

# International VIEWPOINT

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## Who votes for Le Pen?

▲ *The Lombardy League: a modern far right emerges in Italy*

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## International Viewpoint

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At Rio conference:

## The real debates are not on the agenda

THE HUGE QUANTITY of people, paper and rhetoric at the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) which opens in Rio de Janeiro at the start of June will have no relation to quality. It can be safely predicted that the concrete results will be derisory.

HERMANN DWORCZAK — May 22, 1992.

**D**ELEGATIONS are expected in Rio from 160 states. They will include heads of state and government, parliamentarians, experts and representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). The lowest estimate for the number of participants is 25,000.

This army will not in fact have a lot of real work to do. The innumerable preparatory conferences — the most recent the conference on the climate in New York — have shown that little is likely to be achieved even at the level of resolution passing. Immediately before the opening of the congress, the following documents were on the table:

**Agenda 21:** This paper of some hundreds of pages is meant to show the ecological road forward into the 21st century. Even the conservative Austrian paper *Die Presse* concluded soberly that “this paper can be accepted even by states which are far from serious about the environment. It has no legal weight”.

For the implementation of the most important points of the Agenda, UNCED General Secretary Maurice Strong has estimated that some \$650bn would be needed — of which the lion's share, some \$500bn, would have to be provided by the developing countries themselves.

**The Rio Declaration:** Originally the adoption of an “Earth Charter” was envisaged. In the event we get 27 principles which are wholly lacking in the necessary vision. Connoisseurs of the scene have picked up the remark by US president George Bush that “the Ame-

rican Way of Life is not up for debate in Rio”; the American leader can come to the summit without fear of that.

**The Climate Convention:** This text is hardly worth the paper it is printed on. Binding standards for the reduction of the emission of gases responsible for the Greenhouse Effect have been cut out. In particular, the USA has expressed its total opposition to any clear statement of obligatory measures.

**The Forest and Species Defence Convention:** The convention on forests had already fallen by the wayside during the preparatory negotiations. It is possible that some kind of face-saving forest “paper” will be adopted by the conference. On the species convention, although it is estimated that some million types of plants and animals will have died out before the year 2000, there is no sign of serious action being taken. The main reason is the policies of the rich industrialized countries which want to keep the Third World as a region to be exploited as freely as possible.

The rich North, where 20% of the world's population consumes 80% of resources, is interested in keeping the discussion in Rio within strict limits. The international economic conditions which condemn three quarters of the world's population to social marginalization are not to be mentioned here, being considered the responsibility of other bodies such as the General Treaty on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Nor is there to be any discussion of the relevance of the debt burden on the Third World to environmental issues.



### Parade of the vanities

Rio is a “Parade of the Vanities”, as a representative of an Austrian NGO, Brigid Weinzinger, who works for the Austrian Information Service on Development Policy, put it. In her view, “In Rio they are only going to look at the symptoms. The South will not obtain its right to sustainable development. The North meanwhile wants only to discuss those environmental questions that affect it directly.

“On the other hand, last year's international conference of NGOs in Paris maintained unambiguously that a programme that did not include drastic reductions in military spending, reductions in carbon dioxide emissions above all by the industrialized nations and a solution of the debt crisis in favour of the Third World countries was not serious.”

It is not only the political axis between the capitalist states of the North and their neo-colonial agents in the South which makes it impossible for the Rio Summit to pay any attention to those who Frantz Fanon called the Damned of the Earth. The very theoretical basis of the resolutions and specific proposals is anything but encouraging. The Brundtland Report from the UNCED entitled “Our Common Future” does not question the profit motive. In place of the previous “unrestrained” growth there is to be “balanced” growth.

### Export-led development

Various growth models are proposed for the Third World in which exports, carried out with no change to the existing one-sided structure, and cooperation with the multinationals are to pay

a central role: "Multinational business can play a key role in ensuring lasting development, especially since the developing countries are gradually coming to rely more and more on foreign capital".

The extreme moderation of the Brundtland Report goes so far as to rule out any mention of the suppression of nuclear power or a ban on the industrial exploitation of the Antarctic.

Brigid Winzinger estimates that the industrialized nations will come up with between \$5bn and \$15bn to buy off public sentiment. But even over this — in terms of what is needed — drop in the ocean, wide ranging controls will be exercised.

Thus the Group of 77, which brings together more than 120 Third World countries, was not able to push through its demand for the setting up of a global ecological fund. Instead of this, the sheep are to be separated from the goats according to free market criteria.

The World Bank is famous for its questionable credit allocations. For example, 90,000 people are to be forcibly evicted in connection with the Sardar Sarovar Dam project it is financing in India. But it is this very institution that will play a key role in allocating the ecological funds of the "global environmental facility".

### Hope in the shadows

If there is hope, then it is to be found in the parallel conference of the Non-Governmental Organizations. While the heads of state and their entourages are rendezvousing in the centre of Rio, the alternative Global Forum is meeting in the Parque de Flamengo.

The organizers of the latter, which include Brazil's CUT union confederation, are hoping that the meeting will result not only in a general exchange of experiences but also in agreement on concrete proposals. The results will be announced in a general proclamation which will present an alternative to the official Agenda 21.

The formation of a worldwide network will be embodied in for example "binding NGO agreements" and a "Climate Alliance" between the states of the North and the inhabitants of the Amazon, and above all the indigenous populations.

Above all, however, it must give rise to well-worked out campaigns to put pressure on the rulers. For, without struggle and grassroots mobilization, the decisions of the alternative conference will also be nothing more than

**4** pieces of paper. ★

# Repression and resistance

**IN ORDER to understand the rebellion that occurred in Los Angeles in the wake of the King verdict we need to focus not only on the inter-relation of race and class but on the aspects in which the two are different. While it is true that it is very difficult to separate race effects from class effects and vice versa, because Blacks and Latinos are over-represented in the super poor parts of the working class, it is our task to recognize and understand what makes each kind of experience special.**

## DOLORES TREVIZO

**T**HE DESPERATE conditions produced by economic restructuring in the last 20 years, especially in the Black working class, were a necessary but insufficient condition for producing the urban rebellion of 1992. The sufficient, or primary, cause was political. Specifically, a sense of racial injustice overwhelmed a community which has felt like a collective Rodney King at the hands of an ever more belligerent state.

The economic conditions of the past 20 years have been devastating to the Black and Latino working classes. When big manufacturing industries closed the gates to their factories in many cities the Black community suffered the most because it was untrained and ill educated (itself a political effect of the racist segregation of education) to be transferred into some of the high tech jobs that opened up.

### The politics of hiring

And those that had been retrained in the skills necessary to post-industrial jobs were turned away at the arches of "human relations" offices because hiring is especially political in the context of an overabundance of labor.

The upshot has meant severe unemployment and underemployment for African American men. To get a feel for the effects of capitalist restructuring on the African American community, consider these numbers: in 1974, close to one half of all Black males between the ages of 20 and 24 worked either as semi-skilled machine operators or in craft positions at family level wages. By 1986, only 25% of that group of Black males worked in such jobs, while the others were forced either into non-union, low-waged service jobs or into

unemployment.

The situation for Black youth is even more devastating. Faced with overcrowded schools, a declining quality of education and no prospect for future employment, over 50% of Black and Latino youth drop out before the completion of high school. The social effect is a wholesale disorganization of the African American, and to a lesser extent, Latino communities. Faced with the option of getting through the day by watching rerun after rerun on television, young Black and Latino males with nothing to do organize their lives around the community of a gang. And the community of gang-life is very violent as it is increasingly involved in the use and sale of drugs.

### Massive force

In order to contain the effects produced by economic restructuring the state has responded to the growth of gang membership and gang identification with massive force. The Los Angeles Police Department, under the guidance of Police Chief Daryl Gates, has in fact pioneered pseudo-legal techniques in repression that are seen as a model for police departments across the country. For example, the battering ram was a military vehicle used to break down the doors of crack houses. Obviously, its use trampled over the rights not only of innocent citizens (whose homes were accidentally destroyed because of mix-ups in addresses) but even those of criminals whose property was wantonly destroyed.

Operation Hammer was another military technique pioneered by Gates that had to be abandoned because of its inherent violation of civil rights. Under this policy, police officers combed the poverty stricken

streets of South Los Angeles rounding up "suspects" en masse. As one might well imagine, hundreds of non-gang members were arrested and released simply cause they were Black or Latino boys who wore fashionable urban gear (baggy pants, white t-shirts and thick jackets). And even though their innocence was legally established, their names remained in police files for years after their illegal arrest.

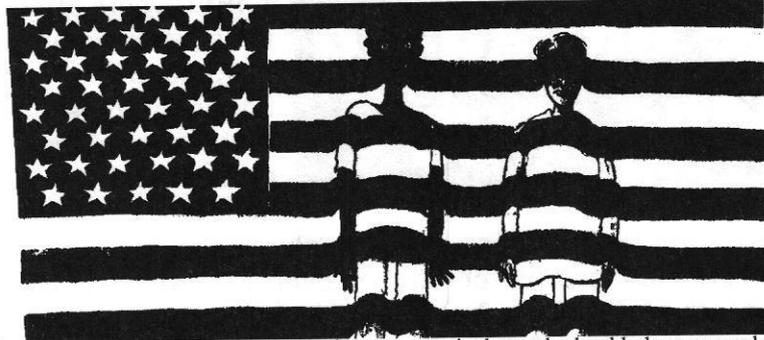
The net effect of these and similar policies has been the wholesale criminalization of the Black and Latino youth of Los Angeles. Gates' war on drugs became in reality a war against minority youth, a racist war which was to produce increasing incidents of collateral damage. Law suit after law suit has been filed against LAPD officers for use of excessive force, wanton destruction of personal property and wrongful arrests. In each case Daryl Gates has defended his officers and has pressured the city council to release the monies necessary for litigation as well as for the out of court settlement of suits.

The Black and Latino communities of South Central have recognized the racist war against them for what it is. It is a war in which only one side has had the legitimate means to manoeuvre and lethal force. And this is no abstraction. As most in the community will tell you, you cannot be a black man in South Central Los Angeles without being stopped, usually for no reason at all, forced to get on your knees if you're co-operative, or to kiss pavement if you're proud, and then released after an illegal search of your car and then your person. And if you protest too much you might find yourself not only physically abused but probably without legal recourse.

The verdict of innocence for the police who savagely beat up Black motorist Rodney King was seen, rightfully, as the complete social and political legitimization of the racist attack against Blacks in this society. In order to confront that, the African American community tested its power on the streets.

### Holding the streets

One of the things that was so awesome about the uprising was that for a few short days African Americans and Latinos took the streets, holding their enemy at bay. The alteration of the relationship of forces, however temporary, had a liberating effect for the African American community. It sensed its own power by being able to hold the streets against the cops and it got a sense that the state was not omnipotent. Indeed, the repressive state apparatus came off as an awkward and even bumbling machine when the national guard couldn't be deployed within the first 24 hours



because the ammunition had been forgotten.

As we know, the state has since recovered and has in fact overcompensated for those few awkward hours when its agents were reduced to spectators of the public violation of law and order. Police officers have taken back the streets through an unprecedented display of military force which has resulted in the arrest of approximately 19,000 individuals and the deportation of 700 Latinos with several thousand more facing likely deportation. This reassertion of power, coming in the form of a military occupation, has bought with it a complete suspension of civil liberties.

Currently the people of Los Angeles do not have the right to public assembly or free speech. It is even worse for the Black and brown communities who currently don't even have the right to privacy. The police are currently conducting a door to door search for loot in the Black and Latino communities and many of these searches are being conducted without search warrants. Further, both communities are being subjected to raids. Latino communities are being swept of so called "illegal aliens" and the police are sweeping the streets with the biggest operation hammer manoeuvre yet (apparently Gates is making good use of the national guard while it is still here).

### Defending basic rights

Hence at the moment, the struggle remains on this very high political level. The immediate questions before Los Angeles citizens are: do we have the right to assemble peacefully? Do we have the right to privacy? Do we have the right to a speedy arraignment? Do we have the right to due process? Do we have the right to a community free of military occupation? Do the 19,000 deserve amnesty? Do people of color have a right to equal justice?

In terms of our longer term coalition building, the strategy that ought to be adopted should be both political and economic. The issues of police abuse and the racial double standard in the courts need to be highlighted if a coalition wants to be seen as responsibly addressing the issues of minorities. This is not to say that economic

demands should play a secondary role. On the contrary, while anti-racist solutions should be defining of a coalition, economic demands should be central.

A model attempt at this kind of dual strategy was seen at a Black and Latino community wide meeting called by the Coalition against Police Abuse. There were about 80 people at this meeting with about 15 to 20 community groups represented. The demands that came out at the meeting were many but the basic ideas focussed on one theme: community control of everything. There was a big discussion of community control of the rebuilding process which generated a consensus around the notion of a Cooperative Zone as counterposed to the government's solution of an Enterprise Zone. The idea was first and foremost to reject the government priority of rebuilding businesses.

This positive notion, which has not yet been fleshed out in details, calls for a major public works project. Specifically, the coalition wants to set up a public board composed of over 50% South Central residents. This board would be responsible for receiving and allocating government monies being earmarked for relief and would employ residents of the community in both the construction process and at the cooperative association level at union wages.

The purpose of this strategy is that:

- a) the community democratically decides where monies go since only its real residents know what is needed and
- b) the community benefits collectively from the redevelopment of the area.

### Community control

In other words, not only should the construction contracts not be given to private development firms but what is actually developed should be owned and worked collectively.

It remains to be seen whether or not the coalition can mobilize sufficient forces to carry out this ambitious but no less necessary project. In any case, major problems face the local ruling class, problems that can no longer be hidden or explained away. As many of the community activists put it "an unstable Black community is an unstable Los Angeles". ★

# The old guard fades away

**THREE** years after the bloody events of Tiananmen Square and the repression of the student and popular

movement in China, nothing is yet resolved. The conquerors are less triumphant than ever: it is rather their factional adversaries who have the wind in their sails, enjoying the solid support of that formidable tactician Deng Xiaoping.

The rebels of 1989 are silenced or repressed — with some of them who have connections in high places turning to business. Both social peace and the regained strength of the “reformers” — who wish to combine economic and social changes with preservation of political continuity involving a capitalist “reconversion” of a part of the Communist bureaucracy — are underpinned by current economic successes.

ROLAND LEW — May 7, 1992.

**A**T THE TOP levels of the state the pendulum continues to swing. Currently, Deng Xiaoping, through a rapid and resolute offensive, has imposed a return to a line clearly favourable to the “reformists”.

Their project is increasingly explicitly that of a transition to a type of state capitalism, favourable to private initiatives, open to the outside world and with a firm hand on the political tiller, exercised by the “Communists” at the centre (who, in the case of success, will adopt another name).

Starting with a visit by Deng in January to the southern provinces most heavily involved in the reform, the offensive was pursued from March onward by a big media campaign designed to pressure the central apparatus to give way. It is revealing of the fragility of the situation that, according to *Le Monde* of April 22, 1992, “the new offensive’s success remains tied to the health of Deng Xiaoping” — and one may add, that of his opponents. In China the future of a billion people depends on the remarkable longevity of a few very old men.

Indeed, it is being said that Deng has gone on the offensive because he has little time left — and because many of his opponents are no longer in a fit physical state to fight back. Deng (88 years of age) will carry the day at the forthcoming Chinese Communist Party (CCP) congress in October if he gets the support of Peng Zhen (90) and

Bo Yibo (85), or if he can really count on Yang Shankun (85), China’s president, one of the main organizers of the 1989 repression, and somebody who is known to have influence on the army, which is expected to play a crucial role in the succession.

And then the big question of Chinese politics; can Deng outlast his conservative rival, Chen Yun (87)?

The whole population is watching its leaders die; a spectacle that recalls the last years of Mao, with a vast gulf between the regime and the rest of society, including many CCP cadres.

## Irresistible social pressure

However Deng’s current successes are not due only to his undoubted tactical skill. He owes it above all to the mounting pressure of society and the growing power of those sectors of the apparatus who support reform, and who want to narrow the gulf between a profoundly changed Chinese society and the atrophied apparatus, which talks and thinks in a way totally out of touch with the reality of the country. Furthermore, significant sections of the apparatus are already far along the road to their social reconversion.

The battle at the top is becoming more and more ferocious as the conservative current fights with its back to the wall. While it continues to control many command structures at the centre, at the summit of government and in the propaganda apparatus,

it is often, on the other hand, powerless in the depths of country, and is frequently thwarted by provincial authorities who are masters of their own regions. These regional powers, even when they are not especially enthusiastic about the content of the reforms, fear the recentralizing tendencies of the prime minister Li Peng — and this is not to mention provinces such as Guangdong and its capital Guangzhou, or Zhejiang, which have become great free trade zones for capitalism.

The conservatives are still able to win battles and exercise the power to make a formidable nuisance of themselves, but the whole trend of the times is against them; they have no clear project of their own nor do they have real support in the country.

It seems that they have even lost the support of the army. In order to bring this about, Deng has had to agree to a sharp increase in the military budget which has no justification in the current international situation.

Given that its economic record is far from negative, the pitiable state of the Li Peng team may seem strange. The economy is far from stable and the ills of the past remain, but, nonetheless, the Chinese economy has performed better than expected over the past three years, to the surprise of foreign observers.

## A fragile dragon

While the achievement may be fragile, for the moment China is among the “dragons” of Asia, with 6 to 7% growth a year. Even more unexpectedly, the regime has succeeded in bringing inflation down sharply, demonstrating that it has some control over the economy and thus some capacity to exact obedience, something that was by no means clear three years ago.

However, if these positive results are looked at a little more closely, it is clear that they reflect the victory of Li Peng’s opponents. The necessity of the struggle against inflation and austerity was recognized by all currents and applied since 1988.

But the attempts at recentralization and even partial recollectivization in the countryside promoted by Chen Yun or Li Peng have run up against tough and ultimately victorious resistance by an irresistible alliance of new economic forces in the towns and countryside, regional officials attached politically and materially to their newly won autonomy and peasants opposed to any measures of recollectivization, however limited. This alian-

ce moreover enjoys the support of Deng and many other top cadres.

Post-1989 China has continued to open up economically to the outside world. Furthermore it has successfully undertaken an aggressive policy of exporting low technology goods — exports doubled between 1985 and 1990, at a time when imports were sharply cut by the austerity policy.

More striking still, the trade balance was in the black in 1990 and 1991 and China is, after Japan, the country with the biggest surplus in trade with the United States (+\$11.5bn in 1990). This is a much more serious source of tension with the US than human rights violations, constituting a serious crime of disrespect for US economic power and big business.

This policy of taking over the low tech crannies vacated by countries like Singapore, Taiwan or South Korea was first proposed by Zhao Ziyang, the former reformist secretary of the CCP ousted in spring 1989; it thus represents a victory for his line. Even more worrying for Li Peng is the fact that most of the economic growth is provided by the non-state sector companies and the cooperative sector (which are in fact more or less privatized).

While the written projects for economic development, such as the 1991-95 five-year plan, were the result of laborious compromises between conservatives and reformers, the policies actually put into practice have tended towards an extension of reform and towards the progressive entry of China into the world capitalist economy, and thus subordination to its logic. Deng himself recently made a self-criticism for not having allowed the great industrial centre of Shanghai to earlier become a site of capitalist activity (a "special economic zone") capable of attracting foreign capital.

### Pathetic struggle

While the conservatives continue their somewhat pathetic struggle to hold back an apparently irresistible tide, there is an absence of autonomous activity within society.

The regime has not only won economic victories — which, however fragi-

le, are precious for this profoundly discredited regime. It has also succeeded in breaking or diverting challenges to its rule. Social problems, the break down of social discipline, zones of insecurity in both town and country, worker resistance in the enterprises and intellectual disaffection continue, but there is no organized challenge. Furthermore, it seems that clandestine activity is not widespread.

This is the period of everyone for themselves. Some critics have turned



to business, others are simply discouraged. The intellectuals are turning away from politics as their forebears did after the disastrous beginnings of the first republic of 1912. Nor are there as yet any signs of worker self-organization.

There remains a considerable gulf between the energy of worker resistance at the rank-and-file level, a resistance which often has a very narrow focus, and the absence of any significant independent worker organization, whether as trade unions or in other forms. It is true that any efforts in this direction meet with swift and ferocious repression of a much more systematic kind than that employed against intellectuals.

This level of control of the situation is certainly temporary, but it has provided a welcome respite for a regime that looked on its last legs and ready to disappear beneath general opprobrium. The cities remain rebellious but the agitation there is economic, resulting from the population's various efforts to make ends meet. A select few meanwhile are able to profit from the pro-business atmosphere; in today's China one moves quickly from rebellion to the passion for business,

from the exaltation of the mission of the intellectuals to praising the role of the businessman.

The countryside meanwhile is relieved by the failure of the attempts at resocialization (nobody dares use the term recollectivization any more). Rural China has benefited significantly from a substantial rise in agricultural prices, a record harvest and an upturn in non-agricultural activity.

The significant rural small industrial sector, which had suffered under the post-1988 austerity policy, benefited from its subsequent relaxation. Those in the countryside have gained a degree of economic independence and freedom to run their own day-to-day affairs; on the other hand, they do not challenge the regime.

This consent without approval, which is not without calculation, remains the regime's biggest strength; the political passivity of the three quarters of the country's population who live in the rural areas, and fear of instability are the regime's major weapons, far more than the army, which, in any case, is largely composed of conscripts from the countryside.

### Sources of instability

All this does not mean that the vista for the regime is entirely rosy. There are still many sources of instability in the country.

Demographic, as is being constantly emphasized both inside and outside China.

Economic — inflation is taking off again (5 to 6% this year and rising) and a mixed economy made up of a parasitic capitalism and a subsidized state sector which are always out of balance.

Social — with ever increasing inequality in this vast country where the social and geographical margins have been left to rot, provoking growing tensions with the national minorities which are strongly present on the periphery.

And political — with the unending war of succession which blocks off the search for new political openings and must give rise to a great unknown that



frightens everybody both inside and outside China.

The outside world is an important issue in itself. Li Peng has made increasing efforts to get the country out of its international isolation, first with some small successes and latterly with some bigger ones, such as his foreign tour, although even here some of his hosts felt obliged to mention the serious human rights problems in China.

But the essential fact is that a China which is economically open to the world cannot remain too long outside the international political game, at least in Asia.

This is all the more true in that, with the break-up of the USSR, China counts for less than it did on the global scene, being no longer indispensable to the USA in its system of anti-Soviet alliances.

Furthermore, China is surrounded by countries whose power is increasing, including Taiwan, whose independence movement, although supported by only a minority at the moment, is increasingly feared by China.

Beijing must re-enter the concert of nations to defend its interests and in particular find an answer to the new situation arising from the collapse of the USSR — a situation rich in both possibilities (the disappearance of a powerful enemy) and dangers (with the impact on inner China of developments in the Islamic republics of the former USSR).

Thus, China cannot retire into splendid isolation. It must and will pay its price for reentry into the world arena. And this does not work in favour of Li Peng, the symbol of the 1989 repression, the most hated man in the country, whose elimination would have symbolic weight, and would be a more credible sign of change than the recent successes of Deng, rendered uncertain by the latter's fragile state of health.

The regime has proved both more resistant and more flexible than expected — it has been pragmatic and shown a determination to get to grips with the processes of change.

Whether it will succeed remains an open question, but Chinese-style "really existing socialism" is in its death agony, even if the clinical moment of death is being postponed by fear of chaos, by bureaucratic manoeuvres and by the astonishing longevity of some historic figures. ★

## Privatizations meet mounting resistance

**LIKE** many other third world countries, Sri Lanka is under intense pressure to privatize state-owned sectors of the economy and end social support for the poor in order to obtain desperately needed financing from the international banks and institutions.

*International Viewpoint* spoke to Vasudeva Nanayakkara, a leading member of the Sri Lankan NSSP (Nava Sama Samaja Party — Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International), a member of parliament and president of the United Federation of Labour, who has been in the forefront of campaigning against the sell-off of his country's wealth. The interview took place in Amsterdam in May.

**W**HAT was the situation before the privatizations? Was there a very big state sector?

From colonial times services such as railways, health and education and posts and telecommunications were government departments. After independence these were continued and expanded to provide an infrastructure for the economy. Then in the 1950s and early 1970s, when populist governments came to power, a series of manufacturing industries such as steel and textiles were set up by the government or with government cooperation.

This generated employment and led to greater economic activity and cohesion. Areas of the economy were developed that would never have been under private investment — with long gestation periods and low returns during the initial years.

There was much corruption, as in all Third World countries. The government in power used the state sector as a propaganda tool and put in position their supporters and main backers. We can say that the state sector was politically infested and bureaucratically jammed.

**■ So what has changed? Why has the government decided to privatize?**

If you look at the private sector you will see systematic plunder and exploitation of the people on the one hand and on the other the transfer of resources out of the country by those for whom the local currency no longer matters. Then there is a big black economy which has developed alongside, and which also

bleeds the country. Thus, when we criticize the state sector, we should not overlook the nature of the private sector, which is even more unpatriotic and damaging to the country.

Political patronage is always linked up with the state sector. It is no secret that the state sector developed under populism was an exercise in state capitalism. The state sector kept on feeding the private sector. Very often foreign and local suppliers make huge gains out of it by giving low quality and charging high prices. In 1977, a new government took power which had a new strategy of linking up with the IMF and World Bank and liberalizing. Import controls were lifted, foreign investments allowed in freely, privatization developed and so on.

Privatization is unpopular in the country. Despite all the corruption and inefficiency the people got the minimum services from the government sector while the manufacturing sector provided employment and skills.

In this situation the government had to use a variety of gimmicks and incentives to placate the public. The privatization was called "peoplization". They said, before you have been managed by bureaucrats, but now we are going to let the people buy shares.

However, workers were not impressed, recognizing the threat to jobs. In many cases the government issued shares to the workers — in the case of road transport 50% of the shares. They were encouraged to retire, take a golden handshake; but after a year the rate of inflation had eaten away the golden handshake, and many people were in

difficulties.

Resistance began, and reached a height over the attempted privatization of two state banks which controlled 60 to 70% of the country's financial activities. These state banks were doing very well even in the face of foreign competition, particularly after the collapse of the Bank of Commerce and Credit International (BCCI). This was a disaster in Sri Lanka; particularly Sri Lankan workers in the Middle East had put their money in BCCI. The state banks agreed to compensate people.

As usual it was explained how privatization would bring greater efficiency, but popular experience has been that it usually means that services are lost and prices go up along with unemployment. This time the bank employees resisted along with a campaign of pickets and demonstrations.

Finally the prime minister and the finance minister got up in parliament and said: "we are very sorry but we have to announce that the state banks are bankrupt; we have to tell you the truth", hoping in this way to provoke a run on the banks, so that they would have to seek foreign assistance. But everyone understood that this was part of a conspiracy by the government and foreign bankers. Then there was a vote of no confidence in the ministers. This privatization effort failed.

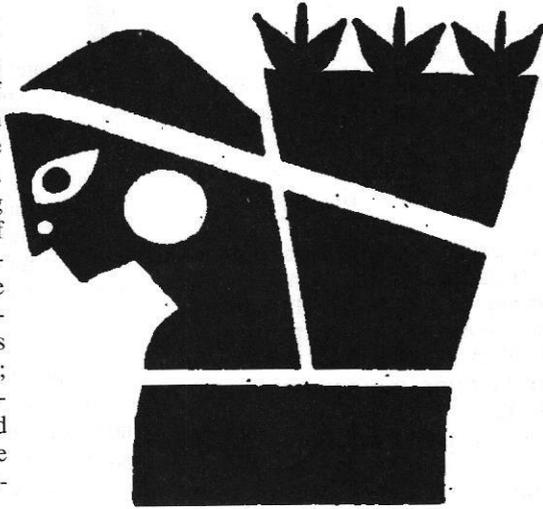
### Nationalized tea plantations

Then there are the tea plantations which are all nationalized. The idea is to give them over to the foreign companies. Increases in profitability here, at a time of declining prices, can only be achieved through rising unemployment, and harder work for no more wages.

First, the government was forced to rule out ownership by foreign companies in favour of local companies; then they retreated on that as well, saying that the workers would continue to be government employees, but independent management would be brought in. Even this plan has not been carried out.

The administrative workers' unions have launched a big campaign to refuse to handle any work related to denationalization. When the foreign companies' representatives come to look around there is sabotage and they have to go away.

However, the workers have not yet moved—they have not yet been directly affected; they are under the influence of



a leader of the plantation workers' union who is also a government minister, but resistance is growing.

Recently there was a march of 180 miles to protest against privatization, unemployment, the cost of living and the anti-Tamil war in the North. Altogether some 100,000 people took part in the initial stages and then for the last stretch another 100,000 joined. People know that the background to the government's schemes is the World Bank and IMF's plan for squeezing the Sri Lankan masses in the interests of foreign investors.

All the opposition parties have been involved in the anti-privatization movement, including dissidents from the ruling United National Party. The NSSP has been in the forefront in educating the people on this question and exposing the World Bank plan. We have led our trade unions along with others in pickets and played an important role in organizing the march. Our General Secretary is also coordinating chairman of the committee resisting the privatization of the plantations and we have an influence in the bank workers movement.

On May 25 there is to be a strike in the plantations and throughout the administration.

We need resolutions of support from the international labour movement, but also information about the multinationals operating in the country such as Nestlé, Levers, Bata and others — they pretend to be benefactors.

We will also benefit from having what we are doing publicized. We have had some successes, as is true also in India, where an anti-privatization movement is growing. It is not like in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. There there was so much oppression and economic stagnation that people welcome any change and only a very few will be inclined to resist at first. ★

## Lesbian and gay rights in Ireland

**THE recent case of the 14 year old rape victim who was prevented, on the basis of the Irish constitution, from travelling to Britain to have an abortion, highlighted that country's reactionary social laws. The outcry against this decision, on the other hand, showed that contemporary Irish society is not in the image of the country's constitution. This contradiction also applies to Irish lesbians and gay men, as *International Viewpoint* found out when it spoke to Kieran Rose of the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network in Dublin in April.**

**WHAT is the legal situation facing lesbians and gay men in Ireland?**

In Ireland the Victorian British laws were never changed as they were in Britain in the 1960s; that means that consenting sexual relations between men are theoretically punishable by terms of imprisonment. However, these laws have not been applied for a long time, which results in the paradox that there are more convictions for homosexuality in Britain — and therefore Northern Ireland — than in the Irish Republic. Lesbians are not mentioned in the law.

**■ What is your organization, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network?**

The European Court of Human Rights declared against Ireland's anti-gay laws in 1988. Around that time we realized that there was going to be a huge campaign so we set up the Network, which attempts to link up all the groups and individuals. Equality is the

basic demand, but we have specific ways of implementing this which we think are acceptable in Ireland and can draw broad support. The first one is that a government-appointed commission has said that there should be no distinction between heterosexuality and homosexuality in the criminal law. We believe this should be implemented.

We believe that there should be a broad anti-discrimination code. Ireland does not have such legislation at the moment; what does exist is an unfair dismissals act, taking up gender and marital status, which could be amended to take in homosexuality.

Most of the organizations we are in contact with are service organizations such as switchboards; there are strong organizations of this kind in Cork and in Dublin, where there are also theatre groups and a good newspaper.

■ **What was the reaction here to the — rebuffed — effort of New York's Irish lesbian and gay community to join this year's St. Patrick's Day Parade?**

Emigration is a big problem for us in Ireland. Many of the best activists are in London or New York. In New York the lesbian and gay organizations wanted to take part in the March, with the support of many of the city's politicians, but were refused by the march organizers. The organizers of the New York parade, the Ancient Order of Hibernians, states that it is a Catholic organization, and for them Irishness does not include lesbians and gays. We carried out quite a big campaign here in support of New York.

■ **What about here in Ireland?**

In Cork it would be the Junior Chamber of Commerce and in Dublin the Tourist Board doing the organizing. We have no particular problem here.

It is a sign of the doublethink here that there is in fact quite a positive attitude towards lesbians and gays. Our campaign has support from figures in all the Irish political parties. The feeling is that if we make some progress it will help the general moves towards a less repressive attitude to homosexuality in Ireland.

There is a history of disrespect for the law here; the establishment has no great support and thus there is a sympathy for the marginal and disadvantaged. You get sympathy for disrupting the consensus. Nonetheless, even after four years the law has not been changed. When it comes down to doing something practical it seems more difficult.

In fact there is no big anti-gay sentiment here; you don't have the kind of bigotry promoted by tabloids like the *Sun* in Britain. On of the British tabloids, the *Star*, has an Irish edition, but this doesn't contain the virulent anti-lesbian and gay stuff they publish in Britain. It doesn't ring any bells.

■ **To people outside Ireland events such as the constitutionally-based attempt to prohibit a 14 year old rape victim from obtaining an abortion seem almost mediaeval, representing intense anti-women feeling.**

There is prejudice, but it isn't virulent. The anti-gay group here, Family Solidarity, is very soft. Perhaps the Church is doing the job so well they have no role.

We have had trade union support for a long time, from the level of the Congress of Trade Unions down. We want groups that offer us support to take up our demands and implement them themselves, and this has happened in some cases, as for example, with the Irish Council of Civil Liberties.

The Unfair Dismissals Act is to be finalized this month; it is not clear what will happen. We are hoping for support for an amendment from leaders of political parties. Indeed, we are getting some criticism for not being activist enough, not out on the streets — which we will be, if the act is not amended.

■ **A Republican prisoner, Brendan McClenaghan, has written an article on what it is like to be a gay prisoner.**

This was a very important thing on a personal level. We could not know what it was like to be a gay man in the ghettos of Belfast. He was in contact with us for a long time. He visited us on his Christmas leave, before he wrote the article. It also cut across the repression of the issue of republicanism and the armed struggle in Ireland. We have been able to set the tone on the basis that everyone should be listened to.

The republican movement has supported us, but we have had much more positive support from mainstream political organizations and liberal groups. The Sinn Fein paper *An Poblacht* carried a very strong editorial supporting lesbians' and gays' right to take part in the New York St. Patrick's Day march, but Sinn Fein have their own constituency which they are perhaps afraid of. Here the revolutionaries are behind the reformists. ★

IT IS above all the Lega Lombarda (LL— Lombard League) that represents the motor force behind the spread of Leaguism in Northern Italy. The Lega Lombarda was already on the scene in the 1970s. It was launched by Umberto Bossi — the charismatic leader of the League — with a vague program of autonomy for the North. It remained a marginal and insignificant force until the second half of the 1980s, when it began its surprisingly rapid ascent.

The original implantation and initial successes of the League occurred in the northern zones of Lombardy, where the recent economic growth had been based on the expansion of small and medium firms; that is, companies in which restructuring is taking place, characterized by the absence of unionism, where safety standards are not respected, and tax evasion is rampant.

These are also the areas where the employment situation and the quality of public services are relatively good. In sum, the League thrives in relatively favored areas where the processes of capitalist modernization have strongly marked the social fabric. The League registered a qualitative leap forward in the regional elections held on May 6 and 7, 1990 where it increased its score from 3% in 1987 to 18.9% in Lombardy and became the second largest party in the region.

**Middle class support**

Beyond its Lower Alpine stronghold it made inroads throughout Lombardy, including Milan. An analysis of the Milan vote shows the class basis of Leaguism more clearly. The true core of the League is made up of the small and medium bourgeoisie, increasingly intolerant of a state which in their view taxes them too much and is too inefficient.

The Lega Lombarda's economics expert, Marco Formentini, expressed this mood among the middle classes thus: "Involved in economic management, in competition with private business and in cahoots with the unions, the state represses free enterprise both through heavy taxation and through the inefficiency of the infrastructure and services that ought to be the external support of the productive sectors. The League has drawn up a project which will reaffirm the values and express the demands of enterprise. The entrepreneurs want to work in a context of freedom without oppressive restraints".<sup>1</sup> This translates into the demands put forward by the League's leader and representative of the middle classes, Umberto

# The rise of a new far right

**THE parliamentary elections held last April 5 and 6, 1992 signaled the full entry of Italy into Europe. They also reflected the crisis of the political system that guaranteed more than four decades of capitalist growth. And as elsewhere, the right has capitalized upon this crisis. The governing parties (the Christian Democrats, the Socialist Party and their satellites, the PSDI and PLI) registered a loss of support — especially in the North — and the left has become marginalized.**

**The growth of the far right is a trend which currently exists on a European-wide scale but the tendency to put all right wing parties and movements in the same sack without taking into account the diversity and specificity of their various contradictions must be avoided. This is particularly important in the Italian case. The traditional fascist right is represented by the Italian Social Movement (MSI), while the Leagues are not to be equated with the fascists of the French National Front or the German "Republicans" of Nazi inspiration. They are rather, a reactionary and populist movement, as we will see below. It is therefore necessary to analyze in depth the origins, the growth, the social radicalism and the political character of the Leagues, especially considering that the readers of *International Viewpoint* have not yet had the opportunity to read about the new Italian right.**

**LUCIANO MUHLBAUER**

Bossi: "Only we truly represent the social revolution of the small and medium entrepreneurs. We have the same revolutionary potential as the corporations of 1926".<sup>2</sup>

The intolerance of the small and medium bourgeoisie and in general the failings of the state apparatus at a time of capitalist modernization are, however, not enough to explain the wide support obtained by the Lega Lombarda. Much of the League's vote comes from popular and working class layers. It is not only the Christian Democrats (DC), who have been at the centre of political life since 1945, that have lost much ground; the left, and in the first place the Democratic Left Party (PDS — the ex-Communist Party), has also lost many votes to the League.<sup>3</sup>

The League's capacity to win support

among workers and the lower middle class with a cross-class outlook and to direct their social and political discontent against the central state ("Away from Rome"; "Rome robs, the League will win") and against the "Roman" parties in their entirety is beyond all doubt.

Underlying this capacity is the crisis of the workers' movement and the left. The profound confusion in the workers' movement in the 1980s, characterized by such developments as the acceptance of a capitalist horizon by most of the former CP, the renunciation of class conflict and the explicit support for "co-management" by a section of the leadership of Italy's biggest trade union confederation, the CGIL, have deprived the Italian proletariat of any point of reference. As Vittorio Moioli put it: "in the absence of any other credible references,

the diffused malaise and the protests it gives rise to, find solace in the Leagues; this support is given without worrying about whether the reasons for the protest and the League's political project are in fact in harmony — except in the case of those social groups to whom the League has offered clear guarantees for their corporate interests".<sup>4</sup>

In 1987, the League had a mere 3% of the vote in Lombardy; in three years it climbed to 18.9%. This rapid expansion of support is mainly electoral. The League had no weight in the social movement, no links with mass organizations and its party organization was stretched to the limit by the elections. Thus it was faced with the need to make a qualitative leap forward, which implied developing an organized relation to society and extending its political horizons beyond Lombardy.

## Rejection of centralism

Already, at the end of May 1990, the Autonomous Lombard Union (SAL) was formed. According to internal sources, membership rose to 10,000 by the end of the year. A poll conducted by the FIOM union among Lombard engineering workers showed 43.1% of respondents having a favourable view of the formation of the League's union. The reasons included: "rejection of the centralist system and bureaucracy, which also exists in the union movement, desire for fiscal and administrative autonomy, job insecurity, prejudice against Southern Italians and foreigners, distrust of the party system and support for a 'Lombard' policy as a remedy for social ills".<sup>5</sup>

Such a response is evidence of the widespread discontent of many Lombard workers with an increasingly distant union bureaucracy, which is increasingly reflecting the views of the bosses. In fact, the SAL has a cross-class programme for an "alliance of Lombard producers" which identifies the central state as the enemy to fight, the enemy both of the bosses and the Lombard workers, for example, through taxes that affect both. The state furthermore is accused of furthering the interests of Southerners and immigrants to the detriment of Lombard

1. *Italia Oggi* May 5, 1991, quoted by Vittorio Moioli, *Il tarlo delle Leghe*, Ed. Comedia 2000, 1991.

2. *La Stampa*, February 2, 1991, in V. Moioli, op. cit.

3. A survey related to the vote of April 5/6, 1992, carried out by DOXA, found that 24.5% of the League vote came from former Christian Democrats and 18.9% from the former PCI; in *Avvenimenti*, May 6, 1992.

4. V. Moioli, op. cit.

5. *Ibid.*

workers.

According to Antonio Magri, the SAL's secretary: "we must re-establish the correct relation between entrepreneur and worker, based on their real value; let us get rid of the negative past of antagonism and conflict so dear to Marxist ideology and replace it with a contractual relation based on dialogue between the wage providers and wage earners. The exploiter of both the worker and the entrepreneur is the Roman centralist state".

"The SAL must not fight so much through strikes, an instrument now outdated: it must act in a differentiated way towards its counterpart, the employers; hard struggle against big capital but a benevolent approach to the small and medium entrepreneur. We are an expression of the middle classes and we will not betray them as fascism did", Umberto Bossi has stated.<sup>6</sup>

### Collaborationist unionism

In fact, just as with the fascists, we are talking here about a collaborationist unionism, opposed to class conflict, and this will also apply in the case of big capital. Furthermore, the SAL is demanding the reintroduction of "topped up wages" given that "workers in the North get less than in the South since wage parity does not take into account the lower cost of living in the latter" (A. Magri), and wants "to get rid of all laws which in fact give precedence to Southerners in access to public sector jobs" (A. Magri). The same individual has also proposed the expulsion of immigrants from employment.

Thus, the League calls on the Lombard workers to fight against Rome and Southern and immigrant workers. This is a risky operation, but its success should not be discounted. After two years the Leaguist union has obtained mixed results.

On the one hand, the League continues to reap a rich harvest of workers' votes, but, on the other, its "unionism" has not really taken root. It is incapable of dealing with the realities of class struggle. This became clear during the recent big battles against attempts at massive layoffs in Lombard industry. It is especially true where vanguard groups are established in the factories, which are able to oppose both the bosses decisions and the collaborationist policy of the union confederations, the CGIL, the CSIL and the UIL.

However that leaves out the workers in small and medium enterprises, who are often not unionized and are subject to constant blackmail from the bosses (and who enjoy the least legal protec-

tion) and where there is no union or political intervention.

### Organizing business

However, the most important operation for the League has been the foundation of the Lombard Association of Independent Entrepreneurs (ALIA), which organizes people involved in small and medium business, shopkeepers, craftsmen, the liberal professions and company directors. The mission of the ALIA is to organize the League's true centre of gravity, the small and medium bourgeoisie.

The Italian bourgeoisie in its entirety is increasingly less inclined to support a state which no longer corresponds to its interests and still less to the requirements of the big capitalist Europe of 1993.

Under the combined effects of the economic crisis and a favourable balance of social forces, it is now stridently demanding the elimination of the gains won by the workers' movement — the right to strike is already severely limited in the public sector — cuts in social welfare, privatization, greater freedom of movement for enterprises and an authoritarian reform of the institutions that would strengthen the executive at all levels. These neo-liberal themes are repeated and expanded by the League.

While we do not dispose of complete figures, such a mood disposes parts of the medium and lower bourgeoisie of the North to increasingly solid support for the Leagues. This is particularly true of sectors that did well in the 1980s and now feel their privileges threatened. The big capitalists, while remaining firmly opposed to the Leagues, are also engaged in bitter debates within the bosses associations. This split in the bourgeoisie in Lombardy and throughout the North of Italy is not really about fundamental objectives such as making the workers pay the costs of the crisis but about political tactics and personalities.

### Network of associations

The Lega Lombarda has other organizations; at the end of 1990 and the start of 1991 it promoted a number of other corporatist organizations such as the League of Artists, a landlords' union (SALPI), and the Association of Lombard Farmers (ALA). There is also a cultural and sports' association, ACLIS, which has about 1,000 sports centres at its disposal.

The League has a weekly paper, *Lombardia autonomista*, with an average print run of 45-50,000, controls a local radio and TV station in Varese and

enjoys the sympathy and support of a variety of journalists from the national press. The League is now increasingly ambitious and in January 1991 the Pontidafin fund was set up with the aim of acquiring a daily newspaper and radio and TV stations in the medium term.

When we talk about the breakthrough in the elections of 1990, we do not only mean the big presence in the elected institutions in Lombardy or the construction of social transmission belts; we are also referring to the beginnings of a spread of Leaguism beyond Lombardy. In 1990 other regional autonomist movements did not gain impressive electoral scores, but they represented possibilities for development which have been confirmed in the recent nationwide elections.

In some regions of northern Italy, such as around Venice, autonomist movements existed for some time without succeeding in becoming more than local and folkloristic groups. In other regions of the north Leagues were formed on the model, and often on the initiative, of the Lega Lombarda.

In 1990 the latter succeeded in uniting the archipelago of old and new autonomist movements in the north under its own domination as the Lega Nord (North League). This started life as an electoral cartel but represents the birth of a political force representing the interests of the middle classes and capable of taking advantage of the mounting crisis of credibility of the mainstream parties, and able, in consequence, to put itself forward as a reactionary and populist global alternative to the system of parties.

The Lega Lombarda-Lega Nord does not have a clearly defined programme nor a well-worked out strategy. Squabbling over various points is endemic<sup>7</sup> and Umberto Bossi is capable of publicly contradicting himself from one day to the next. One should not be misled by such chopping and changing, however. The rapid growth of the League has overwhelmed its own leaders, and above all Bossi, who has had to try to keep pace with electoral success by making policy on the hoof. On the other hand, this very vagueness is useful for a force which shrouds its own base with demagogic and populist rhetoric.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the majority of the League's electorate do

6. Ibid.

7. Here is one example: at the time of the war against Iraq, the Lega's leader Bossi spoke against military involvement in the senate, while his colleague Leoni took the opposite line in the lower house.

8. At the time of the last elections, the Lega's electoral material in Milan used slogans of the type: "Against the parties", "Against the Mafia", "No to the Racketeers". They have also opposed motorway tolls, which are considered as a Roman injustice.

not know what its main political proposals are.

**Proto-fascist tendencies**

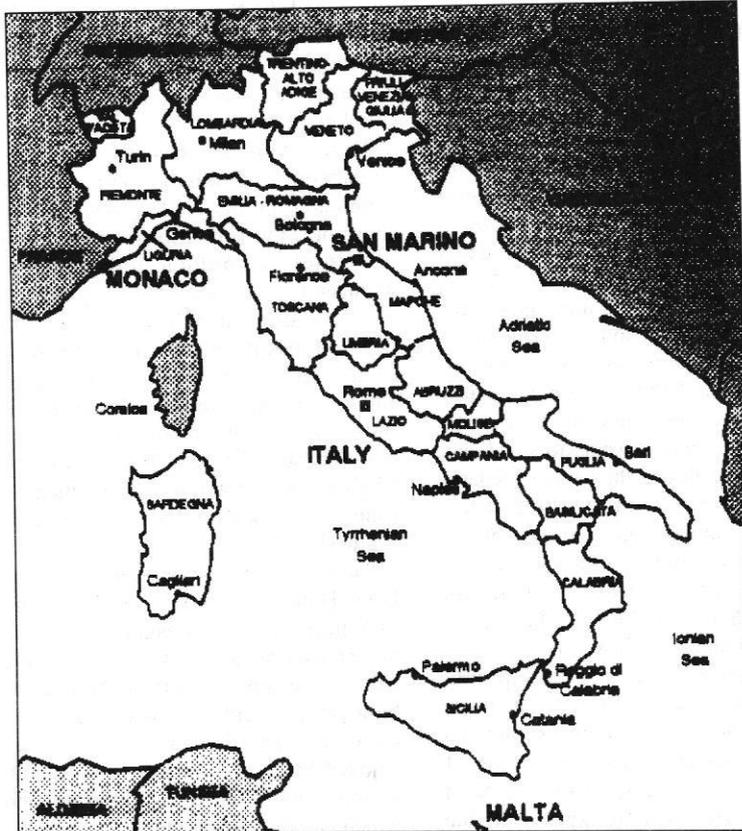
This makes it very hard to predict the League's future development. On the other hand, we should be in no doubt about its reactionary and xenophobic nature or its proto-fascist tendencies. In 1990 a helping hand in working out policy was given to the Leagues by the constitutionalist, Professor Gianfranco Miglio. He rapidly became a close collaborator of Bossi and is now considered to be the League's ideologist-in-chief. Given the influence Miglio has had on the League's theoretical development, it is reasonable to make use of his words to grasp that organization's thinking.

The first and best known aspect of Leaguism is "federalism" and "autonomism". In time, the League has gone beyond its infantile phase in which it insisted on the defense of the "Lombard nation" and its language. It should be stated without the slightest equivocation that the League's autonomist demands have nothing in common with national liberation struggles of the kind seen in other parts of Europe. In the first place, the League's "nationalism" does not correspond to any recognizable independent cultural identity. Indeed, despite all the Lega Lombarda's myth-making, there is a continual oscillation in its rhetoric between a "Lombard" and a "North" identity.<sup>9</sup>

Secondly, Leaguism does not represent the desire for separation of an oppressed and disinherited nationality but the dissidence of a territory and social group that has benefited from the unification of the peninsula at the expense of the South.<sup>10</sup> The League's current federalist project was officially born at a congress of the Lega Nord held in February 1991; it envisages the transformation of the Italian state into a confederation of three republics (North, Centre, South) to be known as "macro-regions". Bossi meanwhile threatens a unilateral declaration of independence by the "Republic of the North".

This is a federalism that aims at the separation of the richest and most economically advanced part of Italy from the rest, which is considered to be an albatross. The Northern macro-region, according to the League, would control all tax income, health and education and could thus proceed without delay to the creation of institutions suitable for capitalist modernization.

On the economic and social level, the League is in favour of a form of neo-liberalism that would excite the envy even of Mrs. Thatcher with all its atten-



dant onslaught on workers' social conquests carried out in a decade of struggles.

"We want to privatize everything that can be privatized" and "total privatization of services to conform to the rules of the market", says the League's charismatic chief. The enemy is whatever remains of the so-called "social state". Miglio, the League's ideologue, maintains that the "social state" is a remnant of "nineteenth century socialism" (for Miglio, socialism takes in everything from Communism to Social Democracy), the rise and decline of which demonstrates "a fundamental truth; it is not possible to imagine a society different from the one we live in".<sup>11</sup>

"I believe that the end of Soviet communism means the end of an attempt to construct a model of society whose main features were: (1) the assurance of an income and a job for all; (2) a tendency to equality of wages." Since the Social Democracy, according to Miglio, is out of the same stable as Communism "the bankruptcy of collectivism has thrown into crisis the very foundations of social democratic regimes: a full employment policy and an incomes policy".

According to Miglio: "no economy can function without the stimulus provided by the negative possibility of losing one's income and the positive ones of becoming rich and improving one's own and one's family's standard of living. Without a strong dose of egoism,

without the desire to be envied by others, there can be neither progress nor development, but only economic stagnation". The new 'social state' would undertake nothing more than to ensure a subsistence minimum for a limited time for those who, through no fault of their own, are not in a position to work and produce. Everything must then be done to ensure that they re-enter the productive circuit as soon as possible".<sup>12</sup>

Similar anti-worker positions immediately raise the problem of the League's thinking on the question of democracy and the state, reduced to the role of a guard dog for unbridled capitalism. And on this point, as with the insistence on the Three Republics formula, we can extract some well-defined underlying conceptions. The sole elements at our disposal are the frequently not very coherent positions of the League on institutional reform, statements by League leaders and, above all, the organizational structure of the League itself.

9. Point 2 of the programme of the Lega Lombarda demands the recognition of a Lombard language, something which is not confirmed by even the most open-minded philologists, since the local modes of speech have never been more than dialects and have never achieved either autonomy or any official status, without this requiring any special effort of repression.

10. Sergio D'Amia, "il Leghismo in una società che schricchiola", *Bandiera Rossa*, No. 19/20, November-December 1991.

11. Gianfranco Miglio, "Io e la sinistra", *MicroMega*, 2/92.

12. *Ibid.*

13. V. Muioli, *op. cit.*

## Institutional reform

There is a diverse chorus of voices on all sides of Italian politics — from the government parties, the neo-fascist MSI and the PDS — that talks of the need for fundamental institutional and electoral reform. While they differ with respect to the depth of the reform the line of march is the same in all cases. *Grosso modo*, the basic shared idea is more power for the executive, reductions in social spending and electoral laws favouring big parties — this latter also aimed against the Leagues. The Lega for its part has always stated that it wants to supercede the First Republic in the name of federalism. However, from 1990 on, it has repeatedly spoken out in favour of the most radical option — the presidential republic, supported by the PSI (Italian Socialist Party), the MSI and the former president Francesco Cossiga.

The Lega claims to be ultra-respectful of democracy, but a series of statements by its leaders throw doubt on this. To take some passages from a recent text of Miglio ("A Constitution for the Next Thirty Years") which express all the contempt of a reactionary intellectual for the masses: "In my view, participation is a myth... with this idea of participation — or the notion that the citizen has the obligation to take part in political life — and with the joining of parties and standing in elections — people are given an incentive to live off public funds, naturally at the expense of the productive elements of the population, devoted to private activity. Citizens who produce and work do not feel the need to take part in political competition".

"It is above all necessary to recognize that the popular will is in part a myth. Just like the idea that the people can govern themselves". "Parliament has thus been seen as an infallible subject, to which one could entrust the regulation of the entire political system (in just the same way as royalists saw the role of the hereditary monarch). This (wrong and dangerous) conception is still with us and constitutes the basis of parliamentary absolutism, as totalitarian as monarchic absolutism".

## Four-tier structure

It is, however, the League's organizational structure that shows above all the Lega Lombarda's anti-democratic and anti-authoritarian outlook. The membership is divided into four categories: the Founding Associates (who play a major part in congresses); the Ordinary Associates (the only other category to take part in congresses); the Militant Asso-

ciates and the Sympathizing Associates. In 1991, of the Lega's 30,000 members there were seven Founding and 180 Ordinary Associates — among the latter all of eight women.

To rise from the ranks of the Militants to become an Ordinary you have to be nominated by the leading bodies. Furthermore, the formation of currents is absolutely forbidden under pain of expulsion, a measure used frequently to eliminate discussion. The real centre of decision-making, in any case, is the head of the charismatic leader, Umberto Bossi, who has explained his own role thus: "a man, one alone, is needed to lead the ranks"<sup>14</sup> And he is echoed by Miglio: "Democracy is for a moment, it cannot be a constant, otherwise political synthesis fails".<sup>15</sup>

The final, and most repellent, aspect of Lega-Thought is its racism. According to Vittorio Moiola: "Leaguism does not in fact discriminate between races on the basis of pseudo-scientific theories of biological difference; instead it makes itself the champion of the privileges enjoyed by those it claims to represent, in opposition to all that is 'different' and which can thus be considered as a threat to the tranquil enjoyment of the acquired benefits".<sup>16</sup>

In reality the practical consequences of this kind of racism are not much different from those of its more classic variety. The targets of Leaguist discrimination are Southern Italians and above all immigrant workers from the Third World. In this spirit the Lega has conducted a campaign against recent immigration laws (the "Martelli Laws") which, although in fact in no way favourable to immigrants, were considered to be too permissive by the League. The Lega has furthermore promoted a whole series of anti-immigrant initiatives in its strongholds.

## Anti-immigrant strike

The noisiest of these was a — successful — action in May 1991 to organize a tram strike near a depot of the Milan transport department. The aim, which was realized by the actions of the police, was the expulsion of a group of immigrants, guilty of having parked their vehicles in the vicinity of the depot.

Let us add only that the same repressive logic has also been applied with respect to homosexuality and drug users, both considered as "illnesses" to be cured.

The elections of April 5 and 6 showed, apart from general political fragmentation, a significant rise of the right. The fascist MSI party, which has been in decline in recent years, regained its posi-

tion of 1987 (with 5.4% of the vote) thanks to an aggressive election campaign centred on racism, calls for a return of the death penalty and support for Cossiga's authoritarian visions. The Lega Nord got 8.7% of the national vote, with all its votes in the north. In Lombardy the Lega consolidated its position as the largest party, with 18.09%, in the city of Milan and in its historic strongholds it got between 25 and 30%.

## Leaguism spreads across north

The fundamental fact, however, is the spread of Leaguism to other parts of the north. In the electoral district of "Torino-Novara-Vercelli" (Piedmont) it got 15.3%, in "Venezia-Treviso" (Veneto) 17.3%, in "Genova-Imperia-La Spezia-Savona" (Liguria) 14.3% and in "Bologna-Ravenna-Ferrara-Forlì" (Emilia-Romagna) 7%. Leaguism thus ceased to be a purely Lombardy-based movement, and has thereby shown its capacity to garner the protest vote against the "partyocracy".

This is all the more worrying if we look at the youth vote. According to a recent DOXA survey<sup>17</sup>, it emerges that if only voters under 34 had voted, the Lega would have got 12.4% of the national vote. It seems that if the age limit were reduced further, the picture would look still worse.

It would be a dangerous mistake to under-estimate the Leaguist movement, or to simply view it as a passing phenomenon overlooking all the reactionary load that it carries with it. Without wishing to risk predictions, further expansion of Leaguism is possible (perhaps into Southern Italy).

Recent events in Milan, symbol of modernity, where a share scandal involving all the big parties has broken out, can only reinforce the crisis of the whole political system and the Leagues' facile but effective "anti-party" demagoguery. Whatever happens, Leaguism reinforces the tendency to a rightist solution to the present political crisis.

It is up to the left, and in the first place the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC), to rebuild a class opposition at both a social and political level which can become a reference point for a proletariat that is profoundly wounded after 15 years of bourgeois counter-offensive. There is no other antidote to populist demagoguery and the League's reactionary schemes. ★

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. *Avvenimenti*, May 6, 1992.

## Who votes for Le Pen?

A SERIES of elections in Western Europe in late 1991 and early 1992 revealed a more or less significant increase in the

influence of reactionary, populist or fascist movements. Even if the basis of these movements is not completely identical — given the importance of the regional question in, for example, Italy or Belgium — they have emerged in a context of a profound economic, social and political degradation common to all these countries.

Everywhere, there is a crisis of state institutions — as demonstrated in the farce surrounding the election of the Italian president — which has reinforced the “protest” vote against the established parties, to the benefit of the parties of the far right.

In France, the cantonal and regional elections of March 22, 1992 confirmed the continuing presence of Jean-Marie Le Pen's Front National (FN) on the political scene. With nearly 14% of votes at the national level, the FN has certainly stabilized its support, but has also become the biggest party of the far right in Europe.

If the breadth of the “Le Pen” phenomenon is now a fact of French political life, the typology, evolution and motivation of its electors are less well known. *International Viewpoint* spoke to Nonna Mayer, Director of Research at the National Centre of Scientific Research (CNRS) in the Centre for the Study of French Political Life (CEVIPOF). The interview was conducted by Claude Gabriel in April 1992.

### WHAT is the reality of the presence of the FN in the French institutions?

It should not be exaggerated. It now has three general councillors, 239 regional councillors — there are only 10 departments where it does not yet have councillors — and nearly 1,700 municipal councillors. It is the leading party in thirty municipalities, one of them relatively significant, that of Saint-Gille. Moreover, it has a deputy in the French parliament and 12 deputies in the European parliament. This does not amount to a very significant institutional weight, but it should be stressed that its influence is greater than the number of its elected representatives.

Since 1972, it has become solidly implanted as a party. Today it has an estimated 50,000 members, enough to cover the French national territory — this is less than half what the FN claims, but it is nonetheless considerable.

Beyond this strong implantation, it has tried to extend its influence in all the professional circles through a number of associations. There are circles of ex-servicemen, of dockers, of women, of youth and of health workers. A whole constellation of circles like this extends the influence of the party. In the universities also, the Student Renewal and the National Circle of Paris Students have had some representatives elected, benefiting from a very high rate of abstention among students. But there is no Le Pen tidal wave. What matters today is its electoral potential, which since 1984 has varied between 10% and 14% of those who actually vote.

When the polls ask “Is there a party for which you would in no case vote?”, two

out of three French people cite the FN, which means that one in three have not ruled out voting for them. Finally, the survey carried out by *Le Monde* in October 1991 shows that there is a clear advance in the influence of the FN, to the extent that one French person in three is in agreement with its ideas.

■ The FN began to gain influence around the question of racism and immigration. But in the debate over whether the organization should be characterized as fascist or not, one of the aspects to look at is its capacity to go beyond these themes to cover areas which imply other ideological constructions, like for example the defence of the species, ecology and so on. Is this a recent development? In what way does the FN target the different social categories?

The FN is making very clear attempts to enlarge its influence and encroach on the ground of the other parties, particularly since 1991, on the theme of ecology and in the direction of the farmers — the two being quite closely linked — with the creation of a national circle of farmers. Until now this has not worked — the president of the circle, Alexis Arette, has resigned and taken his distance from the FN.

He is a former member of the French Federation of Agriculture (FFA), one of the networks through which the FN hopes to implant itself in the agricultural milieu. For the moment it has suffered a setback. In some areas some notables have been won to the basic ideas of the FN, and one can note, in some places, a slight increase in the rural vote for Le Pen, particularly in the Centre region, in Champagne.

But, when you look at the national results, the farmers remain, with the teachers, those who remain the most resistant to the FN's blandishments. They combine all the factors which stem the influence of the FN: strongly organized and unionized, strongly controlled by the classic right, by the Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) essentially, and with a strong proportion of practising Catholics. In fact, contrary to what is often believed, the most devout Catholics are the most hostile to the FN.



■ **What is the make-up of the FN electorate and in particular what has been its evolution over the past five or six years?**

Even if it is an electorate in evolution, it has some general characteristics which have been confirmed with time. It is necessary to analyze it on two levels. The FN is a new party, which has drawn from the electorates of the existing parties, and it is necessary to distinguish the political characteristics of its voters from their sociological characteristics.

Their political characteristics first: in 1984, when it appeared for the first time on the French political scene, surveys showed that it received support from all categories of the population and among all electors. But it was an electorate with a marked bias to the right. It benefitted at the time from a radicalization of a part of the right, faced with the arrival in power of the "Socialist-Communist" government.

Starting from 1986, it began to win over layers which were less right wing and more popular, in the wake of disappointment with the Socialist government. Its electorate diversified. The case of Paris is very significant in this respect: in the 1984 European elections, the FN vote was above all concentrated in the wealthier neighbourhoods in the west; starting from 1986, it was the opposite, and the FN bastions moved towards the popular neighbourhoods in the east of the city, even if it nonetheless won votes in all areas of the capital.

Starting from 1988, these two types of bourgeois and popular electorate fused.

The Centre for the Study of French Political Life (CEVIPOF) conducted a big post-electoral survey after the presidential election of 1988. We noted that, among the electors who had voted for Le Pen in the first round of the elections, only a third had voted for the FN at the legislative elections of 1986. There was, then, a big turnover of its electorate. How had the remaining two thirds voted in 1986? Around 50% had voted for the classic right; a quarter had voted for the left — and massively for the Socialist left; of the rest, a third were not entered on the electoral lists, were too young to vote or else could not be bothered to vote.

Contrary to the received wisdom, its electorate came rather from the classic right, but there was also a strong minority of voters from the left or previously apathetic, abstentionist voters.

Certainly, taking account of their different political origin, this electorate is sociologically diverse, less stereotyped than that of the moderate right or of the left. But certain categories vote more for the FN than others: it is primarily an urban electorate — 52% of FN voters in 1988 lived in towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants. The FN's

electoral bastions are situated in the north-east from the line Le Havre, Valence, Perpignan; it is urban France, the industrial France, the France where there are immigrants.

Then, it is a very masculine electorate. Whatever the type of election, men vote more often for the FN, for a readily understandable reason; the FN challenges all the gains of women (abortion, right to work, and so on). Two categories are clearly more likely to vote for the FN: first, since 1986, the small traders and artisans — in 1984, it was the big traders, industrialists, liberal professionals.

Progressively, it is also among the workers that the FN gains its best scores, in particular among the skilled workers — around 19% of votes expressed at the regional elections of 1992, against 16% among small employers. It should be stressed that it is not the lumpenproletariat that votes most heavily for the FN. If one takes the average characteristics of these electors, they even have a higher average income to the average French person, they have more inherited wealth, are more often owners of their enterprises: they are more likely to have an educational qualification of some kind, and their rate of unemployment is not higher than the national average.

■ **The confusion about the size of the transfer of votes from the Communist Party to the FN — which represents hardly more than 3% — stems from an illusion, very widespread in France, that the popular neighbourhoods have always voted overwhelmingly for the left. In fact, a popular vote for the RPR exists. It could then amount to a transfer of working class RPR votes to the FN.**

**There is a belief on the French left that the tradition of the class vote had been maintained through the years, while in fact it entered into crisis in the 1950s and 1960s with the arrival of De Gaulle in power.**

There has never been a social category which is politically monochrome, the "workers vote" does not exist, any more than the "small trader-artisan" vote; there is simply a greater probability that the workers will vote for a party of the left, or for the ecologists, than is the case for the small trader-artisans.

If one combines the political variables and the socio-professional variables, it can be clearly seen that the electors who previously voted for the left and now support the FN are more frequently workers. They even have a system of values similar to that of the voters who have remained faithful to the parties of the left, except on two points. Asked about the Revenu Minimum d'Insertion [minimum wage] or taxes on the weal-

thy, they reply like the other electors of the left, they are in favour. But asked about the problems of immigration or law and order, they answer in the same way as the faithful electors of the FN. Which leads naturally to a question — why this fixation on these two problems?

The explanation seems less to do with objective factors (experience of growing crime, frequent contact with immigrants) than subjective ones, at the level of the imagination and fantasy. They are no more often subject to violent attack than the average, but they are afraid of it. They are no more exposed than others to the alleged problems of living in the proximity of immigrants, but they sense it as a threat. It is the phenomenon of the "halo", described by Pascal Perrineau; the people who live close to the estates and blocks with a strong immigrant concentration are more likely to vote for the FN than those who live with the immigrants.

■ **A whole series of articles have appeared on the phenomenon of the protest vote, linked to the crisis of the institutions and the crisis of citizenship, that is a vote by certain social categories which could be a vote of revolt and rejection. Le Pen denounces the "gang of four" (the four main French political parties), while the people for their part denounce the political class, which corresponds to their image of the institutions. Beyond the question of immigration, is there not also a rejection, a disgust with these institutions and a state apparatus in crisis, as in the rest of Europe?**

There is certainly, as in all the big Western democracies, a weariness with the existing governments. Looking at poll results, it can be seen that Le Pen's electors are more aware of the problem of corruption and the incapacity of the political class to represent them and defend their interests. The succession of political/financial scandals, and the two amnesty laws concerning the crimes linked to the financing of the political parties have greatly served Le Pen's cause.

These attacks against the "gang of four" relate to a reality; the four big parties have not succeeded in resolving the economic crisis or in reducing unemployment. At the same time, Le Pen's party appears as one of the last parties which symbolize hope. On the French political chessboard, there are two parties which have not yet been tested in power; the FN on the far right and the Greens on the other side.

After all the great ideological battles of the 1970s and 1980s, one also has the feeling that the electors are turning towards more concrete political issues (environment, law and order, and so on).

## Vote in 1992 regional elections

	Far left	PC	PS	Other left	Génération écologie	Greens	Non-party lists	UDF RPR	Other right	FN	
<b>Total</b>	1.5	8	18	2.5	7	7.5	4	33	4.5	14	100%
<b>Sex</b>											
Men	2	8	17	2	6	7	5	34	4	15	100%
Women	2	8	20	3	8	8	3	31	5	12	100%
<b>Age</b>											
18 to 24	2	6	17	1	13	8	5	29	7	12	100%
25 to 34	2	10	17	3	8	10	5	28	4	13	100%
35 to 49	2	8	19	3	7	9	4	31	4	13	100%
50 to 64	1	8	15	2	5	5	2	40	5	17	100%
Over 65	1	7	21	3	3	3	3	38	4	17	100%
<b>Profession</b>											
Farmer	1	3	12	—	3	7	15	47	—	12	100%
Small owner	1	3	12	2	6	5	3	45	7	16	100%
Lib. Profs/ Higher Manag.	1	6	15	2	9	7	5	41	6	10	100%
Middle profs.	2	8	17	3	7	9	4	34	6	10	100%
White collar	2	9	22	2	9	9	4	26	3	14	100%
Blue collar	1	11	19	2	9	10	8	19	2	19	100%
Not working	1	9	20	3	4	4	3	35	4	17	100%
<b>Vote in 1989 Euro-elections</b>											
PC	1	83	7	1	1	2	1	1	—	3	100%
PS	2	6	56	5	9	7	4	6	2	3	100%
Ecologist	3	1	8	2	23	39	5	11	2	6	100%
Centre	1	1	8	2	7	3	20	53	15	8	100%
UDF-RPR	—	—	2	1	1	2	2	79	7	6	100%
FN	—	7	3	—	1	1	2	8	3	81	100%
Abstention	1	7	14	2	11	10	6	28	3	18	100%

Source: BVA/Libération, Antenne 2, FR 3, France Inter/France Info, Paris Match poll on March 22, 1992.

There is also a broader cultural phenomenon characteristic of the Western democracies; our political parties are old. Their roots are in the 19th century, they are based on political or religious cleavages which today have lost their significance. The young generation and in particular women, who increasingly participate in political life, no longer recognize themselves in these parties. There are then both structural and conjunctural factors which explain this crisis.

■ **There is a risk of drawing one-sided conclusions about the general political situation from the Le Pen phenomenon. It is said that this represents a lowering of class consciousness, or of social consciousness, which is true. But at the same time, it shows that a part of society is seeking a response to the crisis of the state, of the institutions — through a wrong and reactionary response. This is a contradictory phenomenon. It is interesting in**

**relation to the working class suburbs, where one sees for example the FN targeting the CP voters.**

It is the type of elector who, ten years ago, would have made a protest vote, without necessarily adhering by conviction to the ideas of the CP, who turns towards the FN. That does not mean that this is a vote "for" the FN, that the voter has acquired its ideas in a definitive manner.

■ **What about the youth vote for the FN?**

Before the regional elections, a quarter of young people under 25 said they were prepared to vote for the FN. But there was obviously an element of provocation in their replies. In reality, it was among youth that the FN lists registered their worst scores. There is for the most part an inverse relation between youth and voting for the FN (see table).

■ **That represents a difference with Italy, for example. In Milan, there was a strong youth vote for the Lombard**

**League.**

One cannot compare these two situations on all points. There are common factors, but each formulation reflects the specific history of the country.

In Italy, there is essentially a regional problem; the old opposition between the north and the south.

■ **What is the nature, social implantation and reality of the FN as a party?**

It has considerably changed. At its first congress, the cadres were rather young. But today it is a party which has aged. Its members are even older, more privileged and more masculine than its electorate. The middle classes and the self-employed are very strongly over-represented. They form an extremist and politicized hard core which situates itself very much more frequently on the extreme right than the electors of the FN.

On the ideological plane, they are more radical than the party's electors; more authoritarian, more hostile to the immi-

grants, more nationalist and more conservative in the area of morality (abortion, sexuality).<sup>1</sup>

■ **What is the link, in your opinion, between the Algerian war and the FN?**

Each time that we ask the militants of the FN about their motivations, there is on the one hand, anti-Communism, on the other nostalgia for French greatness, and then the rejection of decolonization. The cadres of the FN are, essentially, militants who opposed the Gaullist policy in the 1960s and supported "Algérie française". The career of Jean-Marie Le Pen is exemplary in this respect; he started off as a Poujadist deputy, then was involved in the presidential campaign of Tixier-Vignancour<sup>2</sup>; he was at the heart of all the struggles against the independence of Algeria.

■ **What type of activity does the FN pursue in the workplaces?**

There are some circles, the most important being *Entreprise Moderne et Libertés*. Some bosses of big enterprises regularly give financial support to the FN (BIC, notably). There, we enter another debate on the sources of financing of the FN; the Moonie sect, as well as the money inherited by Le Pen himself, but also the contributions of members. Moreover, to gain a good place on the FN's electoral lists, the candidates must contribute significant amounts, going from some thousands to several millions of francs.

■ **Can conclusions be drawn as to the regional implantation of the FN?**

Its favoured terrain is the Provence-Alpes-Côtes d'Azur (PACA) region. It constitutes a symbolic region for them, in the front line of the "invasion of the immigrants". It is also the region where the *pieds-noirs*<sup>3</sup>, with a particular contempt for Arabs, are the most concentrated. For all these reasons, the implantation of the FN there is particularly strong.

■ **There has been a change in the nature of the candidates and the FN apparatus. At first, they were refugees from the RPR and the UDF, the former in particular. Some of these people have since defected, and the candidates in the last elections were the true cadres of the far right, people who had spent a long time in the FN.**

It is difficult for a small party to find candidates, and above all to implant itself nationwide when it comes to cantonal, municipal or regional elections. At first, the FN experienced difficulty in finding candidates, to the point where it often recruited by advertising.

Since, then the party has evolved. Under the direction of Jean-Pierre Stirbois, the preceding secretary-general, it has been

totally reorganized, centralized and streamlined; schools for training cadres have been created. This transformation has been continued by the current secretary-general, Carl Lang. The party has professionalized itself.

■ **Have there been surveys on the membership structure and its relation to physical or social violence? Are there links between the FN and the neo-Nazi groups?**

To a certain extent, the FN is trying to distance itself from violence. It is taking on an image of respectability. Progressively, it is getting rid of the skinheads and the most unmanageable elements that might compromise its image. In 1984 a survey by the SOFRES polling institute of sympathizers of the FN and the *Parti des Forces Nouvelles* (PFN) showed that a quarter of them were in favour of a coup to gain power. From time to time, obviously, this kind of thing comes out. There is an obvious verbal violence in certain speeches of Jean-Marie Le Pen or the well known film maker and FN supporter Claude Autant Lara.

■ **In the preceding wave of the rise of fascism, physical confrontation was an obligatory feature. Today, there is such a crisis, such a decomposition of the workers' movement that, at least for the moment, for a party which is not immediately a candidate to the presidency of the republic, the question of violence is not immediately posed. On the other hand who knows what will happen in five or six years.**

**The FN must conserve a subversive aspect in relation to the state apparatus. For example, in the votes for the presidency of the regional councils, some FN representatives have not voted for the right.**

Yes, that is what they have done in Bourgogne and Lorraine, and above all, they seek to block the functioning of the regional councils. It is an indicator.

The polls also show that, if the electors and militants of the FN are not necessarily more violent — something which is very difficult to detect through a poll! — they are nonetheless clearly more authoritarian and partisans of a strong hand; for the death penalty, heavier sentencing, and so on.

■ **How do you explain the results of the regional elections, when the FN did not attain its objectives?**

They were hoping for at least 15 to 20% of the votes, and 40% in Nice. They thought they would emerge as the biggest party in the PACA region, obliging the RPR and the UDF to negotiate with them to govern the region. They wished to show that they were capable of governing a big

French region. One of the weaknesses of the FN, from its point of view, is that it remains perceived as a "sectarian", "extremist" party, incapable of governing France. Even his electors remain persuaded that Le Pen cannot become President of the Republic and that his party is not capable of governing.

In fact, they only obtained 13.9% of votes cast, or less than Le Pen's score in the first round of the Presidential election in 1988. And in the PACA region, the FN did not get the scores expected.

What happened? In the course of the two months preceding the elections, there was an active campaign against the FN. Systematically, its meetings were harassed, prevented, numerous meetings were forbidden because of public order difficulties, and often there were violent confrontations between militants of the FN and anti-fascist militants.

This anti-Le Pen mobilization had above all got going after the desecration of the Jewish cemetery at Carpentras in the south of France in May 1990. The FN was accused at the time of being indirectly responsible for what had happened, because of the climate of hatred and intolerance which it had inspired in France. Around 50 demonstrations took place, the biggest in Paris on May 14 with Mitterrand present. Organizations were set up to struggle against the FN, alongside already established anti-racist and humanitarian organizations.

The 50 proposals of the FN to struggle against immigration, presented by Bruno Mégret in autumn 1991, gave new energy to the anti-fascist forces. In January 1992, faced with the FN's rise in the polls, there was a growing mobilization against it, which had two effects. First, it stimulated the FN voters; the polls showed that they had never been mobilized to such an extent. They appeared as the most convinced, the most faithful to their choice, those who had decided the earliest.

But at the same time this anti-Le Pen mobilization led a certain number of young electors, close to the left, the far left, the ecologists and the Communist Party, to vote in order to bar the way to the far right. It is this which made the difference. The FN kept the same number of electors as in 1988, but turnout was 4-5% higher than what the polls had predicted, and this contributed to a decline in their weight. ★

1. See Colette Ysmal in SOFRES, *l'état de l'opinion 1991*, Seuil, Paris.

2. Jean-Louis Tixier-Vignancour, president of the *Parti des Nouvelles Forces*, founded in 1974 after the dissolution of the *Ordre Nouveau* in 1973 and the defeat of Le Pen's *Front National* in the 1974 presidential elections. Tixier-Vignancour was a candidate in the 1965 French presidential elections.

3. Franco-Algerians, repatriated in May 1962, shortly before the proclamation of Algerian independence.

# Where Columbus came from

**BY focusing on the discoverer himself, his aides, his successors, the "New World", and the unhappy fate of its inhabitants, the commemorations of the five hundredth anniversary of the "discovery" of the Americas have tended to obscure the irresistible conditions which lay behind the event. These were the combination of the economic rise of Europe, in which the bourgeoisie was the prime agent, a concomitant development of centralized monarchies, and scientific and technological developments.**

**MICHEL LEQUENNE\***

**N**othing would be more wrong than to view the adventure of 1492 and the events which preceded it in Spain as a series of accidents. Neither Columbus himself, nor the royal families of Castille or Aragon could escape the rigorous logic of determinism nor its contradictions.

The initial political forms under which the bourgeoisie was able to develop, namely the city-states of Northern Italy, had become exhausted. In order to expand, it needed to break out of the tight constraints of the city walls and escape the influence of the Princes.

For Italy, the limitations of this system were highlighted by the conquest of the Middle East by the Ottomans. Italian bourgeois capital increasingly turned outwards from Europe.

At the same time, the foundations of the great modern states of today were laid down as the result of the conflict of the instinctive alliance between the bourgeoisie and the centralizing princes against the old feudal monarchs. Everything depended therefore on the far-sightedness of the policies of the royal rulers, as well as their capacity to break or reduce the influence of the great feudal lords.

## Colonialism and centralization

It is striking to note that these states took the road of colonial expansion in the same order as that in which they achieved monarchical centralization: Spain, England and then France

(the case of Holland, the first bourgeois state, opened up another period).

Henry VII, who came to the throne in 1485, had to reestablish order in England after the typically feudal Wars of the Roses before he could entrust the Venetian-Genoan Cabot with finding him land in the west.

In France, the first colonial maritime explorations only occurred during the reign of François I, after the feudal rulers Charles VII and Louis XII. But the wars of religion postponed France's entry into the colonial era to the beginning of the 17th century, the time of Richelieu. Henry VII, like Charles VIII (or more precisely, his

sister Anne of Beaujeu, who ruled until the king came of age), did not seriously consider Columbus' project, which had been presented to them by his brother Barthelémy.

These sovereign rulers were not ready for such an expansion, because their states were not ready.

In 1492 Spain, whose feudal divisions were more formal than real, was ready. Its unique bourgeois development was characterized by a powerful vitality.

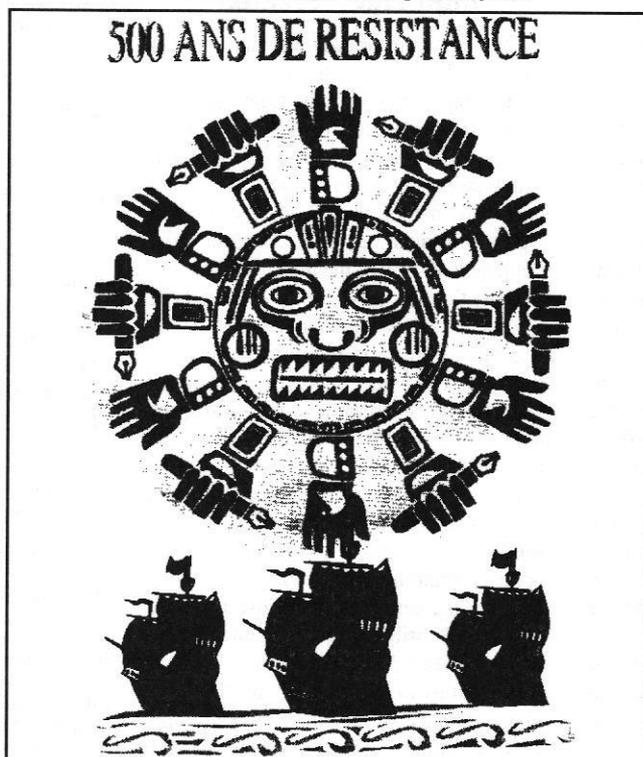
"From the 14th century on, the towns were the most powerful element in the Cortes [parliament], which was made up of their representatives and those of the clergy and nobility. It should not be forgotten, furthermore, that the eight centuries of bitter struggles required to gradually triumph over Moorish domination gave this peninsula an entirely different character to that of the rest of the Europe of the time. At the time of the European renaissance, the North of Spain still retained the manners and customs of the Goths and Vandals, while the South retained those of the Arabs.

"As far as municipal administration is concerned, the cities of Italy, Provence, northern France, Britain and a part of Germany showed undeniable similarities with the state of the Spanish cities. But one cannot compare the Spanish Cortes with the French États Généraux nor the British parliaments of the Middle Ages. The Kingdom of Spain was formed in conditions that were unusually favourable to the limitation of the royal sphere of power.

"On the one hand, small parts of the peninsula were reconquered and transformed into independent kingdoms at a time when the long struggle against the Arabs was still raging. In these struggles new popular customs and laws took shape. The successive conquests, made above all by the nobles, immeasurably increased the power of these latter while reducing that of the monarch.

"On the other hand, the cities and communes acquired increasing importance inside the country, as people were forced to come together in fortified places to shelter from the incessant Moorish attacks. And the propitious form of a peninsula, and its constant relations with Provence and Italy, gave birth in their turn to trading cities and important seaports."<sup>1</sup>

\*This article first appeared in the April-May issue of *Critique Communiste*, the review of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International



It was the equilibrium of these contradictory elements that allowed the emergence of the Spanish monarchy, which rapidly crossed the thresholds of political modernity, conquering half of America and, thanks to its gold and the guidance of Charles V, stifling the bourgeoisie and eliminating the democracy of its Cortès.

There is a curious common feature shared by the three great "absolute" queens, Isabella of Castille, Elizabeth of England and Catherine the Great of Russia: all three came to the throne amidst violence, through the force of their intelligence and in spite of blind brute force.

Salic law [royal inheritance solely by the male line] did not apply in Spain, but Isabella was only the half-sister of Henry IV who had a daughter, Jeanne. It was said that the latter had been born out of an adulterous liaison, but she was nonetheless the legal heir to the throne upon the death of her father in 1474.

She was also the niece of the king of Portugal, who proposed to marry her. Isabella took advantage of the opposition of the great feudal lords and let it be believed that she could be used as a pawn in the hands of the opponents of Jeanne and of Portugal (the archbishop Carillo said "When I took her under my wing she was only a little girl; and I will send her back to her spinning wheel"). After the death of her brother she had herself proclaimed Queen.

### Political intelligence

This was not the first example of her political intelligence. Her marriage five years earlier to Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Aragon, was of her own choosing and there is little doubt that she was even then ensuring her royal future through the construction of a bloc opposed to Portugal. Isabella was recognized as Queen of Castille by her supporters, although Ferdinand was not proclaimed king.

The war that broke out with Portugal in May 1475 was still a dynastic feudal war. By the beginning of 1479 King Alphonse of Portugal sued for peace, but the settlement recognized the Portuguese monopoly over navigation and commerce on the African coast, thus closing for Spain the route to Asia by the circumnavigation of Africa. It was this which would lead to Columbus' voyage in 1492.

If Jeanne's Portuguese party had won, historical events could have taken an entirely different turn, perhaps for some centuries. But it is doubtful that this could have changed the overall evolution.

The section of the great nobility that had supported Jeanne and Portugal was defeated. Although not broken by Isabella, who was insufficiently strong, it submitted.

At the same time, Isabella and Ferdinand were able to rally popular forces behind them. Thus they encouraged subversion in the lands of a stubborn lord, the Marquis of Villena — a portion of his possessions subsequently ended up in their hands. "The new monarchs appeared as if they were the defenders of the fatherland — which is true — and as the opponents of the feudal aristocracy — which is much more open to discussion and which must be qualified. This ambivalence served the Catholic kings well: while seeking the support of the nobility, without which they could do nothing, the exploited peasants and town dwellers saw in them a hope for liberation.

"They were counted on to end the arrogance of the lords who for a century had allowed themselves to take everything; the royal pair were believed to be the guarantors of an order more sensitive to the trials and tribulations of the people; their sense of justice was celebrated.

"Ferdinand and Isabelle knew how to capitalize on these aspirations; they were careful not to discourage them and knew how to use them in the service of their projects."<sup>3</sup>

The two sovereigns took advantage of the authority they enjoyed in the eyes of the people, exploiting their worst religious prejudices and superstitions to play another double game: to base their power on an alliance with the clergy while aiming in the long term to reform it and the monasteries and to draw them into a common struggle for the religious homogenization of their kingdoms, where Judaism and Islam had until then been tolerated.

### Inquisition created

The war with Portugal was not yet over when, in 1478, the young monarchs created the Inquisition, with the approval of the Pope. It was aimed primarily against converted Jews, the *conversos*, who practiced Judaism in secret. It only really got underway in 1480 that is, directly after the war, and, it must be noted, under the strict political authority of the monarchs.

Thus, the expulsion of the Jews in 1492 was not at all without precedents. There was only a let-up in religious persecution between 1483 and 1492, necessary for "national unity" to achieve the *Reconquista* of the last Muslim stronghold on the peninsula.

This periodisation speaks volumes: it reveals a coherent plan expressing a modern conception of the "absolutist state", replacing the previous empirical mediaeval tolerance, and whose religious aspects, ostensibly the most significant, are no more than a political ideology.

In contrast to the myth of the "Catholic kings", an idea promoted right up until this century with the plans to canonize Isabella,

Machiavelli was right in stressing the amoral realism of Ferdinand in *The Prince* (he ignored Isabella, probably because she was not directly involved in Italian affairs and perhaps out of misogynist prejudice).<sup>5</sup>

Three great events thus stand together as one political entity. The ten years war ended with the capitulation of Grenada, the result of an astute mix of military actions and intricate diplomacy.<sup>5</sup>

The royal couple, flushed with this success, moved quickly to expel the Jews, who threatened the unity of thought of the united kingdoms. Then they gambled on a short-cut to the lands of spices, gold and precious stones in the Far East.

### Royal hesitations

It really was a gamble. The royal couple hesitated between the influence of those whom Columbus had convinced and those who thought his plan impossible.

Moreover, the royal coffers were empty and there was a sense of relief at having achieved peace and united the kingdom (for the moment) within its natural borders. Columbus' friends had convincing arguments: Santangel, former secretary of state in Aragon and treasurer of the Santa Hermandad, agreed to advance half of the necessary funds; the navigator would find the rest.

As for the ships, the town of Palos owed the equivalent of two ships as a fine for an infraction of the accords with Portugal. What of Columbus' exorbitant demands for ennoblement, titles, economic privileges? If he perished at sea, not much would be lost; but if he succeeded, the advantages conceded to Portugal would be more than made up for.<sup>6</sup>

1492 is therefore the date of the birth of the Spanish Empire in Latin America. But the worm is born at the same time as the fruit.

The Church had been "transformed by the Inquisition into the most terrible instrument of absolutism. While, after Charles I's rule, Spain's social and political decadence would present all the symptoms of that slow and shameful disintegration that revolts us as much as the worst periods of the Turkish Empire, at least under this monarch the old freedoms had had a splendid funeral.

1. Karl Marx, "The Spanish Revolution" (translated from *Œuvres politiques*, trad. Molitor, t. VIII, p. 119, A. Costes, 1931).

2. Joseph Pérez, *Isabelle et Ferdinand, rois catholiques d'Espagne*, p. 102, Fayard.

3. Op. cit., p. 111.

4. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, chap. XXI.

5. See Bernard Vincent, *1492, l'Année admirable*, chap. 1, "La reddition de Grenade", Aubier.

6. See Christopher Columbus, *la Découverte de l'Amérique*, writings translated by S. Estorach and M. Lequenne, introduction and notes by Michel Lequenne, *La Découverte*; in particular, t. 3, "Ecrits et documents, 1492-1506".

# Why confuse Cuba with hell?

**WE reproduce below an article by the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano, author of *The Open Veins of Latin America*, which was published in the Bolivian newspaper *Aqui* on April 24, 1992. Galeano, who is by no means uncritical of the Cuban regime, replies to those who wish to put an end to the revolution and who justify the US-sponsored blockade against the island which has been in force for the past thirty years.**

"This was the time when Vasco Nuñez of Balboa, Cortez and Pizarro planted the Castilian flag on the Darien Coast, in Mexico and in Peru, when Spanish influence was predominant throughout Europe and their southern imagination dazzled the eyes of the Iberians with visions of Eldorado, chivalrous adventures and world domination. At that time Spanish liberty disappeared beneath the rattling of arms, under a rain of gold and lit by the terrible light of the autodafés...

"How can we explain the fact that centralization never took root in a country where, earlier than in all the other feudal states, the absolutist monarchy established itself in the most brutal fashion? The answer is not hard to find. Everywhere the great monarchies took shape on the ruins of the warring feudal classes: the aristocracy and the cities. But, in the other great states of Europe, the monarchy appeared as a centre of civilization, the bearer of social unity.

"It was the laboratory where the various elements of society were mixed together and kneaded so that the towns were able to trade in their independence and local autonomy of the Middle Ages in exchange for the general supremacy of the bourgeoisie and the domination of bourgeois society. In Spain, on the contrary, the aristocracy fell into the most profound abasement without losing the worst of their privileges, while the towns lost their former power without gaining a modern importance in its stead".<sup>7</sup>

## Short-sighted genius

The political genius of the Catholic monarchs and the power of their descendants was from the long-term historical point of view undermined by a terrible short-sightedness.

The criminal expulsion of the Jews had disastrous effects in the immediate as well as the long term. The "Discovery" itself, meanwhile, cannot in itself be considered a crime, but its consequence in terms of invasion and conquest are a blackspot that has nothing legendary about it.

It can be said that the Spanish colonial metropolis paid for these crimes by more than three centuries of social, economic and political backwardness and that, in a perverse way, the stolen treasures of the "West Indies" only briefly enriched the Spanish parasites before serving to enrich the economy, and thus the bourgeoisie, of northern Europe.

Imperialist political geniuses beware! ★

**L**ATIN America is no longer a threat. Therefore, it has ceased to exist. Rarely do the universal factories of public opinion deign to throw us a glance. However, Cuba, which threatens no one, is still a universal obsession. This little island, subject to a ferocious state of siege, condemned to extermination by hunger, refuses to give up. Because of national dignity? No, no, explain the experts: out of a suicidal vocation. Coffin in hands, the undertakers wait. A wait which irritates them. In Eastern Europe, they did a speedy and thoroughgoing job, hired by the corpses themselves, and now they are anxious to inter this stubborn red dictatorship which refuses to accept its fate. The undertakers have already prepared the funeral reading. They will not say that the Cuban revolution is simply dead: but that it is dead because that is what it wanted.

**2.** Among the most impatient, among the most furious, one finds the repentant. Yesterday, they confused Stalinism with socialism and today they must erase these traces of a regrettable past; the lies that they have told, the truths that they have killed. In the New World Order, the bureaucrats beco-

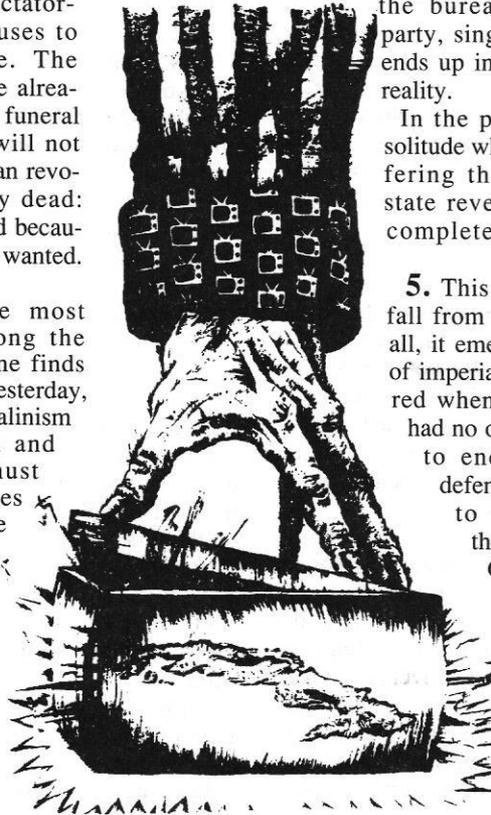
me the champions of freedom of expression.

**3.** I have never confused Cuba with paradise. Why confuse it now with hell? I am among those who believe that one can love it without lying or remaining silent.

**4.** Fidel Castro is a symbol of national dignity. For Latin Americans, accustomed to five centuries of humiliation, he is a well-loved symbol. But Fidel has, for a long time, been at the centre of a bureaucratic system: a system based on echoes of the monologues of the regime, which imposes the routine of obedience against creative energy; sooner or later, the bureaucratic single party, single truth system ends up in a divorce from reality.

In the period of tragic solitude which Cuba is suffering the all-powerful state reveals itself to be completely impotent.

**5.** This system did not fall from the sky. Above all, it emerged as a result of imperial veto. It appeared when the revolution had no other choice than to enclose itself to defend itself, obliged to wage war by those who forbade Cuba from being Cuba: and the incessant external harassment has consolidated it over the years. For thirty years now



7. Karl Marx, op. cit. pp. 122-124.



the imperial veto has been applied, in a thousand ways, to prevent the realization of the project of the Sierra Maestra. A continuing hypocritical scandal; since then, Cuba has been obliged to take examinations in democracy before the fabricators of all the military dictatorships which previously existed in the country. In Cuba, democracy and socialism were born as two names for the same thing; but the big power brokers of the world only gave it the freedom to choose between capitalism and capitalism.

**6.** The Eastern European model, which so easily collapsed there, is not the Cuban revolution. The Cuban revolution, which did not come from above, which was not imposed from outside, has grown from the people, and not against them or despite them. That is why it has been able to develop a collective consciousness of the nation: the indispensable self-respect which is the basis of self-determination.

**7.** The blockade of Haiti, announced with drums and trumpets in the name of sacred democracy, has been a transient spectacle. It has not lasted very long. It finished well before the return of Aristide. It could not last: under democracy or dictatorship, there are 50 US companies which benefit from cheap Haitian labour.

On the contrary, the blockade against Cuba has been strengthened through the years. A bilateral affair? That is what they say. But everybody knows that the US blockade implies, in the world today, a universal blockade. It also implies, even if there are many who ignore it, the negation of the right to self-determination.

The suffocating siege erected around Cuba is a form of intervention, the

most ferocious, the most efficient, in internal affairs. It leads to despair, it stimulates repression, it discourages freedom. And those who apply the blockade know this very well.

**8.** There is no longer a Soviet Union. One can no longer exchange, at a fair price, sugar against petrol.

Cuba is condemned to isolation. The blockade magnifies the cannibalism of the international market. In response, Cuba turns to tourism.

And the remedy could well turn out to be even worse than the cure. An everyday contradiction; the foreign tourists enjoy themselves, an island in the island, they have all that which the Cubans lack. Old wounds open up in the memory. There is a popular anger, a justified anger, in this country which had been colonized and had been a brothel, which had been a plaything.

A painful situation, without doubt. But who can throw the first stone? Are not the privileges of foreign tourism judged normal throughout Latin America? Worse still, is not the systematic war carried out against the poor also judged to be perfectly normal?

**9.** There are privileges in Cuba? Privileges of tourism and, to a certain extent, privileges of power. Undoubtedly. But the fact is that there exists no more egalitarian society in the whole of Latin America. Poverty is shared: there is no milk, it is true, but milk is not withheld from the children and the old.

Food is rare, there is no longer any soap, and the blockade cannot explain all these shortages in itself; but, in the midst of such a crisis, there are still schools and hospitals for all, which is difficult to conceive in a continent where for so many people the only school is the street, and the only doctor is death.

Poverty is shared, I said, and it shares itself. Cuba is still the most solidarity-inclined country in the world.

Recently, to give an example, Cuba has been the only country to open its doors to the Haitians fleeing from hunger and military dictatorship, who, on the other hand, have been expelled from the United States.

**10.** A time of upheavals and perplexity; a time of great doubts and few certainties.

But perhaps the element of certainty is not so small; when they are born from within, when they grow up from below, the great processes of change do not end up badly. Can Nicaragua,

to cite one case, emerging from a decade of astonishing grandeur, forget what it has learned in the matter of dignity, justice and democracy? Will Sandinism end in some leaders who have kept their cars, houses and other public goods? It is certain that Sandinism amounts to very much more than these Sandinistas who were ready to sacrifice their lives in the war and who, in peace, have not been capable of sacrificing material things.

**11.** The Cuban revolution witnesses a growing tension between the energies for change which it contains and its petrified structures of power. The youth, and not only the youth, demand more than democracy. It is not a model imposed from outside, prefabricated by those who discredit democracy by using it as an alibi for social injustice and national humiliation.

The real, and not formal, expression of the popular will wishes to find its own road. A Cuban road. From inside, from below. But the full liberation of these energies for change does not seem possible as long as Cuba is subject to a state of siege. Foreign harassment feeds the worst tendencies of the regime: those which interpret any contradiction as a possible act of conspiracy, and not as a simple proof that life is living.

**12.** Cuba is judged as if it had not suffered, for more than 30 years, a continuous state of emergency. It is a cunning enemy, undoubtedly, which condemns the consequences of its own acts.

I am against the death penalty. Everywhere. In Cuba also. But, can one repudiate the executions without repudiating, at the same time, the siege which denies Cuba the liberty to elect and obliges it to live in uncertainty?

Yes, one can. Cuba is receiving lessons in human rights from those who look aside when the death penalty is applied elsewhere in Latin America. And applied not occasionally, but in a systematic fashion: in frying Black people on the electric chairs of the United States, in massacring Indians in the mountains of Guatemala, in firing on the street children of Brazil.

If the executions in Cuba are lamentable, when all is said and done, is not the courage of this tiny, stubborn island, condemned to solitude in a world where servility is a high virtue and a proof of talent, for all that admirable? In a world where those who do not sell themselves rent themselves out? ★

# Voices from the Urals

## INTRODUCTION

by Poul Funder Larsen

**T**HE Urals region, on the border of the European and Asian parts of the former Soviet Union, is one of the main industrial centres of Russia. In the 30s, during the first five year plans, a series of huge projects were undertaken throughout the region, including the construction of the Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Combine (at the time the biggest steel mill in the world, still employing around 65,000 people) and the Chelyabinsk Tractor Factory.

### Forced labour

Several of these projects employed forced labour — mainly “de-kulakized” peasants — on a large scale, and many camps of the Soviet Gulag were located here.

The predominance of military production was further promoted during World War II as enterprises from the western part of the Union were transferred to the Urals, and the production in a series of the region’s factories was switched over to meet military demands.

Due to the alleged strategic importance of these industries, the region remained largely closed off until the end of the 1980s. Today this high concentration of enterprises belonging to the military-industrial complex presents the region with a series of special problems, made still worse by the all-out liberalization course and the draconian cuts in public spending pursued by the Yeltsin-Gaidar government.

The social infrastructure is lagging behind that of

the large urban centres such as Moscow and St. Petersburg, while the region’s industrial centres, such as Yekaterinburg (formerly Sverdlovsk), Chelyabinsk, Perm, Magnitogorsk and Nizhny Tagil, are among the former USSR’s most polluted areas. The slashing of central resources allocated to social services, health care, environmental protection, culture and so on has hit hard.

There have been some reactions to this: recently the Chelyabinsk Regional (Oblast) Soviet threatened to suspend all payments to the central budget since the dramatic restriction in money supply resulting from the government’s fiscal policy is leading to an acute shortage of cash money in the regions, meaning that many public employees cannot be paid.

### Wage differentials

In the Urals, as elsewhere, the five months since the start of price reform have seen a big differentiation of working class wages and living standards.

In some enterprises, in particular those in a monopoly position or operating in highly profitable sectors, wages have more or less kept up with inflation. This is true for example at the Magnitogorsk Metallurgical Combine where workers get on average 8-12,000 roubles a month, way above the average industrial wage of 2-3,000 roubles.

Meanwhile, at the other end of the scale, misery is spreading among low paid, and especially, white-collar

workers, pensioners and so on. But even the core of the industrial working class is facing hard times as the freeing of fuel prices, which will cause an avalanche of bankruptcies, and privatization draw near. The situation is particularly critical for most of the large military enterprises as ambitious defence programmes are wound up, while much advertised reconversion schemes have made little progress.

### No mass protests

So far there have been no massive outbursts of protest from the working class of the region, which is rather passive — as was seen during the 1989 miners’ strikes, when there was widespread sympathy for the miners’ demands but little in the way of strikes and solidarity actions.

Nonetheless, some groups of workers have been on strike over the past few months for higher wages and for better conditions for the public services, including teachers, healthworkers and bus drivers.

This increase in militancy among some groups, though still in a defensive framework, could provide an opening for some of the region’s Marxist groups to try to link up with the radical wing of the workers’ movement.

During the 1980s a series of such groups — small socialist study circles and workers’ clubs — surfaced throughout the Urals and in 1990 the most important of them came together to form *Rabochii* (“Worker”), a “social and political union”.

Below we publish three interviews with activists from *Rabochii* groups in Perm and Chelyabinsk. All were conducted in April in the Urals by Poul Funder Larsen. ★

# “The workers need independent organizations”

*BORIS Ikhlov from the Rabochii group in Perm is a veteran of the socialist opposition and one of its most active publicists and organizers.<sup>1</sup> Educated as a physicist in Perm and Moscow, he was refused the right to conclude his dissertation because of his political activities. During the perestroika years, he was a member of the independent Union of Communists based in Perm, which later formed the backbone of the local Rabochii group. With its 1.2 million inhabitants Perm is one of the region's major industrial centres strongly feeling the impact of the crisis in the form of social problems (including malnutrition and an acute housing shortage) and a very bad ecological situation.*

## **C**OULD you outline the reaction here in Perm to the general decline in living standards over the last few months?

At the outset everything was pretty calm. But now, most of the factories are in pre-strike readiness. The drivers and the polishers are preparing to go on strike.

The miners here are trying to rid themselves of the restrictions of the official trade union. One newspaper has even called for the formation of a consumers' movement against the trade sector to stop hoarding of goods. The drivers are primarily demanding the maintenance and replacement of the buses. The polishers want a wage increase so they get 5,000 roubles a month.

The same thing is happening in Chelyabinsk, Magnitogorsk and Sverdlovsk. The drivers are going into action on their own initiative.

The teachers' actions have had very little success. The doctors have carried through a one-day stoppage, but it is clear that some hospitals will be closed. Overall one must say that such strikes are only a transient form, a first step.

So far no political structures have been founded. In that sense, everything is as before, except that there is a booming trade sector.

This is spreading into the administration; for example the so-called commercial departments of the city administration are buying sugar for 6-7 roubles and selling it for 60 roubles.

■ **What is the state of the workers' movement here? In Moscow, it is the organizations originating in the former Communist Party — and primarily the more conservative among them — who have set the pace of protest over past months, while the official trade unions have been very slow to react. Is that a picture one can recognize in Perm as well?**

There is a relatively large, effective and aggressive group here of the Russian Communist Workers Party (RKRK).<sup>2</sup>

Earlier it seemed that collaboration with them would be possible, but they don't really have any constructive proposals. They convened a demonstration recently, but only a hundred people showed up; people are getting tired of demagogues.

As for the workers' movement in general, it is still difficult to identify genuinely political forces. There is an association of enterprise managers, in which some deputies are participating.

The labour collective councils (STKs) from different factories have met a few times. Now the regional council of the (official) trade unions are organizing an employment service, but nobody trusts them.

The workers need independent organizations. I don't believe it is possible to reform the official trade unions in the provinces; they are not able to work.

They don't understand what politics is about; they can't take any political steps or propose constructive solutions. They can't even provide a lawyer to help a labour collective or reinstate someone in a workplace.

■ **There has been much talk about the government's grand privatization schemes; however the sparse information in the press indicates that, while official privatization has hardly started, the so-called “nomenklatura privatization”, whereby people use the powerful positions they held in the old system to accumulate property, is steaming ahead.**

**What concrete steps towards the privatization of the large state enterprises in the region have**

**been taken, and what has happened with the so-called “small privatization” of housing, shops and so on?**

The telephone factory, which is a monopoly enterprise, has become a form of joint-stock company; but in reality it is technically bankrupt. No one is in a hurry to privatize because no one knows what it means, and what social actor is in charge of the process. The trade unions do not know who to negotiate with when there is no leadership. We are seeing a destruction of vertical ties, which means a crash. However it is not to Yeltsin's advantage to obliterate the vertical structures, since it could lead to his own downfall.

At the moment our industry can only make a transition to a level of the market of the last century. Yeltsin wants to show the West that Russia will have a market economy, but he is not rushing to implement this inside the country.

Many political parties believe that the labour collectives should have the right to economic management of the enterprises, but this means a lot of work without real rights.

It is equally erroneous to say that the labour collectives should be given ownership rights, if this is simply a law stating that the collective is manager of something, when in reality the workers are not at all managers, have not yet reached that point.

There are today 82 million workers in this country, which means that the syndicalist idea is absolutely justified, but I think that the conditions for such a slogan have not yet matured.

If the workers at once got the right to distribute profits, the enterprises would be ruined. The profits would go straight into pockets, because people are tired of being hungry and miserable. It is necessary for new forces to emerge, but so far there are no workers' committees in any of the factories.

On housing privatization: the representatives of the regional soviet and administration are intimidating people, saying they have got to have their flats privatized. But in fact housing privatization is physically impossible to carry through. As for shops, here mafia structures are carrying out the privatization. Economic levers are replacing the levers of political power.

What is taking place is simply the taking down of the signboard “socialism” and the putting up of one saying “capitalism”. Instead of the “power of the workers and peasants” we now have “privatization”. And the latter is really just robbing and looting; this does not lay the foundations for a market.

■ **As yet unemployment in Russia is not high, but enterprises are**



cutting production, sending workers on "compulsory holidays" or preparing for layoffs. It is well-known that many of the big enterprises are only still functioning because they are riding on a wave of

credits. What do you think will happen when this comes to an end and mass unemployment emerges?

They have "promised" that by the end of the year there will be hundreds of thousands of unemployed. In a way, people have been cutting off the branch they were sitting on. In the Lenin plant here, for example, 37,000 people are employed and a cut of 3,000 jobs is envisaged.

But from some workers you get an ultra-right point of view; we will sack some of the spongers and the money we get from that will go into our pockets.

Of course, it is an illusion that layoffs will solve the problems of pay for those still employed. As soon as people are out of the gates they turn into competitors for those still inside. Then they can start reducing wages using the threat of the unemployed who will fight to get a job.

If unemployment rises by one percent, we will see crime rise by several percent. This is not the West. In this country it is impossible to contain ten to 15 million unemployed.

■ **Perm is known as a very polluted city — has this triggered off an ecological movement of some kind?**

Ecology was one of the main issues for our "Union of Communists", as it is now for *Rabochii*. We are the leaders of an ecological committee which actively supported the movement in the Maysky settlement, when 70 million roubles was allotted for putting a purification system in a plant, without any steps towards this actually being taken.

Because of our pressure, the regional soviet prohibited the building of a nuclear power station. Perm is among the ten most polluted cities in the Soviet Union and this includes radioactive pollution. There are a large number of people suffering from cancer in the region.

■ **Finally, I would like to comment on the development of your own organization, *Rabochii* and the**

role you think it should play in this period. You have been participating in some of the preparatory meetings of the *Partiya Truda* (Party of Labour) initiative. How should the task of building a workers' party be approached today?

We started out as an academic group discussing what we could suggest to the workers — does soviet power exist in the enterprises? The next step was a critique of anti-worker legislation.

We considered it was impossible to solve the problems of the working class without solving those of the intelligentsia, but this was not a very constructive position.

The most consolidated group is the one in Sverdlovsk, though it has undergone a split, as has the one in Chelyabinsk after the collapse of the People's Front of the Urals.

In Perm there are now attempts to organize the Party of Labour through the regional trade unions; however, I do not believe they are really interested in setting up the party.

I cannot support the formation of the party from above. I can propagate the idea of a Party of Labour, but people are tired of parties. I think structures have to arise in the provinces and then we can negotiate with Moscow.

We need permanent reports from the centre, which I hope the Party of Labour can provide. But I think we have to start work at the regional level. Workers will not join some alien organization.

Our task is to help them organize so they can deal with politics. However neither Sotsprof<sup>3</sup> nor the Party of Labour have worked out constructive positions, they have just adopted slogans copied from Western models. I think we have international tasks as well; we shouldn't stick to the national level. But so far we don't really have contacts in the international workers movement — we hope to get them. ★

1. See his article in *Socialist Alternatives*, no. 1, Montreal 1991.

2. The Russian Communist Workers Party is the main force in the conservative *Trudovaya Rossiya* ("Working Russia") alliance. It has a strong neo-Stalinist wing, but it also contains some more moderate (although noticeably traditionalist) elements.

3. Sotsprof (formerly "Socialist Trade Unions", now renamed "Social Trade Unions") is a federation of independent trade unions set up in 1989. At the outset some socialist forces participated in the project, but later it adapted to liberalism, entering into an alliance with private business interests. Today it acts largely as the Yeltsinite "company trade union".

## At the Lenin Plant

*SERGEJ Porosjin works at the Lenin Metallurgical Plant in Perm. He is a member of the trade union committee, and also of the union "Rabochii".*

■ **HAS the privatization of the Lenin plant been proposed?**

The factory has been declared a state enterprise, which means that it will remain the property of the ministry and not get privatized. But within the factory small commercial structures, where one shop gets autonomy, are appearing. The founder of these structures is the management, which means that the leasing agreements set up are not real, but fictitious.

■ **Has there been a reduction in production at the plant?**

The number of state orders has been reduced, but generally there are enough new orders. The question of unemployment remains theoretical, because everyone needs steel. But the salary is very small — 2,500 roubles a month. We recently had an increase of 600 roubles, but this is not a genuine indexation. Still there is no activity among the workers.

■ **What role is played by the official trade union and the council of the labour collective?**

The council of the labour collective has practically ceased existing. Today the only head is the head of the shop. The factory manager has absolute power. The trade union does as the manager says, as its apparatchiks are linked to the management.

■ **Have you tried to build links with the labour collectives of other enterprises?**

Yes, but they do not allow us to do so. This is only for the union apparatchiks.. Now it is difficult, because these links broke down, and we have to start again.

■ **What has happened to the old party structures in the factory?**

Our former party committee is a part of the organizing committee of the Russian Communist Workers Party. They are still holding together, preserving the structures. No one has left, and all the old cadres from the Brezhnev period are still there. ★

# Tankograd's second battle

*DURING the Second World War the industrial city of Chelyabinsk in the southern Urals, with 1.5 million inhabitants, was dubbed Tankograd (the Tank City) as its vast tractor factory was adapted to produce the tanks crucial to the Soviet victory in the war. Today the city and its people are facing yet another tough struggle as large parts of its industry is threatened with closure. Here, Vladimir Resnits, a worker and member of the Chelyabinsk Rabochii group, gives his account of the situation in today's Chelyabinsk and of the possibilities for building an opposition among workers there.*

**C**OULD you say a few words about your own background — how did you become an activist in the *Rabochii* group?

For more than 20 years I worked as a turner. Then, about two years ago I stopped working and decided to become a full-time activist. For a long time, I didn't get any money for this.

I had some savings, but they also came to an end, so I started distributing workers' newspapers to earn some money. Now they have started paying me. I am a member of the leadership of the *Rabochii* union, which is not a big organization.

**■ Chelyabinsk is dominated by military production; what is the current state of the enterprises in this sector?**

In this region around 94% of enterprises were linked to military production, though some of them were only making spoons for the army.

Now, when military production is being reduced and in some places even totally liquidated, many workers, including skilled workers, find themselves out of work. Unfortunately there is no sign that new jobs are being created for these people and reconversion of the enterprises does not look very promising.

So, large groups of people are simply being sacked. The cooperatives, which have been organized and where people used to get work, are not able to employ such a mass of people. I worked at the Tractor factory in 1988, and at that time there were 68,000 people there.

Today, only around 47,000 are left, which means that 21,000 are already gone, and recently at a conference the general director of the factory, Loschenko, disclosed that by the end of this year, another

20,000 jobs should go.

**■ What is the situation regarding privatization here?**

At the Congress of People's Deputies, Yeltsin said that before the end of the year (that is in the autumn, or perhaps December) everyone will get an account or a voucher for the privatization. By now, people have lost even the modest savings (of say 10-15,000) that they used to have, because all the prices have increased from between ten to 100 times. Therefore ordinary people cannot buy anything now, and the privatization is only for those who managed to collect something in the old days or those who have made a fortune recently. The millions and billions are only in the pockets of a few people and among our party mafia. This scheme of accounts or vouchers means that everyone will get a certain sum, for example 7,000 roubles, to buy property. But already in the Brezhnev years I could make 7,000 a year. So what kind of money is 7,000 roubles, or even 70,000 roubles, when the prices can go up another ten times.

**■ Are there any attempts to promote alternative models of destatization, for example in the form of collective ownership, counterposed to the projects of the Yeltsinites?**

Unfortunately no really serious attempts have been made. The Tractor company is now trying to turn itself into a joint stock company with the following design: around 800 million from foreign capital, 360-400 million to the workers, that is the labor collective, and a part for the ministry, which still existed, when the project was drawn up. Now the ministry has been turned into a holding, but it is still a state structure run from above. So the workers will get only 15-20%, and there is no talk about them receiving the controlling stake.

**■ Has the shift of power within the top echelons of the bureaucracy, from Gorbachev to Yeltsin, had any repercussions on the regional level, here in Chelyabinsk, as regards the power structures running the city and the oblast?**

The head of the administration of the Chelyabinsk region (oblast) is Solovyev, the former secretary of the city committee of the CPSU.

The head of the executive committee of the region's administration is Sulin, who was in the same structures. Around these

people you find many former Communists, who threw away their membership card; they didn't even shed their skins like snakes, they remained the same. Behind these people there are seemingly others operating, because for example Solovyev was supported for the post only by a small group of deputies. They wrote a letter to Yeltsin, who endorsed the appointment of this person. Someone has pushed his candidacy, or perhaps Yeltsin knew him personally, since he himself was the secretary of the Sverdlovsk regional party committee nearby. This is how it goes — the old ties remain.

**■ During the "democratic phase" of perestroika there was a rather active People's Front in Chelyabinsk. What has happened to this organization and to its activists?**

At that time the people of this front united all the organizations, which were formed here, with a few exceptions. I think that this was organized by a decree from above, because the majority were members of the party, and so was the leadership, though there were workers in this leadership. On the basis of the People's Front several societies were set up, for example a temperance society, and so were the local branches of the different parties; the social democrats, the Democratic Party and so on. Basically the People's Front disintegrated into a series of parties, and the people who founded it became the leaders of various structures. So instead of the Front you have got ten or twelve parties, which are still more or less controlled from above.

**■ How do you view the political situation at the level of the enterprise? Are there any serious political forces operating in the factories?**

So far it is mainly silent indignation. In some places there have been small strikes, for example, on the level of the shop or the department, not even on factory level. Now the Communists have begun to revive; there are already several parties. When they convene demonstrations more and more people attend, which is in itself significant. But they don't have much support among workers, usually it's engineers, clerks, foremen and pensioners as well.

**■ Could you comment a little on the line pursued by the official trade unions in this region — do you find it likely that they can somehow be reformed?**

Maybe it is possible to reform the structures at the lowest level, for example in some shops or even enterprises. But above these there are structures which are impos-

sible to reform. Since the price reform the trade unions have been maneuvering at the top level, making noises, but I haven't seen them protect their members in practice.

On the other hand the trade unions, which call themselves "free" and have been trying to establish themselves, are weak. I think this goes for Sotsprof; I have seen their leaders, and I don't think they will do anything for the workers. It is my impression that these trade unions, which arose outside the official structures, have practically ceased existing over the last two years, because they couldn't do anything. While those that fell under the influence of official structures are only fulfilling official decrees.

#### ■ How was the union *Rabochii* formed in Chelyabinsk?

In 1989 the People's Front here organized a workers' group, which was basically a discussion club. I participated in this from the very beginning, when there were around 80 people, and a certain level of activity. But when people saw that it was all discussions, which didn't lead anywhere, some of them started to leave. Though we parted with the People's Front the leaders remained the same, because we knew no others. After some time there was a split. They formed their Soyuz Rabochikh (Union of Workers) on a democratic basis; while I grouped some people around me, who didn't reject the socialist idea. In the summer then the Obedinyenii Front Trudyzayikhaya (United Front of Toilers) was set up here, also as an initiative coming from above. We went to Sverdlosk to their Russian congress, but 80% of the people there were trade union functionaries, and only a few real workers. We had a look at it, but did not join. At that time we got in touch with the Sverdlosk Workers' Club and started debating with them. In the summer there was the miners' strike, and then in December a meeting for the organizing committee for a Konfederatsia Truda (Confederation of Labour), where representatives of the miners in Kusbass and Vorkuta took part. The congress of the Confederation of Labour took place in the spring of 1990. We attended once again, and saw the same undemocratic games, games of the apparatus, being played; a situation for which we were badly prepared. However we managed to keep clear of this, and we didn't stay in the Konfederatsia Truda for long, though we were on its council of representatives.

We had consultations with the people from the other cities in the Urals and decided to set up our Union after two working sessions in the winter of 1990. From the outset groups in Sverdlosk, Chelyabinsk, Perm and Magnitogorsk participated. At that time we were around 200 people; that

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is activists. Later, in the summer of 1991, some groups from the Volga region joined. Unfortunately we have lost a lot of force since then. If we look at the situation in Chelyabinsk today there are few really active workers, perhaps two dozen or so, but that is not much for a city of one and a half million inhabitants.

People have not yet learned to stand up for themselves. The workers' movement is still in an early stage. When I worked at the Tractor factory, for example, in 1988, people were ready to go into action if the economic interests of the shop or the brigade were being affected; but today even this scarcely happens.

#### ■ Over the last period several projects to found a workers' party or a Party of Labour have been launched. What is your attitude to this?

As regards the Party of Labour, Kagarlitsky has announced an orientation to skilled, highly qualified workers. But this is hardly more than one in fifteen or one in twenty of today's working class. Of course there are such workers, with higher education, intelligent, full of initiatives, specialists in their field, and so on. But it is a minority, and if they are orienting only towards those they won't get any broad support. So as a party of the labour aristocracy,

in the western sense, it could have the right to exist, but as a party of broad layers of the working class it doesn't make sense. In 20-30 years, after a generational change, such a party could take off. That is if we manage to stay clear of a total domination from the West, and if we are not turned into some kind of an appendage, producing raw materials. Still I believe it would take at least twenty years before our industry, which would indeed need that kind of worker, would really be transformed on a broad scale, and thereby create a more or less broad base for this type of party.

#### ■ So if you think it is premature to found that type of party what kind of organization is it possible to aim at at the present time?

Today it would make more sense to form active trade unions, independent of the official structures. This is obviously very difficult, but if we managed to set up such unions, which would concretely defend people and their social rights, then it would unite a broad range of people not around a specific ideological tendency, but around basic demands. On the basis of these unions it could be possible to found real political organizations. The workers could then also have a possibility to control their politicians from below. ★

# When is a bribe not a bribe?

**HOW BIG a bribe do you have to pay if you want some service performed by an employee of the Moscow mayor's office? It's official: ten percent of the total value of the deal.**

**IRINA GLUSHCHENKO AND BORIS KAGARLITSKY**

**T**HIS figure was specified in a recent interview by Moscow mayor Gavriil Popov himself. You can't get much more official than that.

Speaking to a journalist from the weekly *Argumenty i Fakty*, Popov explained that he was categorically opposed to "blackmail", but that he had nothing against the making of payments to officials for services rendered. The mayor agreed that this could be called bribery, but maintained that it would be more correct to describe it as the payment of "commissions".

Popov complained that he was always embarrassed when he did not know precisely how much he should give people in order to show his appreciation. In America, he had discovered, about 15% of the total value of a deal was considered appropriate. But in the more straitened conditions of Moscow, he thought 10% was sufficient.

District attorneys in the US would, no doubt, be intrigued to learn who it was of Popov's counterparts in American local government who furnished him with this information. Unfortunately these details were missing from the interview.

How often Moscow's new business entrepreneurs express their "appreciation" to Popov was not revealed either. But it is indicative that the "democratic" Moscow mayor, who not so long ago was a modest academic, was listed by the magazine *Kommersant* early this year as one of the five richest people in Russia.

Popov and his associates can appar-

ently tell the difference between a bribe and a "commission" but the difference is often lost on foreigners. For instance, British MP Ken Livingstone, invited to Moscow by the Party of Labour, observed that under British law Popov would be put on trial for his activities, and that his public statements would be considered evidence of guilt. Popov took offence, and initiated a libel suit against the paper, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, which had quoted Livingstone's remarks. Soon afterwards, Popov thought better of it and withdrew his suit.

The official Moscow bribe may now have been pegged at a level well below the American one, but it is still too high for the liking of Russian business people. This is one of the factors behind a scandal which hit the pages of the Russian press during April.

In the early months of this year Konstantin Borovoi, the head of the Russian Commodities and Raw Materials Exchange (RTBS), several times complained publicly that the mayor's office took too much, and that to pay such bribes was beyond the Russian business community. Borovoi and his associates first threatened to declare Moscow a zone hostile to business.

## Feudal corruption

Then, when nothing changed for the better, Borovoi called a press conference where he accused the city government of a degree of corruption possible "only in feudal states". In mid-April, the Moscow newspapers were carrying sensational headlines: "Businessman accuses Moscow government", "Business entrepreneurs demand resignation of Moscow government". Then came Borovoi's charges: "The city's executive power is intimately intertwined with criminal structures, which have created a unique mafia network which controls the city's vital functions. 'The city's finest buildings have been sold off to foreign firms or handed over on long-term leases at nominal rents'".

The Moscow Convention of Business Entrepreneurs called on residents to force the city government out of office through a boycott of its organs.

Popov summoned his own business allies, who duly declared that everything was in order in the mayor's office and the city government. On April 18 *Izvestiya* published an article defending Popov and describing Borovoi as a "veteran of sharp business".

The scandal then died down. A few of the circumstances should be clarified. Borovoi had personal grounds for his accusations against Popov and Vice-Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. A good deal earlier, Luzhkov had made a massive gift to Borovoi's RTSB. This took the form of depositing the monetary assets of the Moscow Social Security Fund, established in the autumn of 1990, not in a state or municipal bank but in the bank of the RTSB. The sum involved was more than a hundred million rubles, at that time a very large amount of money. The vice-mayor's action raised many eyebrows, since the RTSB was then only just setting up in business.

## Reasons to be angry

Later, there was some kind of falling out. The fund was withdrawn from the RTSB and deposited with the Moscow Narodny Bank. Then the RTSB's main competitor, the Moscow Commodities Exchange, began to move its business under the protection of Popov. Borovoi had ample cause to be angry.

Borovoi was always an unlikely corruption fighter, and people familiar with his record were not surprised when his crusade came to a sudden halt. Associates of Popov were said to be drawing the mayor's attention to "the need to examine the business interests of Mr. Borovoi".

As practical people, both sides understood that they had nothing to gain from allowing the dispute to become too public or too prolonged. If Borovoi did not respond to threats, he could simply be offered a share of the loot. One way or another, the signal met with a response, and the protests from Borovoi came to an end. ★



"Long live democracy!"