kind of authoritarian form. The rising wave of populism and the attempts to start a witch-hunt mean that there is a real threat of a Pinochet-style dictatorship based on private property and the market. Only real democracy is a guarantee against such a threat.

■ And what is your answer to the talk about your “illegality”?

Patiently I will say it once again. We are fully open to all our supporters and our critics. Our aim is dialogue, not conspiracy. Our contact telephone number is 299-77-39. ★



# Towards dependent capitalism?

**AMONG all the countries of Eastern Europe, Czechoslovakia has been regarded as the most likely to succeed in the transition to a market economy. Its economy is stronger than others and is untroubled by a massive debt burden. But even this best-of-cases is facing major economic problems as a result both of external pressures and the government's own policies. Half year results for the economy in 1991 are now available.\***

PETER ANNEAR

**A** REPORT on economic and social development issued by the government Statistical Office says Czechoslovakia's transition to a market economy has been seriously affected by the collapse of the former East European and Soviet markets.

This is true, but is far from the whole story. The economy has seriously contracted. Compared with the same period last year, the creation of real national revenue decreased by 13.8% and Gross Domestic Product declined by 9.2% according to the report. The State Bank expects the annual falls for 1991 to be 18% and 16% respectively.

Within the general pattern of decline, it is possible to identify certain major trends. Prices have risen sharply as a result of the transition in January to internal currency convertibility, that is, trade directly between enterprises instead of through ministry allocations, and the removal of subsidies to enterprises.

## Sharp fall in real incomes

Real incomes have fallen as a result, causing a contraction of demand, especially for food products, as people have less to spend. Both convertibility and the fall in demand have caused huge agricultural surpluses, especially of dairy products, eggs and beef, and big losses for some farm collectives.

This agricultural crisis has generated protests from farmers and collectives who cannot find a market for their produce. In response, the government temporarily stepped back from its plans to reform the farm sector and has established a "market regulation fund" which will subsidize exports and purchase some surpluses.

Currently, all agriculture is collectivized or state run and is reasonably efficient. Legislation to reintroduce private

land ownership has not passed through parliament despite several attempts. By creating a rural crisis, the government's policies certainly aid its political campaign against the collectives.

Such economic problems have been aggravated by the government's tight monetary and fiscal policies. Taken together, the federal, Czech and Slovak governments currently support a combined budget surplus of approximately \$560m and interest rates are kept high. Not surprisingly, currency stability, industrial efficiency and management of agricultural competition are all key to Czechoslovakia's desperately sought membership of the European Economic Community.

Rather modestly, the Statistical Office says that the initial period of transformation of the economy after the January reforms was accompanied by unfavourable social effects. In particular consumer prices rose 49.2% between December and June and real income fell by 28.2% compared with the first half of 1990.

A separate preliminary report by the Federal Statistical Bureau showed food-stuff prices up 27.7% and an average rise of 67.4% in all other goods over the six months, but said that the rapid growth of consumer goods came to a complete halt in July.

While the total value of retail sales from the beginning of the year to the end of July rose 3% over the same period last year, the physical volume was down by 45%. People have continued to spend available income, but the huge price rises mean that they can buy less. Moreover the depreciation of the currency means that one's life savings can be wiped out overnight.

Living standards have declined. Unemployment reached 4.6% in July according to the Statistical Bureau, with 363,700 jobless nationally, 165,000 in the Czech Republic (population 10.3m) and 197,000 in the Slovak Republic (pop. 5.3m). At the end of July there were an estimated 44,800 job vacancies mostly in the blue collar sector.

## Skoda sold to Volkswagen

Privatization will not solve these problems. The most significant privatization project to date is the government's sale of the Skoda car enterprise to Volkswagen, which undertook to raise production to 400,000 units annually.

On August 30, Volkswagen deputy chairman Volkhard Köhler announced the company would immediately reduce output from 930 to 670 cars a day. The result is a shortening of the work week from five to four days, effective from September until further notice.

Köhler said the cuts were necessary because sales of the mainline Favorit model were poor. He said domestic sales to the end of August were only 30,000 compared to 123,000 for the whole of 1990 and the same low level of sales

\* This article first appeared in the Australian weekly *Green Left*.



"We want to give him back the forest, but he doesn't seem to want it!" — cartoon by Vladimír Jiránek from *Lidové noviny*

would continue throughout 1992, though exports had been good. Despite assurances to the contrary from Volkswagen, there are rumours that the company is using the Mlada Boleslav plant in Czechoslovakia to produce cheap labour components for its German plants.

According to the State Bank, foreign capital inflow for 1991 could reach \$600m, about 50% above previous estimates. Of the \$400m invested this year, most came from Volkswagen.

Meanwhile, the government's privatization programme is proceeding slowly. The greatest difficulty will be coordinating the coupon method of privatization of state-owned enterprises, in terms of timing and logistics, with the more standard approaches such as auctions and direct sales, according to the Czech Republic's privatization minister Tomas Jezek on August 20. The Federal finance minister has attacked the Czech ministry for "sabotaging" the programme.

The total value of state enterprises to be privatized using the coupon method under the government's "large privatization" programme (in which each individual will be issued with coupons or shares worth 2,000 crowns) amounts to \$4,667m in the Czech republic and \$2,333m in Slovakia, representing the value of enterprises plus real estate.

By the end of August, the Czech privatization ministry had selected all the enterprises to be privatized in this way in the Czech republic. Enterprises have until November 1 to submit plans for their own privatization. In this first phase, the Czech ministry will evaluate the plans of each of 2,490 such enterprises.

### Requests for return of property

As of August 15, 7,058 shops and retail outfits in the Czech Republic had been auctioned for a total value of \$190m in the small privatization process. 8,723 units selected for small privatization remained unsold. And the Czech ministry has received 50,000 requests from individuals for the return of individual property nationalized after 1948. September 30 is the deadline for submitting restitution claims.

But the underlying problem in the economy is the decline in output, which occurred in all areas of production in the first half of 1991. Industrial output dropped by 14.3%. The biggest declines were in clothing (33%), electrical engineering (29.9%) and non-ferrous metallurgy (29.5%). Construction industry output fell by 25.5%. Building commenced on 7,755 flats in the first half of the year, 82.6% down on the same period in 1990. Rail transport was down 22.1% and river transport by 22%.

Reflecting the agricultural slump, purchases of slaughter cattle nationally were down by 19.9%, milk by 12.8% and eggs

by 6.8%. Slovak agriculture minister Josef Krsek claimed in August that the persistent problems in Slovak agriculture stem from the fact that price liberalization did not take into account surpluses left over from 1990. Krsek said that in the first half of 1991 consumption of beef in Slovakia dropped 27% and milk 30%. By the end of the year surpluses are expected to total 110,000 tonnes of beef, 300,000 litres of milk and 460,000 tonnes of wheat.

Pointing to the increasing incidence of insolvency of agricultural enterprises, Krsek said that out of 907 agricultural cooperatives in Slovakia, 160 showed losses last year. Slovakia will address the problems through subsidies for beef and dairy exports, protection of the domestic market and revision of the credit rates and pricing policy. This all comes hard up against EEC policy however.

The economic and political daily *Hospodarske noviny* (Economic News) has drawn attention to the ever-increasing problem of insolvency among industrial enterprises, accelerated above all by the enterprises' failure to pay their accounts to each other. Previously the ministry would balance the accounts at the end of the period and hand out subsidies, but this no longer happens. According to the Czech industry ministry, while the total value of unpaid debts for the republic in January was \$1,067m, by the end of June it had reached almost \$2,600m.

It is becoming clear that the price of building a new economy is the destruction of the old. Industry is simply being run down. Investment in the national economy declined by 28.3% in the first half and expenditure on environmental protection at \$150m was 11.6% less than in the same period last year. The result is not surprising: labour productivity in enterprises with more than 100 employees fell by 14.3% in comparison with the same period last year.

### Redirecting trade from east to west

Increasing efficiency and competitiveness, however, will be the key to redirecting trade from east to west, a major goal of government policy. Currently, Czechoslovak suppliers are winning new markets in the east simply because their costs are lower. For example wages at the East Slovakia steelworks, the country's biggest steel producer, are one sixth of West European levels. What happens when wages rise?

As a result the trade deficit for the six months was lower than expected at \$330m. A surplus of \$310m was registered in trade with "advanced countries" and a deficit of \$630m with the former members of Comecon.

This could mean that Czechoslovakia is exporting finished products to the west at relatively high prices while bartering

or importing inputs from the east at relatively low prices. But how long can it last?

Czechoslovakia's single biggest supplier is still the USSR, which provides 35% of all imports, mainly oil, followed by united Germany with 18%. Exports now go primarily to Germany (24.6%), followed by the USSR (19.3%). At \$290m, an increase of \$23m since December, the country's gross debt is not a serious problem.

Considering the economic data now available in Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries it is now possible to draw some preliminary conclusions about the nature and the likely course of the economic reforms occurring in the region.

Firstly, at the level of the macro economy, the reforms are very weak. This involves mainly the building of market structures like direct trade between enterprises and price liberalization. While the effects of these measures has so far been bad, the extent to which the market has begun to lead the economy is virtually nil. Meanwhile the government's monetary and fiscal policies, directed towards curbing inflation, are recessionary.

Consequently the success of the transformation depends almost exclusively on micro-economic reform, that is, privatization. In many respects this is the government's only policy, because most other things, including rational trade between enterprises, the import of foreign capital, and external trade relations depend on it. The object of the privatization process is, of course, to create a functioning capitalist class, which is a prerequisite for further reform.

### Islands of modern industry in a sea of backwardness

But the limited scope and the slow pace of privatization, which under current plans will affect less than about 20% of the economy in all the eastern and central European countries (except for former East Germany) for a long long time to come, means that these economies will remain overwhelmingly state-owned and state-run for decades. But these statized economies will be dotted with islands of probably foreign owned, low wage, highly profitable, modernized industries lying in a sea of backwardness.

The realities are staring the likes of Czechoslovakia's neo-liberal finance minister Vaclav Klaus in the face. If Klaus' Civic Democratic Party wins the June 1992 federal elections, the privatization economic and political policy here could be much more forcefully implemented. While the social and economic effects of the Czechoslovak economic reform do not look so bad at the moment, that is only because the real reform has not yet begun. ★

# "The working class still exists"

Interview with Tamas Krausz



"Aren't you ashamed to steal from a private store?" — Vladimir Jiranek in *Lidove noviny*

A GENERAL strike was proposed in Hungary last June in opposition to a doubling of fuel prices. Around 800,000 of the country's 5 million active population was ready to stop work. The government retreated on some issues, conceding financial help to the most disadvantaged and some forms of employees' control in privatized enterprises. *International Viewpoint* interviewed Tamas Krausz, a historian and a member of the Hungarian Left Alternative, on the current situation in Hungary. The interview was conducted by Jacqueline Jauffret and Dominique Mezzi.

## WHAT has been the impact of the movement?

We have just seen an effort to organize a big cross-professional strike initiated by the old trade union, the one that existed before the change of government.

The government's weakness was revealed and it made important concessions to the union and the workers. It had to take note of the problems of the poorest and admit that unions and workers had the right to participate in the privatization process to a certain extent.

But the most important thing is that the movement has shown the government that the working class still exists in Hungary.

The two other, new, unions originate from the National Centre for Workers Councils (NCWC), which was not at first a union, but a real organization for workers' power. However, it has been revealed that these unions do not really exist, because the political parties have taken control of them.

## But workers' councils continue to exist in the factories.

Small groups still exist that we are trying to help to become stronger. But the former NCWC is now in the grip of the Democratic Forum and the other govern-

ment parties. It is now a government union.

Furthermore, the biggest section of these unions opposed the strike preparations. The other part, the league of liberal unions, is fighting for the redistribution of the national wealth (that is, privatizations). They fought against the old union, whose strength they fear, claiming that the strike movement was manipulated by Communists. But Hungarians could see that this was not true, and in any case the leaders of the new unions are also products of the Stalinist apparatuses.

The government tries to set the unions against each other while the left tries to establish contacts between them. We are the only ones with the legitimacy to do it.

## What does the trade union movement amount to in reality?

The old unions are not very active in the factories. The newly elected bureaucracy wants to make compromises with the enterprise heads over privatizations. The old union's national bureaucracy is more effective than that at factory level, since the rank-and-file leaders are scared of losing their jobs and they do not have sufficient legal backup to control the privatizations.

This is the current situation. In some ways they have fewer rights than under Kadar; they have lost old rights without gaining new ones.

## Do the workers support the government or is the degradation of their situation making them nostalgic for the old regime?

Workers who suffered under the old regime now want change at the level of the workplace. They opposed Stalinism, but now have little to hope for as the government attempts to introduce strict financial criteria in the factories. The government can hope to set workers against each other in this period.

People do not believe in any ideology or official organization. The majority detest the government and the working class hates it. They realize that they have been deceived, but they do not see what can be done in Hungary at the moment. The government has lost all moral support among the population in two years. It took the old ruling party 30 years to lose the confidence of the people. However there is no credible left force. The new left organizations are circles of intellectuals. I think that the working class will only come onto the stage after some months.

## What is the image of 1956 now?

1956 has become the symbol of the new regime and the government presents itself as its inheritor. They talk about its anti-Soviet and anti-Russian aspects but not about social relations. Yesterday, the last Soviet soldier left. The government said that this was the end of the struggle begun in 1956. They omit to say that the troops are leaving simply because Gorbachev made an agreement with Bush two years ago.

The government says to the people, we represent 1956 because we have obtained the removal of the Soviet troops. Of course, not a word is said about workers'

councils and socialism. For them, socialism and Stalinism are the same thing. I had a conversation with an SzDSz (Alliance of Free Democrats) parliamentary deputy who said that all this talk about the workers' councils in 1956 is just an illusion. And this is the official conception; the social content of 1956 is an illusion and its real content was national independence.

The workers are not impressed by this symbol. Every day they hear "56", "45" and so on. The majority are not listening because they understand that they are being lied to.

■ **What is the Left Alternative's policy at the moment?**

Most of the poorest workers are becoming still poorer. They have little possibility of defending themselves.

There are two possible alternatives: to get involved in some kind of modernized fascism, or to become nostalgic for the old regime, since their present situation is worse than under Kadar. The radical left does not exist in the mass movement. This could change but that is how things are now.

Many workers who were not Communists — I don't know the exact percentage — say that the new politicians are even worse than the Communists. They know that they have lost a lot in terms of living standards.

The government and the parties say: "you have gained much freedom", but what is this freedom for? Sure, workers have rights, but, as Marxists have explained for a long time, freedom has its economic and material aspects. People feel outside parliamentarism and the new parties. They don't have faith in all this. They can see that the parliament is essentially composed of old and new representatives of the economic elite.

I do not think that the workers are going to organize themselves. I think that in this first phase we must assist the organizations fighting the government and in favour of the unions. The workers will not follow anyone who wants to organize them under an ideological hat. National sentiment is strong among workers and is currently under the control of government propaganda. We can say nothing on this question. For example, if you say that we should struggle for rights and not against Romanians, you will be treated as a traitor to the nation. I am an internationalist and I speak of nationalism with much caution. Marxist intellectuals are likely to be considered as internationalist enemies of the people. It is a very complex situation which the majority of Marxists in the West cannot understand.

The left now needs to start from the trade unions. We have had a tendency to forget the old union. This is a mistake because many workers expect and can obtain real help from it. They also want

trade union unity. We must find new union leaders. I may hate the leaders, but it would be a disaster if these unions were destroyed, since the new unions will not replace them.

In my view, by October or November the situation in Hungary will be explosive, because it is then that people will have to pay the new energy prices.

■ **Does Left Alternative want to form a new party?**

Left Alternative will create a new party when there are real mass social movements in Hungary. People loathe the new parties and to create another in such a situation would be understood as just another group of intellectuals trying to get parliamentary money for themselves. For this reason we want above all to help the development of workers self-organization. We want to bring together the various parties that want to change the system, for example the Workers League, which considers itself Trotskyist. We have met with the Democratic Party of Hungarian Workers which represents some thousands of workers. We aim to promote these contacts.

Our second intervention is in the unions. We organize meetings and meet union leaders.

There also exist neighbourhood associations, which we hope to bring together on the national level. These associations could defend people unable to pay their rent.

We have registered some successes in these actions, but we are unable to go further owing to financial constraints. We have, for example, no independent publication and without that we cannot explain our positions on the television.

■ **Is there a feminist movement in Hungary and what is the real position of women in Hungarian society?**

Marxists and the western left need to understand that we do not have real democratic traditions. Feminism is not a real movement in Hungary. Some small groups without social weight exist, and I believe that it will take a few years for feminism to become a real movement.

The new style propaganda promotes a new image of women. Under the Kadar regime, the model was the woman worker, who worked like a man. Now we have the American model — the woman as sexual object.

There is now significant unemployment in Hungary, something unknown before. There is an increasing amount of propaganda putting forward the idea that women's work is not necessary for society. Thus, there is a conservative evolution towards the modern American way of life. ★

# The vultures gather

**THE withdrawal of a Soviet military brigade from Cuba, announced by President Gorbachev on September 11, 1991, at a joint press conference with American Secretary of State James Baker, finally provided the answer to a long standing question: how would Moscow respond to George Bush's unceasing linkage of American aid to the USSR with an end to Soviet aid to Cuba?**

JANETTE HABEL

**A**CCORDING to Gorbachev, there were 11,000 Soviet troops stationed in Cuba. International military statistics, in particular those from the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies, give markedly lower figures. The IISS claims that there are 7,700 Soviet soldiers in Cuba, of which 2,100 are working on intelligence activities, mainly in monitoring centres and research into United States military movements and activities; 2,800 are military advisers, including officers working in the country's strategic centres; and 2,800 form part of a motorized infantry brigade, that is the Brigade of Military Instruction.<sup>1</sup>

The US State Department gives even lower estimates, arriving at a total of 5,400 Soviet military personnel.<sup>2</sup> Finally, the official Soviet press agency itself, TASS, has corrected Gorbachev, claiming that the military brigade comprises 3,000 men.<sup>3</sup>

While in the past Cuba had a strategic significance for the USSR owing to its proximity to the USA and the information gathered at the base at Lourdes, near to Havana, the brigade has never been an important element in Cuba's defences. This country has in fact one of the most powerful armies in Latin America, while the Territorial Militia can, according to Cuban government estimates, call on 80% of the physically able population in case of attack.



"Fidel - must - absolutely - go - at what-ever - price"

Furthermore the brigade could in no way threaten the US' own security. Thus, it is not the brigade itself which is important but the symbolism of its withdrawal — as the editorial in the Cuban Communist Party paper *Granma* of September 14 1991 (see p. 17) underlined — and the circumstances of the announcement of the pull-back, at a joint press conference with an American spokesperson and without the Cuban government being informed beforehand.

The 29-year long presence of this unit on the island, which began after the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962, had a two-fold meaning. Firstly as a military force but also as a political statement of the "friendship and solidarity [of the USSR] in the face of US threats". To put it another way it expressed the commitment of Moscow to reply to any attack by Washington on Cuba. Indeed, the cessation of military supplies to the Soviet-equipped Cuban army is more serious than the withdrawal itself.

The Soviet military presence is all the more understandable given the fact that a portion of Cuban soil has been occupied since 1903 as a consequence of the American intervention at that time. The base at Guantanamo is a colonial relic of a treaty signed 90 years ago and renewed "in perpetuity" in 1934, which occupies an area the size of Martinique. Cut off from the rest of the country behind barbed wire, it is occupied by 2,000 marines, an air base and a spying centre. It has been used to train counter-revolutionaries, and in times of tension is the source of various provocations.

It is also used as a base for surveillance of the Caribbean sea lanes, but there are other bases for this purpose in Puerto Rico and Florida so this is not its essential function, which is rather a political one. When relations with Washington are strained, incidents around Guantanamo multiply. The Cuban people feel this incarnation of American power as a constant humiliation. Furthermore, it requires some nerve

to maintain the base under the 1934 treaty, which stated that its objective was "to reinforce the ties of friendship between our two countries" when in fact the US is inflicting a ferocious economic embargo on Cuba.

From the point of view of international law, the occupation of the Guantanamo base could be compared to the annexation of the Baltic States, whose inclusion in the Soviet Union was the result of historical circumstances that had nothing to do with the will of the people. The Cuban government's demand for the return of this territory rests on solid foundations especially now that the Soviet unit is being withdrawn.

This demand has been raised since the start of the revolution, especially during the October 1962 crisis, when an American pullout was put forward as one of the five points that would guarantee the island's security after the removal of the nuclear missiles from Cuba.

### Guantanamo compared to Gibraltar

Now that Washington's traditional pretext of the Soviet threat is disappearing, it is even harder to justify the maintenance of this foreign military presence, which Manuel Fraga, the President of the Galician regional government in Spain, has compared to the continued British occupation of Gibraltar.

Nonetheless, the US Defense Department has restated its determination to hold onto Guantanamo on the grounds that it has a "regional mission going well beyond that of opposing the Soviet military presence in Cuba" for "the Guantanamo base provides training and logistic support for American marine units operating in the region."<sup>4</sup>

However, whatever the psychological impact of the withdrawal of the Soviet military force, the mortal danger for Cuba comes from the combination of the end of Soviet aid and the American sponsored

embargo. The revolution faces a situation even more serious than 30 years ago, when the US administration abolished sugar quotas. At that time the Cuban government had to desperately attempt to sell its sugar — of which Cuba is the world's biggest exporter — and find oil suppliers. As a result Khrushchev's USSR substituted for the American supplier, while the refusal of US enterprises to send any oil or to refine Soviet oil was met by

their expropriation.

The total embargo decreed on February 3, 1962 was fully in place by May 14, 1964 and included a ban on sales of food and medicines. This embargo is today being further strengthened by Bush who predicts the rapid fall of Fidel Castro and draws pleasure from "hearing his dictatorship crumble bit by bit."<sup>5</sup>

At the same time the barter accords with the USSR, which were not always on advantageous terms, but which had the merit of stability, are being questioned, although it is quite possible that the Russian and other former Soviet republics will continue to buy sugar. It is not so easy to find 3 to 4 million tonnes of sugar on the world market at a reasonable price from one day to the next, and such a big purchase would itself drive up prices.

Some 80% of Cuba's trade with the USSR was with four republics, Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia and Kazakhstan, which have huge oil reserves. Cuba has recently signed an agreement with Byelorussia; in exchange for sugar and the building of a rum refinery in Minsk, Byelorussia will deliver industrial machinery and vehicles.<sup>6</sup>

However there is more to the oil problem than this. Aside from the difficulties facing the Soviet oil industry in production, the amount available at world market prices will henceforth be limited. This lack of energy resources is the Achilles heel of the Cuban economy.

Certainly Mexico and Venezuela have said that they are ready to supply Cuba with oil, but there will be conditions.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the growing chaos in the USSR makes the fulfillment of these accords by no means certain. The Soviets have already indicated that that oil deliveries will be significantly reduced in 1992, fol-

1. *El Pais*, September 9, 1991.
2. *Informe Latinoamericano*, September 26, 1991.
3. *ibid.*
4. *International Herald Tribune*, September 17, 1991.
5. *Le Monde*, September 22-23, 1991.
6. *Caribbean Report*, October 3, 1991.

lowing a significant drop in 1991.

In reality, the situation is worse than in 1959. The Soviet measures are making the effects of the embargo — which is in many respects now a blockade — worse. The Mack amendment — named after a Republican senator from Florida — proposes to forbid branches of American enterprises in third countries from any trade with Cuba, to reduce American aid to countries that buy Cuban sugar and to prevent boats which have taken goods to Cuba from docking in American ports.

Similar measures have been taken in the sporting and cinema fields. The filmmaker Sidney Pollack had to transfer the making of his film "Havana" to San Domingo, and American TV chains did not purchase any re-transmission rights for the Pan American Games in August 1991, owing to a veto from Washington.

The building of a nuclear power station destined to lessen the country's oil dependence has been the object of a campaign of denigration under the pretext of safety. This station, which is far from being finished, is presented as a potential Chernobyl threatening Florida. It seems that Soviet advisers who have been involved for a long time in the building of two nuclear reactors, which would allow Cuba to save up to 1,200,000 tonnes of oil a year,<sup>8</sup> have stipulated as a condition for finishing the work that the Cuban government should buy safety equipment, which its current financial circumstances will make very hard.<sup>9</sup>

If one adds the impact of these measures to the growth of the Cuban debt — which the Cuban government has estimated at \$1.7bn,<sup>10</sup> on top of an existing \$7bn debt — the cessation of all Western credit for several years (the Cuban government has made the provision of new loans a condition for resuming payment of the interest on the old) we can begin to get a picture of the suffocation applied to this small country of 11 million people by the world's most powerful country, and made worse by the Soviet desertion.

Gorbachev and Yeltsin have given the green light to the USA to carry out whatever plan of execution they may have devised. At the moment the favoured approach is that of economic and political suffocation. The US leadership is looking for an internal collapse which they are also trying to stimulate by stepping up propaganda from Radio Martí to unprecedented levels. A branch of Voice of America, financed by the US Information Agency (USIA) to the tune of \$15m, its transmits about

70 hours a week.

Interspersed by musical interludes and sometimes doubtful news reports — such as a declaration by a union of Croat machinists calling on Cuban workers "to follow the example of their brothers in the east"<sup>11</sup>, Radio Martí is, according to official Cuban admission, heard by a significant number of the island's population, since it is a source of general information which compensates for the low quality and rigidity of the Cuban media.

The Cuban-American Foundation plays an important role here. It is headed by Mas Canosa, an immensely rich Cuban businessman, a Bay of Pigs veteran who represents the far right of the Cuban emigré community in Miami.<sup>12</sup>

### Yeltsin gets support of Cuban ultra-rightist

To accompany the departure of the Soviet troops and to do away with any ambiguity, the Russian government and representatives of the Soviet government have been increasing contacts with Mas Canosa — the first such contacts had taken place even before the fall of the Berlin Wall<sup>13</sup> — who was in Moscow with an important delegation in September 1991. Indeed, it was Mas Canosa who organized Boris Yeltsin's first trip to the US.<sup>14</sup> As icing on the cake, the Soviet leaders have given the Foundation the right to open offices in Moscow, an act described as "stupefying" by Lionel Barber of the *Financial Times*, who recalls that the Foundation "includes former collaborators of the Batista dictatorship."<sup>15</sup>

From the USA to the USSR the collapse of the Cuban economy is considered inevitable. Within this perspective two different tactics have been put forward by the American and Spanish governments respectively. Spain, which is Cuba's main commercial partner in the European Economic Community, has been increasing contact with Castro's government.<sup>16</sup>

The Spanish have been putting forward the point of view of the Latin American governments as they were expressed at the Guadalajara conference, as well as that of the French government which wants to see a peaceful, gradual and moderate political transition. This means lifting the embargo — a position that has been officially adopted by the Spanish government, the Latin American parliament and the French secretary of foreign affairs. It also involves criticizing the "provocative" statements

of President Bush. A French right wing commentator, A. Vivien, has written that it is necessary to sponsor "the evolution of the regime rather than trying to crush it."<sup>17</sup>

Bush is openly opposed to such an orientation and condemns any cooperation with the regime insofar as it does not proceed to the organization of immediate elections with the participation of representatives of Miami.

Is there a real difference between the two positions? During an official visit to Cuba Manuel Fraga, president of the Galician regional government (and a minister under Franco), referred to the Spanish transition as a way of suggesting a transition controlled from above, from inside the team in power itself, in order to guarantee "a moderate, progressive and reformist" change.<sup>18</sup> In order to make the scenario as reassuring as possible, Fraga referred to the possibility of this transition taking place "with Fidel Castro, avoiding, as in Spain, the violent liquidation of the ruling (Francoist) team".

### The Spanish scenario

In this hypothesis Fidel Castro could, in the manner of King Juan Carlos, in some form be elected honorary president for life. The proposed reform of the method of election for choosing the President of the National People's Assembly could be understood in this light. This scenario has the advantage for the Latin American governments of avoiding the violent confrontations that they believe would inevitably accompany the fall of Castroism, and whose effects on Cuba and a Latin America in an increasingly precarious economic state are unpredictable.

This "Spanish" scenario however runs up against two big obstacles. Firstly the economy in Franco's Spain was a market economy, and the peaceful institutional and political transition involved no radical economic change. But in the Cuban case it is precisely a matter of a fundamental economic change. Secondly, it is quite hard to imagine Fidel Castro opening exhibitions, even if Juan Carlos' role is not limited to that.

7. Venezuelan oil has been supplied since 1976 as part of a triangular agreement between Venezuela, Cuba and the USSR. The latter gives oil to a Venezuelan company in Holland, in exchange for supplies of Venezuelan oil to Cuba. This operation allows a reduction in transport costs. See Jorge F. Perez Lopez in "Socialist Cuba: Past Interpretations and Future Challenges", Westview Press, Boulder and London.

8. Cf. Perez Lopez, op. cit.

9. *IHT*, September 28-29, 1991.

10. *Informe Latinoamericano*, October 3, 1991.

11. *Pensamiento Propio*, September 1991.

12. In June 1991 he called for the assassination of Castro on Argentine TV. See *Pensamiento Propio*, September 1991.

13. *Financial Times*, September 13, 1991.

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Financial Times*, September 13, 1991.

16. See the visit of Cardinal Suquia representing the Spanish bishops.

17. *Le Monde*, September 28, 1991.

18. *El Pais*, September 30, 1991.



For Bush and the Miami Cubans getting rid of Castro is a non-negotiable question of principle. Carlos Alberto Montaner, one of the spokespeople of the Cuban Democratic Platform, who has also spoken in favour of a peaceful transition, has been eager to condemn in advance "any Spanish interference".

Although Castro went out of his way to welcome Fraga, going so far as to qualify the attitude of Franco's Spain to Cuba as irreproachable, it remains to be seen how far aid from Spain and the oil-producing Latin American countries is to be conditional on the progress of the "Spanish" scenario, and how the Cuban Communist Party congress will deal with this question.

If one restricts oneself to the simple description of possible scenarios, the Cubans have nothing more to do than choose what sauce to be cooked in. However all these "solutions" pay little heed to an essential factor: the attitude of the Cuban masses. While it is true that the population is protesting about the worsening economic situation,<sup>19</sup> it has not challenged the existing political system.

This view, expressed by diplomats in the Cuban capital, *International Herald Tribune* journalists present after the Pan-American Games and by the well-informed commentators of the *Financial Times*,<sup>20</sup> is explained not only by the continuing support of sections of the population for the revolution, but also by the feeling of national resistance aroused in people by the cynicism of the world's great power, which brandishes human rights while trying to starve them to death.

### Unenviable fate of Cuba's neighbours

The Cuban people can hardly have illusions about the fate that awaits them if their despised northern neighbour had the opportunity to take its revenge after 32 years. Despite the extremely serious situation on the island, things still stand comparison with the unenviable fate of its near neighbours such as Haiti, San Domingo, Jamaica or Nicaragua. People know what to make of American promises. The new US ambassador to Costa Rica has just declared that economic aid to that country had been "artificially high" during the 1980s and that priorities have changed after the departure of the Sandinistas from power in Nicaragua.<sup>21</sup>

It does not seem that either the American or Spanish scenario is imminent, but for how long? The preparatory assemblies for the Fourth Congress of the Cuban Communist Party, which will open for the first time since the revolution behind closed doors on October 10, saw several months ago the expression of popular aspirations and criticisms of some aspects of the "rectification process", such as the suppression of free peasant markets and private

workshops. As for the youth there was questioning of voluntarism and the functioning of the micro-brigades used for building houses<sup>22</sup>, ideological rigidity, jargon, the method of electing the party's leading bodies at every level and the bureaucratic functioning of the party. Changes are on the agenda on all these points. The traditional argument of the Castro leadership, that unity is the only guarantee of the country's defence, is no longer admissible. Behind the facade of unity, divergences and choices exist, from which the people are excluded.<sup>23</sup> Events in Eastern Europe have already shown the price to be paid for depoliticization and cynicism created by monolithism.

The options currently being discussed concern on the one hand the extension of the economic opening already under way in the mixed enterprises, agriculture, small manufacturing and distribution and on the other the degree of possible political relaxation. A part of the apparatus sees Nicaragua as a negative example showing the possibility of change under the pressure of the American blockade; only the lifting of the blockade, a withdrawal from Guantanamo and a commitment to non-aggression against Cuba could lead to eventual changes.<sup>24</sup>

Other sectors of the party, in particular the intellectuals, consider that political changes can no longer wait, and while references to Marxism-Leninism should be kept, it is necessary to return to the national sources of the revolution and challenge political monolithism. To sum up, an orientation of the "Chinese" type, combining economic liberalization with the political status quo, is advocated on the one hand, while on the other there are the partisans of political reforms without any clear idea of what that might entail. These differences are, in any case, not yet clear-cut and other options may arise.

It is to be hoped that this closed Congress provides the opportunity for collective and democratic elaboration, the critical revision of the political institutions and a challenge to bureaucratic practices. For this is what is needed to deal with the crucial tests that await the country. ★

19. The number of factories that have had to close due to lack of spare parts and raw materials is not known, but there is clearly a significant problem of finding work for those laid off. An effort is being made to turn them towards agriculture.

20. Article by Damian Fraser in the September 14, 1991 issue.

21. *Mexico and Central America Report*, September 16, 1991.

22. Incidents took place during the construction of housing for participants in the Pan-American Games. At first the plan was that the micro-brigade workers would get the houses, and this was an important motivating factor. However the leadership in Havana Province decided to turn the houses over to tourism. The workers reacted violently and apparently the regional leaders had to reverse their decision.

23. See *Informe Latinoamericano*, September 19, 1991.

24. This is the implicit line of the *Granma* editorial extracts from which are published below.

## "We will not be slaves"

WE publish below extracts from the editorial from the paper of the Cuban Communist Party, *Granma* the day after the announcement of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from Cuba (September 14, 1991).

### DOCUMENT

**T**HE decision, taken unilaterally and without prior consultation by the Soviet authorities concerning their military personnel in Cuba, the so called Instruction Brigade, which we have called since 1979 the Study Centre no.12, has grave political consequences and compromises our security...

This brigade has in the course of time become the only Soviet military presence — a fact known to the United States, even if this was not a publicly known fact... On the eve of the 29th anniversary of this brigade, which continued to be a fighting unit with all the necessary means and instructions, the question was raised of its unilateral withdrawal, on the grounds that it belonged to a past epoch.

For us the word symbolic, which we were the first to use in this connection, has two meanings: the brigade is not a numerically significant force, but at the same time it expressed friendship and solidarity in the face of the US' threats...

In the scenario of the joint press conference held at the end of the bilateral negotiations between the Soviet Union and the United States, the announcement of the decision to withdraw the military contingent in our country appeared as an unconditional concession in the eyes of world public opinion. President Gorbachev omitted any reference to the US presence in Cuba as did the Secretary of State James Baker, who knew the news already and had time to find the right words....

On September 12, some hours after the Cuban ambassador in Moscow sent an official note to president Gorbachev concerning the announcement of the withdrawal, the Soviet Union's foreign affairs minister, Boris D. Pankin, gave a press conference. In his preliminary declaration, as in his answers to journalists, Pankin gave additional elements which made it possible for us to publicly fix the Cuban position on the principles of the matter... **17**

According to the head of Soviet diplomacy, the American side had been told of the removal of the military contingent of the Instruction Brigade — before even the Cuban government could learn about it from the press agency — because this was an appeal to the US with the hope that they would respond on their side with similar gestures.

According to Pankin, and thus according to the Soviet authorities, everything was based on what the US might hypothetically do, on condition that these hopes were not unfounded; but the Soviet hopes are extremely modest — a reduction in the military personnel at Guantanamo or other equally minor gestures. But in any case this would only depend on the choices made by the US and could be reversed at any moment as often happens with US policy, above all now that that country feels that it owns the planet. The gestures that the USSR has said it is ready to make, on the other hand, are irreversible and unconditional...

Happily, we are no longer in October 1962, but nearly in October 1991, and the defence of Cuba rests solidly on a doctrine and preparation that, for more than ten years has totally excluded any other hypothesis. It is based on the unbreakable determination not to become the US' slave and to rely on our own forces...

We can also count on our own experience, and on being faithful to certain principles that we cannot renounce.... We have rejected all the pressures and even all the proposals of different North American administrations who have demanded that we abjure and break our close links with the Soviet Union...

One is filled with indignation at the thought that we are moving towards a new world order in which small Third World countries such as Cuba, whose system displeases the US, have no other choice than to submit or face the risk of disappearance; there will be no more room for ideological loyalties nor for elementary ethical principles without which a new menace will arise for our civilization; the predominance of a new barbarism based on the technological power and hegemonic delirium of the US.

Nonetheless, we have always had confidence in the peoples and the future. What our country represents today it has not become by wavering and denials. Faced with the arrogance of empire and the difficulties that have appeared in our relations with the USSR, we have chosen dignity and self-respect, without for all that deceiving ourselves. We know that we have reduced material resources and that we will be obliged to make truly heroic and superhuman efforts. But we are ready to do what is required by our principles.

It would be unjust to put an equals sign between the Soviet military collaborators in Cuba, representatives of a tradition of



solidarity and internationalism which has been indispensable for the construction of our armed forces, and the American forces at Guantanamo. It would also be immoral and unjustifiable to accept now, at precisely the moment when the talk about the end of the Cold War is reaching its climax, when nobody can use the pretext of Communist expansionism, nor see a danger in a small Soviet military contingent, that a US base and its aggressive troops should stay on Cuban soil while the Soviet troops withdraw. We would be ready to accept the simultaneous retreat of both forces. That would be the only equitable, just and honourable alternative in present circumstances. Besides these questions should be discussed by us, as an interested party....

Cuba is willing, to this end, to take part in an international accord at the United Nations.

In this agreement, with all its guarantees, one could [introduce] clauses satisfying both parties, among them, evidently, the cessation of practise invasions of Cuba which the US commanders have carried out systematically in the region for years.

Then in the case of Cuba, you could really talk about a new political philosophy at work in international relations...

Cuba does not threaten any government on the planet. But nobody can hope to count on Cuba to renounce its principles, to submit or take advantage at the expense of the interests of others.

The unilateral and unconditional decision, taken without any consultation with us, by the USSR to withdraw its military unit, amounts to giving the US the green light to go ahead with its aggressive designs against Cuba. This is the moral meaning of the withdrawal of this symbolic contingent from Cuba; there is no other possible explanation or interpretation of this event. Cuba will never surrender or self itself to the USA. We will fight to the death in order not to become slaves. ★

## Women confront communalism

TRUPTI SHAH is a member of the Inquilibi Communist Sangathan (Indian Section of the Fourth International) and an activist in the "Sahiyar" women's organization in Vadodara in the state of Gujarat. She spoke to *IV* about the Indian women's movement and the issue of violence against women. The interview took place on September 21, 1991 in Amsterdam.

**T**HERE are many small groups who address themselves to the mass of unorganized women. Autonomous groups try to reach women in the slum areas and villages around basic issues such as housing rights or provision of electricity. The movement is not homogeneous. Groups address themselves specifically to, for example, slum women, village women, tribal women.

Others do consciousness raising such as street theatre and campaigns directed at the media. There are professional organizations of women doctors or lawyers and organizations which aim to help women with crisis centres and so on.

However there is a network and when an issue arises at the national level they come together and address it in their own way. Of course the leadership is usually from the educated middle class, but they have been conscious of the need to turn outwards.

Since 1975 the women's movement has been growing constantly and has had a definite effect on political life and on the government and on society as a whole. Many laws in favour of women have been passed, including laws on rape, on dowries, laws on violence within the family. The government is now setting up a special department for women.

The government is trying to coopt the women's movement, putting forward many feminist-sounding programmes such as an attempt to bring together women in rural areas to fight for their rights. Feminists are invited to participate in these programmes.

We have tried to work in them — as we did in Gujarat where we were invited to train the women involved in this pro-

gramme. The issue of violence against women came up; there was a very influential man in the area who was abusing women. We wanted to fight against this man, but the government machinery came into action and we were thrown off the programme.

On the one hand they ask the feminist movement for their opinion on the issue of the maintenance of divorced and separated women but at the same time they have been passing a law excluding rural women from this benefit.

At the same time all the political parties had to address women's issues at the last elections and many trade unions now have women's caucuses.

There is an informal network of women's groups of many different types and throughout the country. Every two years or so there is a national women's conference. The last conference took place last December in Kerala. About 1,000 women came together from many different organizations and 12,000 women came to the closing rally.

The conference decided that growing communalism and religious fundamentalism is a major danger for women's rights, threatening a rollback of what has been achieved through our struggle. In our country laws on issues such as marriage, divorce, adoption and inheritance depend on religion. There is also a civil law. If a Hindu got married under a Hindu marriage law then the marriage thereafter would be regulated according to that law.

### Restrictive religious laws

With the rise of fundamentalism the religious personal laws are getting more restrictive, while the constant atmosphere of violence is also restrictive. The organization to which I belong has been active against communalism for many years. We have been repeatedly threatened and told that this is not work for a women's organization. But in fact it is a major issue in our lives; the fundamentalists want to tell us where to work, what to wear and everything.

One of our activists went to distribute a leaflet in a Hindu area and she was not wearing the bindi [the spot on the forehead indicating marital status]. So people were asking her if she was a Hindu or a Muslim and said that they would not allow a Muslim woman to come into their area.

It was fundamentalist youth who were saying this. They told her that if she came again they might kill her. She was working in an office in this area and the fundamentalists went to the office and put pressure on her colleagues to tell her to dress properly like a Hindu woman.

The communal crisis has an especially bad impact on poor women. The government imposes curfews because of riots, and women street sellers cannot work.

The Hindu fundamentalists put out false

information about us, claiming that we are anti-Hindu and pro-Muslim, that we get money from Arab countries, that our accounts are not in order, that we are all Westernized and do not believe in Indian culture.

On March 8 we decided to have a demonstration against communalism, as did women's organizations throughout the country. The communalists announced that they would have a meeting in the same place and the same time as us and were ready to attack us. But we had many allies in the anti-communal movement, such as trade unions and left wing parties. We mobilized many women from the slum areas and others — we got about 1,000 people out. They were not prepared for this and our meeting went ahead. They also suspended attacks on us for the elections, since that would have made a bad impression. In Gujarat the majority of MPs are from the Hindu fundamentalist BJP. The same kind of attacks have been seen throughout India. ★

## Dowry deaths — a product of Indian capitalism

**A** REAL mass movement arose in 1980 over the issue of rape, when a 14 year old girl was raped by police in a police station. There was a demand for a change in the law.

The second issue was violence against women in the family, and in particular dowry deaths. Very many women are murdered because their families provide an insufficient dowry. To give an example; in Gujarat official figures say that each day six women are burnt alive for this reason.

There was a debate in the women's movement. Some say that this practice is a remnant of the pre-capitalist past of India and will die out with increasing education and development. This is also the common view of western scholars. However socialist feminists have insisted that this practice was not prevalent in pre-capitalist India, but is on the contrary the result of the impact of imperialism and of the really existing capitalist India of today.

In the past this practice was known only in the upper castes, where daughters would be married upwards in the caste system. For this a dowry had to be

given as a payment for the social rise and an alliance with a powerful family. Caste and land were the two main ways to get power in feudal India.

Furthermore in the upper castes, women were not allowed to work in the social productive process, and were considered an economic burden on the family, so that a compensatory payment was expected from the bride's family.

However in the lower castes women worked in social production and were thus an economic benefit. With the penetration of imperialism the whole Indian economy was disrupted; the cottage industries in which women worked were completely destroyed. These women became unemployed and were unable to get work in the factories. For example millions of women worked at rice pounding in 1901; but thirty years later there were only a few left. Thus many lower caste women became a burden on the family. Of course, these women do work in the home, but their work is not considered productive, it doesn't count in market terms.

### The process of Sanskritization

At the same time the whole process of Sanskritization took place, with lower caste people adopting the mores and customs of the higher castes. The dowry custom spread among the lower castes and the amount of the dowry increased. Thus capitalism has seen a custom from feudal times become more widespread and more cruel. The fight against it is a part of the fight against imperialism and capitalism.

The middle classes have adopted consumerist values. A doctor or someone well-placed in the administrative sector will ask for more dowry for goods — there are more factors at work than under feudalism. Education and economic and political status have become added to caste and land.

Another important issue is that of female foeticide, where the sex of the foetus is found out and girl foetuses aborted. Abortion is legal in India and is even encouraged by the government as part of a population policy. The government is also forcing contraception on women and further pressure to do this is coming from the IMF and World Bank. Contraceptives that are banned in the First World are being used in India without the knowledge or consent of the women. This includes injectible contraceptives such as depo provera which are very bad for women's health. Female foeticide is also felt to be a good way of controlling the population since it reduces both the number of people and the number of potential mothers.

And of course doctors make money out of it. This is another form of violence against women. ★

# Poisoned factories and techno-fantasies

**IN popular economic terms, the Malaysian government's policies of rapid development have achieved many successes. Through the New Economic Policy (NEP) formalized in 1970, it set out a path of export-oriented industrialization to address the country's poverty and unemployment. Per capita GNP has risen rapidly, marking Malaysia as an up-and-coming NIE [Newly Industrialized Economy] and a growing Malaysian middle class has emerged. But behind the simple GNP figures lies the reality of an expanding gap between rich and poor — that is poverty has not been eliminated despite the increase in urban jobs.\***

**JIM STOCKTON**

**T**he import substitute formula of development, implemented after independence, did little more than continue the British colonial pattern of dependence on raw material exports (rubber and tin originally, and later palm oil and timber), while doing nothing to alter the colonial pattern of racial division in the economy. By the end of the 60s, widespread unrest had built up to the point of eruption. In 1968, the government passed the Investment Incentives Act, thus embarking on an aggressive policy of wooing foreign capital for export-oriented manufacturing.

The goal of rapid economic growth was in fact necessary for the racial goals of the NEP, to bring ethnic Malays (*bumiputras*) into the mainstream of the economy, for the government knew quite well that Malaysia's Chinese and Indian merchant class would more readily share a growing pie with the Malays than a limited one.

## Low wages attract investment

The policy met with spectacular success in attracting investment in sectors that were labor-intensive — and indeed "low wages" is the reason most cited by investors for their move to Malaysia. This is not however to deny the importance of the many incentives offered by the government — tax shelters, repatriation of profits, political stability including stringent controls on labor, and low environmental standards. Global competition and management/labor struggles at home are also key factors.

The development of free trade zones, first around Penang and then Kuala Lumpur, drew thousands of people from the surrounding agricultural areas into the booming industrial sectors. By the end of

the 80s, manufacturing accounted for \$26.9b or about 48.4% of all exports. In terms of the domestic economy, manufacturing had even overtaken the agricultural sector by the mid 80s to form the largest single contributor to GDP; and it has continued to grow steadily from 19.7% of GDP in 1985 to 25.6% by 1989. Employment has followed a similar track; those working in agriculture, forestry and fishing declined from about 53% of total employment in 1970 to an estimated 35% in 1990, with the manufacturing sector growing to provide almost 20% of employment with even more people being absorbed into the tertiary sectors including services and retail.

## Most workers young women

For many reasons, most of which hinge on the socialization of women to be respectful of authority and therefore more easily dominated, the vast majority of these new workers are young women: 88% of textile workers are women, 85% in food production and around 80-85% in the electronics industry.

If manufacturing has been the spearhead of Malaysian economic growth, the outstanding sector is clearly electronics and electric products — in economic terms across the board, in capital investment, employment numbers and sources of income. In 1988, some 244 electronics projects employed some 107,578 people or about 23% of the total industrial sector (followed by textiles with about 17%, food manufacturing with over 10% and the forestry industry with just less than 10%). The world's leading consumer electronics and semi-conductor firms from Japan and the United States moved the lower value-added, labor intensive end of their production offshore in search

of increasing profits, and also to secure proximity to growing Asian markets, especially important in the late 80s as automation replaces labor.

Within the electronics industry itself, semi-conductor companies have consistently accounted for over 80% of the total output; and United States electronics companies are the leading producers in Malaysia. Figures from the MAEL (Malaysian American Electronic Industry) indicate that their members are exporting M\$4.5bn or one fourth of all manufacturing exports. Japanese foreign investment has in fact grown to be greater than that of the United States, but in this sector they have focused more on consumer electronics assembly.

Accommodation to the needs of foreign companies has been the hallmark of the Malaysian government's industrialization program: the tax free status of "pioneer" industries, recently extended for companies that were due to graduate; continued protection from the "threat" of national unions organizing the electrical workers; refusal to set a legal minimum wage or to correct the imbalance between men's and women's wages. When foreign companies wanted to institute multiple shifts to keep their expensive machinery operating around the clock, Malaysia abandoned its labor law forbidding women to work between the hours of 10pm and 5am.

## High-tech nationalist fantasies

Despite the fact that this new "Malaysian" industry is practically 100% foreign owned, and making products that are not intended for Malaysian use, the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment has become infected with a high-tech nationalist fantasy of development:

"We have been impressed by the importance of technological development for economic growth... ultimately, technological development will be accorded its rightful place in national planning because technical capabilities accord nations increased capacity for self-determination."

This kind of hope for economic and political salvation through technology is certainly widespread in the nations with sophisticated technological capabilities, and many wax romantic for a new industrial Golden Age propelled by the new information technologies. But these techno-dreamers, in both the United States and Malaysia, have glossed over some rather key elements in their formula for success. Little is discussed about the kind of jobs that are being created behind Malaysia's rising GNP numbers. In fact, the clean sleek image of high-tech jobs clashes with reality for many workers: in the United States, where health and safety institutions have collected data on workers and cite as

\* This article first appeared in *AMPO Japan-Asia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1.

their goal the protection of workers health, occupation illness rates in the semi-conductor industry are three times higher than the national average for all manufacturing. The California Department of Industrial Relations surveyed the industry to find out that nearly 1/2 of these illnesses were due to "systematic poisoning" — long term exposure to the highly toxic chemicals used in the processing of computer chips — an ominous warning for the Malaysian workers who have far less government or labor union monitoring and protection. This also raises concerns about the health of the surrounding community and environment. The most basic question of what is being produced for whom seems to be lost in the rush to achieve "technological capabilities... for self-determination."

The roots of the high-tech "revolution" can be traced directly back to the know-how that emerged from the US military research programs of World War 2. In fact, the high-tech industry in the United States has never weaned itself from government military spending; and the US remains the major destination for Malaysian produced chips. Thus, the notion of connecting high-tech growth with national self-determination is at best an exercise in self-deception.

Perhaps the Malaysian elite plans to follow the Japanese and NIE model of transferring technological know-how into the manufacture of consumer electronics. Indeed, market researchers have pointed out that nearly 55% of Japanese semiconductor sales are geared for consumer products, compared with only 15% for US companies.

### Precarious success

However, high-tech success is precarious under the intense competition of a shrinking world economy, as the recent faltering of the South Korean economy testifies — to say nothing of the social, political, and environmental costs generated by South Korea's path of development, nor of its dependence on technology supplied by Japan.

Outside of these exports of the Japanese semi-conductor industry to the Asian NIEs and to their major market in the US, the vital domestic consumer is in industrial electronics. Japan is the world leader in computer-based automatic manufacturing, and the epitome of this is the vast army of robots pressing out automobiles in Japan at the staggering rate of over 13 million a year. It was through such economies of scale that Japan could afford to invest the capital and research necessary for development of automated manufacturing.

That such accelerated production could be repeated is very doubtful — the strain on the world's resources and environment would be unimaginable. Already, Malaysia's Proton Saga car enterprise has found



it necessary to export in order to find a large enough market, and the price must be subsidized in order to sell — imagine a Third World government subsidizing a First World consumer.

The central issue plaguing the Malaysian government's equation of high-tech and self-determination is the question of whose self-determination will be increased. All indications from the government have shown that the workers in the electronics industry are not a part of the equation.

The drawn out struggle that the electronics workers at RCA/Harris Solid State continue to face in order to establish their company union epitomizes the relationship between workers, their government, and their foreign employers. After a decade and a half of protecting the "pioneer industry" of electronics by withholding government approval of unions with the registrar of Trade Unions, the Minister of Labor somewhat suddenly announced in 1988 that the industry was strong and stable enough for the formation of trade unions. The immediate uproar from the MAEI along with the Japanese giants put the government in a tight spot, for the pressure for the decision was connected to Malaysian access to the US market.

### Unions accepted

In order to maintain GSP favored trading privileges with the US, Malaysia announced the acceptance of unions in the electronics industry, at least in policy. Jolted, the multinationals, led by Motorola and Matsushita, threatened to move operations to Thailand or China; and workers were threatened with dismissal and harassed by an increase in security monitoring of their activities. One US company offered a box of Kentucky Fried Chicken to any worker who would sell out the names of co-workers who signed for union membership; Hitachi offered cash bonuses for those who

would pen letters to the Labor Minister rejecting the formation of a national union.

In response, the Labor Ministry modified its statement to allow only for the formation of in-house unions. Thus the application for a National Union of Electronic Industry Workers was not accepted by the RTU. Yet this compromise allowed for some unionizing, and the government registered the first in-house union, the RCA Workers Union, in January 1989.

### Grudging recognition from government

With the grudging recognition from the government, the fight for a union shifted back to the company site since RCA refused to grant recognition. In the months that passed, as RCA obstructed the unionizing process, the whole semi-conductor division of RCA was sold to Harris Solid State, forcing the registration process to start all over again.

This tactic had such success in forestalling the union that the Harris management tried it again by terminating then transferring all workers to Harris Advanced Technology, a mere change of company name. A formal complaint filed in February 1990 is being fought by Harris, while they have begun to intimidate and harass workers associated with the union. At the end of September 1990, the company succeeded in isolating 21 union activists and dismissed them. As the Malaysian government is clearly constrained from supporting its workers by its dependence on foreign capital, they have done little to help the workers in this case. Their equation of national self-determination and high-tech seems to leave out the over 100,000 workers who actually produce the technology.

The rights of workers to organize and bargain collectively is not an abstract freedom — real threats to workers' health and safety and the lack of standards or any clear support from a government with

divided loyalties, is a matter of survival in the high-tech arena. As was noted earlier, "systematic poisoning" accounts for nearly one half of the high illness rate among Californian semi-conductor workers.

This reality runs counter to the clean image of high-tech and even workers' own perceptions: encased in the air conditioned spaces and "clean rooms" of semi-conductor production, workers are deceived about safety. Like the protective suits the workers wear, the environment is not designed to protect the workers from dangerous chemicals, but to protect the delicate chips from human contamination.

The solvents, hazardous chemicals, and even radioactive gas used during the manufacture, assembly, and testing of semi-conductors present a constant danger for the workers. Furthermore, these are used in various levels and combinations depending on the actual factory and little is known about how they interact together.

### Caution the norm

Perhaps because there are so many hazardous chemicals, strict and constant caution has been the norm, and few major incidents have been reported throughout the industry. An outstanding exception in Malaysia was the 1981 explosion of testing equipment at a Harris Semiconductor plant which exposed workers to radioactive krypton-85 gas.

The health of workers is an extremely broad concern, connected to many factors of living and work organization, and comparing workers in an industrialized country to those in Malaysia cannot be done directly. The average worker is young and from the rural areas, and she probably has inadequate knowledge or preparation for industrial work — this was especially true in the early stages of the industry.

The long hours of tedious repetitive work, the shifts, especially late night work, the fast pace of work controlled by machines, and management pressure to reach work quotas have all added up to constant complaints among workers of stress and fatigue.

Electronics industries in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia have all experienced frequent reports of mass hysteria breaking out among workers. Many factors must be involved in such a phenomenon, including cultural dislocation, job dissatisfaction, accumulated stress, and some researchers have suggested that exposure to toxic chemicals plays an important role.

Often subtle and complex, the effects of exposure to toxic chemicals over a long period of time, chemical injuries are con-

fusing — they are not necessarily detected immediately, so are not perceived as dangerous. But trace toxins are stored up in fatty tissues for years before they are released by weight loss, injury, or just saturation. The symptoms then can be indistinct and difficult to trace back to source. A health study in the US released in 1986 by the Digital Equipment Corp, which focussed on workers who process microchips, pointed out the complexity of these problems and lack of medical knowledge about the industry.

Most alarming among the many revelations of health risks was the 39% rate of miscarriage, twice the normal rate, among the female workers in wafer-etching areas.

Ten to fifteen years of workers experience in the semi-conductor industry in Malaysia have not turned up any systematic medical study on the effects on women workers — itself a powerful argument for a national industry-wide union to coordinate such urgent research.

However, independent women's groups have begun to uncover disturbing incidents. Since the summer of 1989, four women workers at the Texas Instruments'



*This worker is in danger. This worker has some protection.*

Materials and Control Plant, in the Ulu Klang Free Trade Zone near Kuala Lumpur, have died.

All of the women had been working in the plant for a minimum of ten years: each suffered serious pains and weight loss for a long period before a sudden worsening of their condition; each had been under the care of a company physician, but none were told there could be a connection with the chemicals they worked with, and the company has completely ruled out that the deaths were work related.

### Workers express worries

Workers from the TI plant when interviewed expressed worries over a range of irregularities. Some workers feared a moulding compound used in the semi-conductor area, with a warning on the label that repeated and prolonged exposure to its contents (silica and antimony oxide) may cause lung irritation.

Norlia Rusli, who died at 29 in November 1989, had worked for the company for ten years, and had worked in the mold room of the semi-conductor plant.

Her family noted that she suffered pains for a while, but suddenly she deteriorated with swollen joints and her chest felt red-hot. Margaret Joseph, 40, had worked for 16 years and 8 months before being medically boarded out of the company. She died in 1990 from lung fibrosis.

Some workers had also been concerned about exposure to the cleaning agent Trichloroethane, used while operating a manual degreasing machine and also in the disc press area. Exposure to trichloroethane is thought to cause cancer and reproductive problems.<sup>1</sup>

On July 10, 1989, Azizah Sajak died at the age of 28 after chemotherapy for cancer of the uterus. Her father claims that she had been ill for almost two years. She had worked for ten years at TI. Loon Siew Foong underwent surgery for cancer of the colon with hepatic metastasis, but died within the year, aged 30, after 14 years.

### Sent home to die

Such stories cannot accurately reflect the extent of chemical exposure throughout the whole industry. Yet, the women's groups who are reaching out to isolated industry workers emphasize that many more have been sent home to die — back to their villages, back to their families — but with no explanation of the medical complications, no compensation, and no responsibility taken by the people who are in the best position to know.

Concerns about the personal exposure of the workers to industry toxins are quite urgent yet seem to be brushed over in the government's effort to ensure an attractive climate for

foreign investment. These concerns, however, can be further generalized to a danger in the environment and the surrounding communities. Hazardous chemicals in the plant become hazardous wastes after they are used.

In the Malaysian government's 1985 Report on Environment Quality, a reference was made to "other liquid wastes such as spent solvent, large volumes of which generated by the electronic/semiconductor industries were accumulated and stored."

Yet earlier in the same report, it casually identified treatment and storage of industrial wastes as a problem, and "existing domestic landfill sites are inadequate and environmentally unsuitable to receive such toxic residues."

The lack of attention to this potentially disastrous threat seems to be exemplified by an incident in January 1991 involving a little boy who was walking outside one of

1. For details on dangers from chemical exposure see Asia Monitor Resource Center's "Health Hazards in the Electronics Industry", from which the cartoons accompanying this article are taken.

Kuala Lumpur's FTZs, carrying his father's lunch. The boy slipped and fell into a drainage ditch, which led to his death. However, the boy did not drown in the liquid waste; newspaper reports confirm that he ignited when he fell into the ditch and died from burns.

In the US and Japan, investigations into the electronics and semiconductor industry have revealed that extensive environmental pollution poses a significant risk to surrounding residents.

An IBM facility in California was listed in 1984 by the US Environmental Protection Agency as one of the country's worst polluters, leaking a chemical plume into the underground water system that stretches for five miles. And ongoing measures of chlorofluorocarbons, which are destroying the global ozone layer, have pointed to Silicon Valley as registering higher than any place in the world.

In Japan, a 1990 government survey found that one out of every 13 water wells across the country was contaminated with organic chlorine solutions commonly used by the high-tech industry.

The costs of ignoring these environmental disasters may not be paid by the corporations whose activities cause them, but the increases in birth defects, in cancer rates and the poisoning of workers and of entire communities must be borne by someone.

Like the "economic miracles" of South Korea and Taiwan, the success of the Malaysian economy has been judged quite selectively, primarily using the large growth in GNP.

So, while many young women have found jobs in the booming electronics industry and have increased their skills with technology, and their incomes, there are high costs being paid silently and painfully by increasing numbers.

### Repression, dislocation and damage

On a large scale, political and labor repression, social dislocation and environmental damage are all part of the process of rapid industrialization which don't show up in the GNP figures — sometimes they are even counted as a plus, such as an increase in spending on pollution abatement equipment.

High-tech development has brought wealth and prestige to some, and they will continue to pursue their program with little concern for the hidden or forgotten costs. But for another group of Malaysians, the logic of development has been more accurately described by an organizer around women's issues:

"Development has come to mean mindless consumerism and tremendous waste. Earlier one produced to consume. Now it seems people have to keep consuming so that production can go on. Common wisdom and common sense have been made to stand on their heads." ★

## Popular revolt challenges dictator

**FOR the past four months Madagascar has been shaken by a popular movement of unprecedented size and duration. A widely observed general strike of state employees has halted the work of much of the administration and banks have been unable to open. Madagascar has moreover ceased paying its debts. Internal air transport has been suspended and international flights are sporadic. At Tamatave on the east coast, a dock strike has seen violent clashes with the army, leaving several people dead.**

FRANCIS CAZALS

**T**HE fighting is centred on the demand for the resignation of the president Didier Ratsiraka, who was put in power by a military directorate in 1975. The opposition movement, the most significant the island has ever known, is probably also one of the most impressive peaceful anti-government mobilizations the African continent has experienced.

The agitation started with an opposition demonstration at the opening of a parliamentary session at the start of May 1991. Over the months, and notably through two big meetings called by the Christian churches, the opposition has developed its demands for a national conference to revise the constitution and prepare new elections.

The government did not pay the slightest attention to these demands. The president, in his over-confidence, believed the time ripe for a few cosmetic constitutional changes, as promised in January 1991. At the start of June he proposed constitutional amendments to the National Assembly, where his supporters have a big majority, removing references to socialism, and at the same time reinforcing presidential powers.

The reforms would also have guaranteed the perpetuation of a number of deeply unpopular institutions, such as the Supreme Council of the Revolution based on the military hierarchy. The population saw all this as a direct affront to justice by the president. An appeal by the opposition coalition, the Committee of Living Forces (Heri Velona) for demonstrations against the constitutional changes led to the first of many demonstrations in the May 13 Square in the capital, Antananarivo, and in a number of other towns.

On his return from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit in Nigeria,

and after a stop over in France, where he met President Mitterrand, Ratsiraka treated the protests with contempt. The fact that armed forces were not used shows that he believed that this was nothing but a short lived flare-up that could be easily brought under control.

In fact, however, the demonstrations began to grow, leading a number of the regime's notables to demand tough action against the protesters. By then it was too late; the very size of the demonstrations had massively raised the stakes of any attempt at repression. Furthermore, the army high command made it known that it would refuse to take part in any direct repression of such a movement. Paris, also, had discreetly warned the president against any such final solution as long as the popular movement itself remained peaceful.

### Regime's supporters hamstrung

Without any lead from the president, the regime's supporters were totally hamstrung. Ratsiraka retreated to his presidential palace, built by the North Koreans and decorated by the French, and situated some 15 kilometres from the capital, intending to sit things out. Refusing to compromise, he has been banking on the strike movement wearing itself out and on the divisions in the opposition.

However the demonstrations have not subsided, becoming rather a daily event in the capital and elsewhere. Far from fizzling out, the movement has gone on to new heights, each day drawing in new layers of the population. Several times the meetings in the May 13 Square have brought out 400,000 people — a third of the capital's population.

The hard core of the protesters are the

striking public employees, of whom there are some 50,000 in Antananarivo. However many other social groups are evident in the demonstrations, including the middle layers, the unemployed, street traders and private sector workers. Raising a series of democratic demands — for a national conference, new elections and revision of the constitution — the movement soon came to focus on the issue of the resignation of Ratsiraka and his government. This “bourgeois revolution” has the explicit support of a substantial number of the local employers.

The inactivity of the army, where some ranks share the opposition’s objectives and the legalist approach of the opposition leaders, has allowed the media to draw the conclusion that they are seeing a “quiet revolution” on the Czechoslovak model.

In fact what we are seeing is the collapse of a system whose authoritarianism had until now been masked by nationalism, which attracted the support of sections of the population. The popular uprising of May 1972, which forced out the neo-colonial regime of president Tsiranana, was mainly sparked off by school students. The Malagasy bourgeoisie adopted a low profile to weather the storm. The old political class — pro-French and corrupt — was completely discredited. A team of young nationalist military men rose to power by turning to

their advantage the anti-imperialist themes of the Malagasy May. Didier Ratsiraka, at that time a military attaché at the French embassy, was made president by a military directorate.

The international climate allowed this type of petty bourgeois nationalist current to find a niche, in the context of Moscow’s international line (such as the Indian Ocean “peace zone”), and through the adoption of an “anti-imperialist” profile on international stages such as the United Nations or the Non-Aligned Movement. The military received training in the Soviet bloc. At the end of the 1970s, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein gave the Malagasy leader a personal gift of several million dollars, which were invested, according to Ratsiraka himself, in a trading company, the Procoops, which is to be found at the centre of numerous deals involving prominent figures in the regime, including the president’s wife and sister-in-law.

The Ratsiraka regime also strove to build a social base by taking its distance from France, by leaving the franc zone, by introducing Malagasy into education, nationalizing the banks and insurance companies and setting up national enterprises.<sup>1</sup> As is the way in Africa, this state control allowed the economically weak petty bourgeoisie to establish links with the national and international bourgeoisie and accumulate the initial funds that would subsequently allow their transformation into authentic capitalists.

### Economy nears catastrophe

The rise in oil prices, the drop in the price of export products such as coffee and vanilla, corruption, lack of hard currency and industrial obsolescence were among the factors that led the economy to the brink of catastrophe. The opposition was rounded up and integrated into the system of power through the National Democratic Front of the Revolution (FNDR), to which all parties were obliged to adhere. In 1982, Madagascar started its first discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Then followed the usual restructuring plans from the World Bank and the progressive liberalization of the economy. Despite some initial reservations, Ratsiraka turned out to be a good pupil of the IMF, to the extent that the World Bank, in its 1991 report, praises the commitment of the Malagasy government to structural economic reforms.

However, while the military

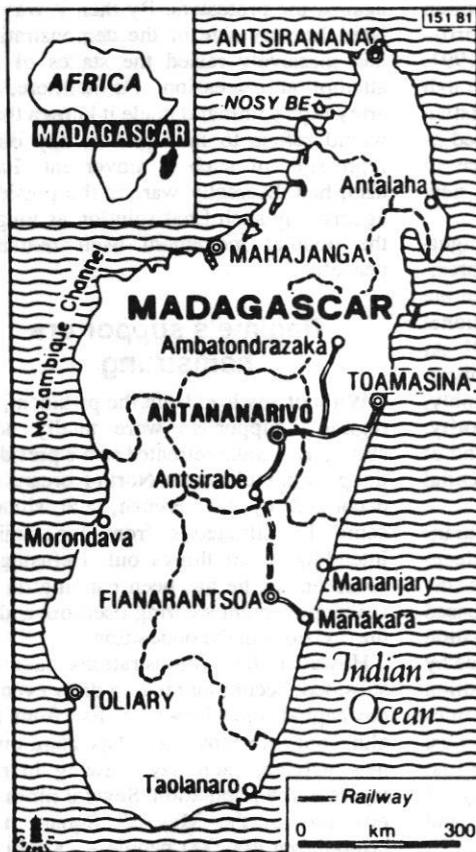
and apparatchiks have been recycling themselves into the private sector, and while Paris has resumed sending aid, the population has had to pay the bill both for the state and for the liberal reforms. The IMF’s medicine has had its customary effect; spending reductions have meant a 40% fall in health spending, real wages have fallen by 50% in ten years, while the prices of basic necessities have shot up. The shops are no longer empty, but the products, now often imported from South Africa, are beyond the reach of the great majority of the island’s inhabitants. The minimum wage is about 100 French francs (\$16.50) a month and the enterprises in the Free Trade Zone pay a few francs a day. The middle classes and the state employees, who had for a long time benefited from the system, have also been hard hit, as have the lower levels of the army. And this is not to mention the peasants, who have never been taken into consideration by the regime, and who have become the prey of the *dahalc*, organized bands of zebu rustlers who have links with high placed people.

### Determination of demonstrators

The determination of the anti-government demonstrators in recent months reflects the depth of the crisis. However strictly social demands are not at the forefront of these mobilizations. Indeed, the opposition leaders are concerned to limit their expression. All share the IMF outlook and are little interested in its social consequences. However, under pressure from below, the opposition has adopted a more radical tone and proposals for action. Thus the Committee of Living Forces has set up a transitional government headed by a doctor, Albert Zafy, who is leader of a small Christian Democrat group, as prime minister and by General Rakotoharison as president.

This latter is a former chief-of-staff of the army who was thrown out by Ratsiraka in 1985 for refusing to round up young members of a Kung Fu club in the capital — the latter were close to the opposition and had, a little while previously, killed a government militiaman. Ministers of this shadow government have even been installed in various government offices with the agreement of the strike committees. However, the presidential palace, the prime minister’s offices and the main banks remain inviolable. Beyond this line, the army is ready to intervene.

This demonstrates the limits of the “peaceful revolution” and of the power won by the population. In fact, the ministries on strike have rapidly become deserted; real power in any case resides elsewhere in a presidential dictatorship with military support. When on August 10 the opposition called on the population to



1. See *International Viewpoint* 204, April 15, 1991.

march towards the presidential palace, a regiment charged with protecting the head of the state, the RESEP, trained by French instructors, fired on the crowd several kilometres away from its objective. The official total was 32 dead, but opposition and some medical sources claim that over a hundred more died. Thus, the Malagasy revolution has ceased to be peaceful.

For the opposition leaders, this vast protest movement is nothing more than a means to further their own political ambitions. Such a power struggle in the most trivial sense of the term makes it hard for genuine popular leaders to emerge, that is, leaders free from the verbal, demagogic and mystified populism that is the stock in trade of the leaders of the Committee of Living Forces.

These latter are playing a double game: in the May 13 Square they make impassioned speeches, while at the same time they engage in discreet negotiations with the regime.

### Christian churches influential

Apart from the Christian churches, who are very influential and are the only ones to show an interest in the social misery of the majority, the opposition parties fall into two main categories: former allies of president Ratsiraka who have fallen out with him; and people from the First Republic, that is, supporters of the neo-colonial regime of Philibert Tsiranana, overthrown in 1972, or sons of bigwigs from that government.

In the first category is the MFM (Movement for Proletarian Power), which first appeared at the beginning of the 1970s as a far left formation among school students, and whose leaders, among them Manandafy Rakontonirina, were repressed by the military after the Malagasy May of 1972. It then rallied to the "red book" of President Ratsiraka and agreed to join the National Democratic Front of the Revolution. The group's leaders took up posts of responsibility in this regime and participated in the dragooning of the population behind the president.

At the start of the 1980s they too backed the turn towards economic liberalization, only to break with the regime because, in their eyes, the economic programme was not being applied seriously enough. The MFM has continued its drift to the right and has now become the main defender of the liberal credo. The group's leaders now have close ties to some of the local employers, who, after benefiting from the economic protection of the nationalist epoch, now want to speed up the opening to the world market.

The AKFM-Renouveau (Renewal) of Pastor Richard is another group that supported the regime in its time. A nationalist petty bourgeois current with an electoral base in the capital among the Merina (the ethnic majority originating from the high plateaux), it has sometimes been seen as a

Stalinist group owing to its relations with Moscow. Today this party has split in two, one part remaining with Ratsiraka, the other going into the opposition.

The Social Democratic Party (PSD) sees itself as the inheritor of the mantle of former president Philibert Tsiranana. It is led by former partisans of the neo-colonial regime or by children of former notables of that regime — Tsiranana's son is a member. Its leadership is made up of doctors, businessmen and high-level state functionaries. Furthermore some of its officials are from the Merina aristocracy and have many family and business connections with some figures in the regime.

The island's trade unions are not capable of compensating for the limits of the movement's leadership, being both too fragmented and too closely dominated by the political parties. The more radical elements, who remain in the MFM or the Monima party — an old populist group with an implantation in the south — are today completely at sea, or even swimming in the opposite direction to the masses.

Some of them, out of opposition to the liberal trend of their leadership, have been won back over by Ratsiraka in recent times, providing him with his "left wing". Today they find themselves heading up institutions rejected by the population. Thus in the short term it does not seem likely that the mass movement can give rise to anything more than a change in the government.

### Paris backs "democratization"

France is the main supplier of bilateral funds for Madagascar. For this reason, Paris has maintained privileged relations with president Ratsiraka, now considered to have shown himself a graduate in the "democratization" of Africa currently in vogue in the French administration.

Thus French diplomacy at first observed a discreet silence on the events, which it has been finding increasingly embarrassing. The official French position is that the only solution is a new election. Paris has never supported the demand for a national agreement to revise the constitution and continues to offer the president an escape route.

After August 10, 1991, France felt obliged to make some noises. However it soon returned to the idea of a compromise solution which its ambassador is trying to sell to the opposition in the form of a "Committee of Public Salvation" bringing together equal numbers of regime supporters and opposition representatives. This committee would oversee the runup to the elections.

These prevarications have made life easier for Ratsiraka, who is now trying to claim that the only alternative to him is chaos. ★

## Sweden: a time of wolves

**ON SEPTEMBER 16, 1991 the Swedish social democratic government fell. The parliamentary elections resulted in the most crushing defeat for the established workers parties since 1928. Above all it was a defeat for the Social Democrats, whose vote fell by 5% to 38%, that is a loss of 300,000 votes since 1988.**

### DICK FORSLUND

**B**UT it was also a defeat for the Left Party (LP — formerly the Left Party of Communists). A defeat in figures, in which the LP lost 72,000 votes and decreased from 5.8 to 4.7%, but above all a political defeat, in the sense that the LP was not able to attract all those workers and low income earners who are fed up with the austerity policies and drift to the right by the Social Democrats over the past ten years.

The LP, which experienced a boost in popularity a year and a half ago when it opposed government proposals to ban strikes, has since been ridden with internal conflicts. A group of leaders and MPs has been publicly pressing the party to be more "reasonable" and "responsible", arguing that this must be the conclusion of the fall of what they once called "really existing socialism" in Eastern Europe. This group finally called for a vote for the Social Democrats a week before the elections.

### Witch hunt follows Moscow coup

Other party leaders were unable to respond to this campaign, which was applauded in the press and finally developed into a witchhunt after the Moscow coup, with the aim of "driving the Communists out of parliament."

Despite their public opposition to Stalinism and the coup, the LP were unable to challenge the identification of socialism as such with Stalinism. The LP leadership's response when confronted with the

### Trotskyist campaign

THE Socialist Party (SP — Swedish section of the Fourth International) chose to enter these elections in a united front with local Left party branches in a number of towns. Despite meagre results for the common slates, SP candidates were elected to the local parliament in Umeå in the north and in Nacka outside Stockholm. In other towns, where the LP rejected unity with "irresponsible revolutionaries" or the SP had decided to run alone because of the poor state of the

LP, the results were contradictory. Preliminary results from the district of Jönköping indicate a rise of the SP vote from 500 to 2,000, whereas in Uppsala, Sweden's fourth biggest town, the SP scored around 1,000 for their separate slate as in previous campaigns. In the industrial town of Eskilstuna, the "pure" SP slate got 500 votes (0.7%) while in another industrial town, Köping, the SP was eight votes short of staying in the local parliament, with its vote falling from over 3% to 1.4%.

SP spokesperson Gote Kilden ran in Gothenburg as the third candidate on the LP slate for national parliament. This unity could not counteract the slide to the right in Swedish politics. The LP got only one seat in Gothenburg. However, the left wing LP branch in Gothenburg holds the possibility open for Kilden to alternate with their elected MP on occasions. ★

right wing campaign against "stone dead socialism" was to keep the question of class power and socialism out of the debate. Instead, the LP leadership put all its weight behind trying to defend the "Swedish model" and the gains of the workers movement in a better and more consistent way than the social democracy. This was done without addressing the issues of power within society and with arguments for high income taxes and other measures that social democracy abandoned ten years ago. Questions like: "won't big capital leave Sweden if you try to act against the will of big finance?" were answered "I don't think so" or "it will not happen immediately", if any answer was given at all.

### Lack of alternative to Stalinism

The LP's lack of an alternative to Stalinism was also shown when the party chairman, in a 45 minute television interview, was unable to give a clear answer to questions like "do you support the ideal of Communism or not?". This performance disappointed both LP members, who smelled concessions to right wing propaganda and those right wing LP members of parliament who want the LP to become a "real" parliamentary left reformist party — this, in their opinion, is the only way to attract disappointed social democrats.

The winners in the election were the Conservative Party (Moderaterna) which won 21.9% of the vote (an increase of 4%), the Christian Democrats, who got into parliament for the first time with 7% of the votes, and New Democracy, which has grown in one year from nothing to nearly 7% and also gained parliamentary representation for the first time. The head of the new government is conservative leader Carl Bildt.

The Green Party, which entered parliament for the first time in 1988, lost its seats, polling less than the 4% threshold

for parliamentary representation. It paid for its three years of adaptation to the system. The voters, although positive about the party's defence of the environment, no longer see a vote for the Greens as a way of protesting against the establishment. This role was instead taken over by the conservatives and above all the New Democracy.

The two more "welfare minded" bourgeois parties also lost out. The Centre Party lost 160,000 votes with 8.5% and the Liberals lost 180,000 and got 9%.

The Centre Party is the traditional defender of the farmers in Sweden and tried during the election to advance their interests, criticizing the Social Democrats from the left on the issue of taxes. The Liberals campaigned with the Conservatives for a harsh austerity programme — with the aim of entering a coalition government — simultaneously raising criticisms of the new hardline policy on refugees.

### Racists score success in south

That the traditional liberal defence of refugees was not a vote winner was shown in Skåne, the county in the very south of Sweden, where the racist Sjöbopartiet got almost 7% of the vote, campaigning on a single issue "stop the immigrants" platform. Their success cut the support for the centre party by one third.

Hostility towards immigrants and refugees of a smoother kind was also a theme of the extreme right New Democracy. This was combined in their propaganda with harsh attacks on politicians, trade unions and the state bureaucracy — "which gets a lot of money but does nothing to earn it" — and legislation restricting the use of alcohol, car traffic and the activities of small businesses (it is true that small businesses are going bankrupt by the hundred each day in Sweden).

The two leaders of New Democracy —

one a successful businessman and the other an unsuccessful descendant of the Swedish aristocracy who has been sacked from leading positions in Swedish big finance — were embraced by the media as "something new". Their meetings, at which they criticized the Social Democrats for being unfair to the working class and being no longer a workers' party, attracted thousands. "I have earned hundreds of thousands owing to the social democratic tax reform, isn't that unfair" was one of their themes. At the same time their programme suggests cutting taxes on private fortunes, stock market business and easing the already light tax burden on the rich.

With the exception of the north of Sweden, where social democracy and traditional Communism are very strong, the New Democracy made heavy inroads in working class neighbourhoods, both in big and small towns. This — together with the fact that more workers than ever abstained from voting — cut big slices (up to 10%) out of traditional social democratic and LP support. In the industrial town of Gothenburg, Sweden's second largest city, the LP went from 9 to 7% and the social democracy lost its majority in the local parliament, while ND got 7.1% and 4 seats in the local parliament.

### Youth support for New Democracy

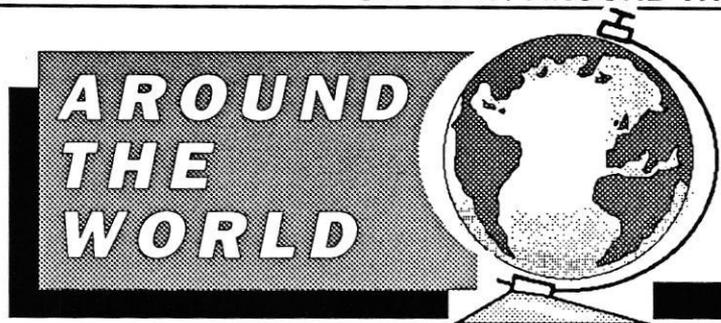
The ND also got a lot of support from youth voting for the first time. In high school test elections, scores of 20% for New Democracy and 30 to 40% for the conservatives were not unusual.

There were some exceptions to this picture, which has been described as the "right wing revolution" in the Swedish press. In two medium sized towns, Alvesta and Nässjö, a left wing opposition got between 15 and 20% of the vote. In both cases these new local parties were split-offs from the social democracy arguing that their mother party had turned bourgeois. These left alternatives, unmarked by the stigma of Stalinism and with deep roots in the local labour movement, managed to canalize working class anger, cutting the support for social democracy by half and — as in many cases in the north of Sweden — keeping New Democracy out of the local parliament.

The far left KPML(r) also gained influence in two towns where they had concentrated on working class issues. But this party also lost votes in its stronghold, Gothenburg, where it got a little over 2%.

Swedish social democracy has been dealt a severe blow. It is the biggest political defeat for the labour movement in Sweden for over half a century. For the first time since the twenties a strong right has taken the government; this will be different from the bourgeois interlude between 1976 and 1982.

LP leader Lars Werner described the



result as "not so bad" referring to the fact that his party managed to stay in parliament. The social democratic newspapers and leaders in their turn put their hopes in the chaos created by the entry of two new parties into parliament. They question the possibility of the bourgeoisie forming a strong government, hoping for new elections within the year.

In a first comment on the right wing victory, the editorial of *Internationalen*, the weekly of the Socialist Party (the Swedish section of the Fourth International), characterized Werner's statement as "bullshit", fooling nobody but himself.

"The ND is digging itself deep into the working class districts. The anti-establishment revolt is canalized by the brown-blue right and the right of the priests and by nearly one million abstentions. The "red-green coalition" dreamed of by LP leaders (SD-LP-Greens-Centre) lost 663,000 votes (the LP itself 72,000) and is smashed. The LP leadership itself is unable to shake off the historic millstone of Stalinism. This must be characterized as a severe defeat. All efforts to comfort people who have worked hard during the campaign with fairy tales will only rebound in the long run.

### Broad base for rightist solutions

"It is not wise to hope the bourgeois politicians will perform harakiri. No amount of political chaos among the bourgeoisie can help the fact that there exists a broad base for right wing solutions in any constellation they choose, directed against workers, low income earners and the trade unions.

"Let's look the truth in the eyes. We are facing the time of the wolves. The harsh reality is that the left is not yet capable of forming a strong pole of attraction within the disintegration and growing polarization of capitalist society. Let's not have the slightest doubt on what is at stake and the intentions of the right. Socialists, LP members, social democrats, green activists, anti-racists, radical women and youth activists... unite in resistance everywhere where the blows are striking. Away with sectarianism and suspicion! Unity in plurality for the workers interests or split and stupidity facing the right. This is how the question will be put.

"But at the same time we must try to learn what has been in order to face what is coming. In these times when the left/right notion has become confused, and where the fall of Stalinism is tearing down many things that were self-evident for old-style Communists, it is necessary to scrutinize our own messages and goals. What is ruled out by history, what is still standing and what must be added in order to make socialism once again the liberation movement of the exploited and downtrodden? These are the questions we must answer in the coming battle." ★

## ZAIRE

### Corruption and "chaos"

NUMEROUS observers have spoken of "chaos" in relation to the crisis now gripping Zaire. There is without doubt nothing worse for a state than to see its own troops, discontented at not being paid, invading and pillaging the towns — followed in this by a population exhausted by repression, economic crisis and penury.

The state of Zaire has for a long time been a skeleton state; Mobuto's autocracy has only ever been a caricature of power. Brutal force and generalized corruption have acted as methods of government for 26 years. If it seems now that the last resources of the regime are exhausted, it is the extreme weakness and confusion of the opposition which, in its turn, feeds the chaos, and no social and political force appears capable today of filling the vacuum.

Imperialism is fully aware of this. The decision to once again send French and Belgian troops to "assure the security of foreign residents" no longer seems intended to save the Mobuto regime as such.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has long since given up on negotiating anything with Kinshasa; the principal Western powers have given up hope of any structural reform of the regime. Paris, Brussels and Washington will now issue many communiqués expressing their profound "concern" at the deaths that the current crisis will undoubtedly bring.

But how many thousands of murders has the Mobuto regime committed since 1965, under the protection of its American, Belgian and French friends — the regiment which has just revolted in Kinshasa was commanded by French officers!

The foreign troops will without doubt then proceed to the evacuation of the 10,000 western residents of Kinshasa — there are some tens of thousands throughout the country — who have greased the wheels of the machine, at all levels, for the foreign companies, for their own profit and for that of the regime. The latest intervention is another episode in twenty six years of complicity with crime

by the "democratic" West. ★

## MAURITIUS

### Landslide victory for bourgeois coalition

THE recent general election in Mauritius saw two big right wing coalitions competing for the vote of the electors; that of the outgoing government, comprising the Mauritian Socialist Movement (MSM) and the Mauritian Militant Movement (MMM), and that of the Labour Party (PT), allied to the Mauritian Social Democratic Party (PMSD). In reality, the two groupings were indistinguishable in economic policy, as well as relations with imperialism and the role of the Mauritian Free Trade Zone.

The outgoing coalition had demagogically tried to appear as less authoritarian and more populist than its adversaries. Finally, the MSM-MMM front won a crushing victory with 56.77% of the votes and a majority of parliamentary seats — the PT-PMSD lists won 39.23% of the votes, 4% going to other lists.

A similar electoral tidal wave took place in 1982, in favour of the opposition (then essentially embodied by the MMM); this time it is the outgoing government that has won.

This confirms that, in a situation of full employment and accelerating industrialization, the workers can, to a considerable extent, lose sight of the class references still present ten years ago; the polarization of votes between the two bourgeois lists is the expression of this.

In this context, the Parti Militant Travayer (PMT) took the decision to put forward candidates in six seats and to campaign for the defence of working class and democratic rights.

This list was the sole independent workers' expression during this campaign. One of the candidates of the PMT obtained 4.24% of the votes and another 1.15%. Following the victory of the outgoing government, the Parti Militant Travayer insisted again on the necessity of rebuilding an independent workers' movement. It is, on the other hand, unfortunate that the revolutionary left did not succeed in mobilizing on a unitary basis in the course of this campaign.

The other organization of the indepen-

**Army coup in Haiti**

ON MONDAY September 30, 1991, following some bloody confrontations, the chief of staff of the Haitian army, Raoul Cédras, who had been appointed by the new president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, seized power in the country. Aristide was arrested by the putschists, before leaving the country under the protection of the French embassy. At the time of going to press, there remains great confusion about the situation in Haiti.

The claims by the military that Aristide had the intention of installing a "new dictatorship" and the promises of a rapid return to constitutional normality are the commonplaces of any coup. The fact that the United States has condemned the coup does not necessarily prove either that it has clean hands in the affair.

But numerous questions remain. Why did the army, which had remained quiet during the attempted coup by the "macoutes" which preceded Aristide's assumption of power in January 1990, act now? Could the Haitian army, and above all its current leaders, who are close to the United States, act without, at least, the consent of US imperialism — which, it should be remembered, still keeps its Marines at the Guantanamo base in Cuba?

Yet Bush's official declarations are increasingly firm — aid will be suspended and the junta will not be recognized. Moreover, French imperialism is trying to profit from this affair to increase its influence in Haiti in the event of a return to power of Aristide.

At the same time, this army coup should surprise no one who was aware of the limited room for manoeuvre that Aristide has enjoyed (see IV 211). He was confronted by a state apparatus and an administration trained under Duvalierism; he had no real majority in the Assembly, no real party; his trusted supporters were not in the majority in his own government; an economic crisis is raging and the Haitian bourgeoisie is profoundly parasitic; the absence of an organized mass movement also weighed heavily. Finally, the "deDuvalierization" of the army, which has certainly been weakened by the different coups of the past few years, was limited to the retirement of six of its top leaders — while soldiers with close links to the United States were placed in key posts — and an attempt to put the rural police under the control of the Minister of the Interior.

Aristide is currently in the United States; after having appealed to the Organization of American States, which will send a mission to Haiti to demand that the military leave power and has refused to recognize the junta, he will address the Security Council of the United Nations.

However muddy the circumstances of the coup, the tasks of socialists are clear — to demand the departure of the military junta and give total support to the Haitian people. — Cecilia Garmendia. ★

dent Mauritian left, Lalit, chose, in the name of the "danger from the far right", symbolized in its view by the PMSD, not to weaken the governmental coalition by putting forward a candidate. ★

**DENMARK**

**Palestinians wage fight against mass deportation**

THE Danish government is threatening 125 stateless Palestinians with deportation to Lebanon, where they face persecution by the Syrian authorities or different militias (See IV 211).

Seventy have sought refuge in a Copenhagen church, an action which has made national headlines and has mobilized trades unionists, religious people, artists and writers in their support.

The Socialistisk Arbejder Parti (SAP — Danish section of the Fourth International) organized a demonstration on September 12 sponsored by 16 Copenhagen trade union chairs and vicars, which attracted

about 700 people around the slogans "Withdraw the expulsions!", "Lebanon is no safe country!" and "Asylum for the Palestinians threatened with deportation!".

While a parliamentary majority has now spoken out against the expulsion of the Palestinians, the decision remains in the hands of the Minister of Justice, Conservative hard liner Hans Engell.

Behind the current wave of expulsion orders lies an extreme tightening of asylum policies. Since 1989 Palestinians have no longer been automatically granted asylum.

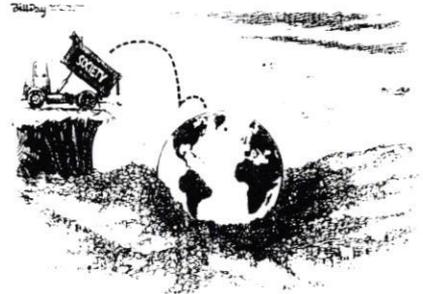
Many of the Palestinian refugees are former members of Fatah or other PLO groups which the Syrian forces have tried to stamp out in order to ensure their hegemony in Lebanon. Some are wanted by different militias for desertion.

Amnesty International and Danish Refugee Aid (a semi-official organization) have documented the fact that the Syrians control airport arrivals and departures,

and already this year five stateless Palestinians were deported from Lebanon to Syria (where they were arrested) under the terms of a new security treaty between the two states.

Protests should be sent to Danish embassies or to the Ministry of Justice, Slotsholmsgade 10, DK-1216 Copenhagen K.

Copies and other messages should be sent to Asylaktivisterne, Blaagaardens Medborgerhus, Blaagaards Plads 3, DK-2200 Copenhagen N. ★



**FOURTH INTERNATIONAL**

**Eighth summer camp held in Czechoslovakia**

MORE than 750 young people from all over Europe participated in the 8th international summer camp of revolutionary youth organizations in solidarity with the Fourth International, held this year at Hradec Nar Moravici in eastern Czechoslovakia. Around 40% of the youth present were attending their first Fourth International summer camp and almost 50% of the participants were not members of revolutionary youth organizations.

For the second time, delegations of youth from Eastern Europe participated in the camp, and this year the content of the debates and political exchanges marked a clear advance, the question of feminism and women's oppression in particular coming to the fore.

This year, the political programme was essentially axised around the upheavals in eastern Europe and their economic, political and social consequences in the new Europe; the transition in the East, the formation of the Europe of the Single Act, nationalism and socialism, not forgetting the problems of the Third World. The week ended with a day devoted to our revolutionary project, based on self-management and democracy.

The success of the eighth camp shows what it is possible to do despite limited resources and above all faced with the ideological and economic offensive of imperialism, in the East as in the West.

The new Europe demands that revolutionaries, if they wish to win youth to their project, adopt a new practice of which international meetings like this are, without doubt, one of the possible forms. ★