

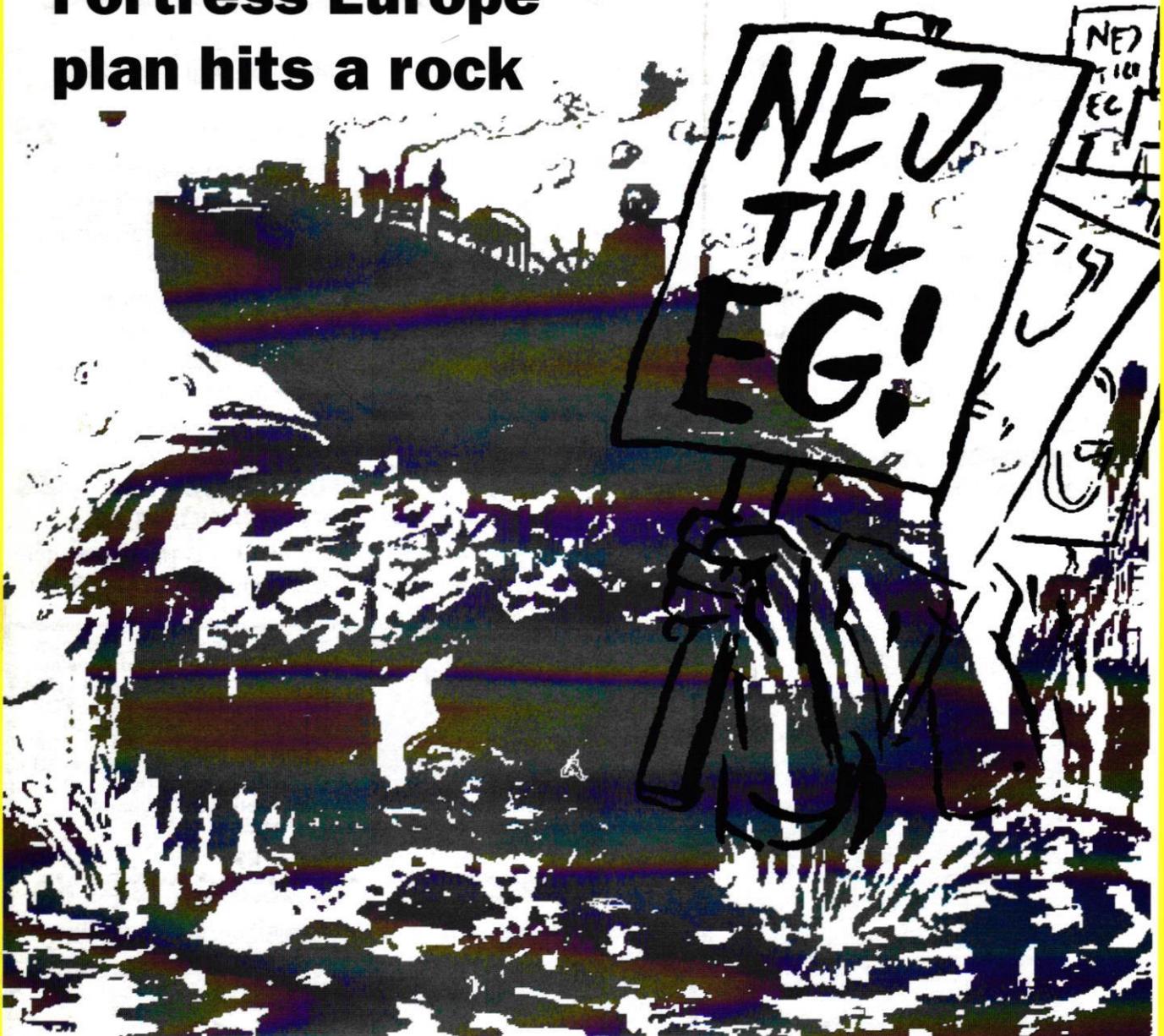
International VIEWPOINT

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Fortress Europe plan hits a rock



Inside:

- Behind the Danish vote on Maastricht
- Thailand: the May Massacre ○ Will Czechoslovakia survive?
- Spanish state: resisting convergence ○ and much more

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The infernal logic of the one-nation state



THE idea underlying the various negotiated schemes for dividing up the war-torn former Yugoslav republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina is that of creating nation states dominated by one ethnic group, and this is the interpretation that has been given to the term "self-determination of peoples". The same logic was at work first in the contacts between Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and Croatia's Franjo Tudjman, and then on May 6 of this year in the negotiations between the leaders of the Serb and Croat nationalists of Bosnia.

CATHERINE VERLA

SUCH negotiations, which assume in advance that Serbs and Croats cannot live together, take place at the expense of the Muslims, the only ones until now to defend the notion of a single republic of three peoples with rights not determined on a territorial basis. They have also taken place against the express wishes of tens of thousands of peace demonstrators who have defended the multi-ethnic approach and who created in April the People's Assembly for Public Salvation, which was rapidly dispersed by the forces of war.

Europe's pseudo-solution

The European Community, by supporting the pseudo-solution of ethnic cantonization, has, even in the kindest interpretation, been taken in by the Croat and Serb nationalist logic. The meaning of cantonization is to carry through at local level the logic of attempting to protect rights by creating ethnically pure cantons, which would then come together to join Serboslavia or Greater Croatia at a later stage. The combination of the recognition of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BH) as a sovereign state and the cantonization plan only added fuel to the fire it was supposed to put out.

At each stage of the developing crisis the "civilized world" has taken the worst

possible positions and contributed to the upward spiral of violence. First of all there was support for a centralist federalism and rejection of the expressions of a desire for sovereignty by the republics — who were then pushed into making a disorderly series of independence declarations, according to the principle of everyone for themselves. Then, there was the stage of recognizing the independence of this or that republic without any coherent overall principled approach to the complex national questions throughout the Yugoslav space. Before too long war in Serbia's subjugated Albanian province of Kosovo and the explosion of Macedonia will confront the EEC with the obvious reality: there is no way to separately find effective solutions to the national questions of what was once Yugoslavia, which would avoid carnage and a general regional conflagration.

Untouchable frontiers

There are, furthermore, no principles about untouchable frontiers or about who is or is not a people that gives the right to insist that a group that feels itself, rightly or wrongly, threatened by living in a state it does not consider "its own", should separate.

The only way to avoid an unending challenging of existing frontiers is the

limitless extension of the rights of "minorities", to make frontiers open with multiple citizenship rights or even better by the formation of a Balkan confederation of multi-ethnic and democratic states — pluralist in terms of culture and rights. Such a solution cannot be imposed by war, and still less by an outside intervention by NATO or the new "Europe" beyond the control of the people who live in the region.

There have recently been a number of encouraging developments in the fight against the prime mover in the conflict; the Greater Serbia project and its logic. These include

- the demonstrations of some tens of thousands of people called by peace and opposition groups in Belgrade at the start of June;

- the courageous decision of two Serbs, Nemat Kecmanovic of the Reformist Party and Mirko Pejanovic of the Socialist Party (the former Communist Party), to rejoin the presidency of Bosnia-Herzegovina, boycotted by the Serbs since the creation of the so-called "Serb Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina" last March. They have come out in favour of the "independence, indivisibility and territorial integrity of Bosnia-Herzegovina"¹ and disowned the policies of the mad psychiatrist Radovan Karadzic, the local leader of the Serb militia.

- the possibility of the Federal army and the Serb authorities disengaging from the conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina. There are a number of factors pushing them in this direction; first and foremost, the desire to keep open the possibility of international recognition of the Yugoslav federation of Serbia and Montenegro, proclaimed on April 27,

1. *Le Monde*, June 3, 1992.

and ensure that it keeps the positions in international institutions held by the former Yugoslavia. There is also the likelihood that Milosevic and the army will lose control of their temporary allies on the ground in Bosnia.

A sort of division of labour has operated between the far right nationalist groups of V. Seselj and Karadzic's party and the army and Serbian regime. The latter have acted as a strong rearguard with clean hands, supplying the paramilitaries. This game is turning out to be an expensive one, with the economic blockade which may sharpen social discontent in Serbia.

While the patriotic reflex of the "nation unjustly attacked" can be powerful, this does not mean, as the demonstrations have shown, that all Serbs identify with a war in which they also have been victims. The hundreds of thousands of refugees and the issue of deserters effect all families and communities. We may soon see former allies turn on one another; the high command of the Yugoslav army have expressed their readiness to give up their arms to the Bosnian government² rather than to the Serb militia in Bosnia, who are demanding them. In BH itself, differences between city and village Serbs are becoming increasingly sharply apparent. It must be remembered that 60% of Serb soldiers in the former federal army come from outside Serbia, particularly from the rural areas of BH. This has also allowed the army to withdraw soldiers who are not from BH while still leaving important contingents behind.

It is from these rural areas, with their centuries long warrior traditions, that the far right draws its forces. To remove legitimacy from the acts of barbarism committed in the name of the defence of "Serb interests", Serbs themselves will have to dissociate themselves from the Greater Serbia project. In order to move towards this all those responsible for the war (not only Milosevic) must be exposed and the criticism of the thinking behind Greater Serbia, including the way it has been adopted by the opposition, pushed through consistently.

UN makes discovery

The UN report on Bosnia-Herzegovina rightly states that "Serbia is not solely responsible for the war"³ — and the media have naively reiterated this "discovery". The secret negotiations mentioned above between Croat and Serb far right currents, the political evolution of the HDZ (Croat nationalist) party in BH, which is close to Croatia's president Tudjman, towards the creation of a paramilitary organization controlled by

forces associated with the neo-fascist Paraga, are also part of the reality which feeds the actions of the Serb paramilitaries supported by the villagers. All such forces have to be disarmed as the army is forced to retreat.

But the bedrock of this war is the logic of the (single) nation-state and above all that of Greater Serbia, and it is this

which must be directly challenged. Tomorrow we may well see war break out in Serbia's Albanian-populated province, Kosovo, and how they respond to the Kosovo question will show what the Serb opposition to Milosevic is worth ★

2. *Libération*, June 3, 1992.

3. *Le Monde*, June 4, 1992.

Serbia: talk of a military coup

AS THE bombs continued to fall on the Bosnian capital Sarajevo, mangling without distinction all that city's starved inhabitants, be they Serbs, Croats or Bosnian Muslims, the population of Serbia and Montenegro are beginning to experience rationing due to the international trade embargo.

The political impact is already perceptible in the Serbian capital, Belgrade. The consciousness of the ordinary citizen has been struck both by such things as the lack of petrol and the expulsion of the country's football team from the European championship.

Subjected to demented official propaganda, which exalts the martyrdom of the "chosen people, descended from the heavens", Serbian public opinion has been led to believe that Serbia is "the last rampart holding back Islam in the east and the fascist Catholics in the west". They were confirmed in the belief that Milosevic's pro-war policy enjoyed solid international support by the confused policy of the Europeans and American benevolence. United Nations resolution 757, which was supported by such historic friends as France and "Mother Russia", has ripped through the veil of lies, illusions and Serb national exaltation. The population has suddenly discovered that their country is an international outcast, its government a nest of criminals and its army a band of murderers.

The disorientation of the regime's popular base is evidenced by the lack of demonstrations in its support. Some physical assaults, threats of attacks on the westerners and other minor forms of political gangsterism have been the only spontaneous expressions in favour of the regime.

With a presentiment of a social explosion in the short term, the opposition has announced the organization of a general strike and demonstrations "from June 15 until the fall of the regime".

Milosevic, who has just won the parliamentary elections, has grasped the danger he is in. The slogan "all the Serbs in a single country" — used to justify annexations of areas of neighbouring states — is no longer cited as a government priority, although it has been taken up by the Orthodox Church.

In a statement on British television, the dictator even held out the possibility that he would resign if this were the price for the ending of the economic sanctions. He has denied any governmental responsibility for the current bombing of Sarajevo.

This may not be a complete lie, insofar as the destruction of the Bosnian capital provided the pretext for the United Nations forces to occupy Sarajevo airport. This operation, which has been voted through by the UN Security Council, will mean in the coming week the deployment of a thousand UN troops and implies a complete clearout of all artillery from a 30 kilometre radius around the airport.

If the Serb formations that have arisen out of the disintegration of the army do not retreat, there will almost inevitably be a clash with the UN forces.

In Belgrade, meanwhile, a bitter, if shadowy, factional struggle has been apparent. Belgrade citizens, hanging on the telephone, are ruling nothing out, not even a military coup. — **Slavko Mihajlicek, June 10, 1992. ★**

50,000 votes that shook Europe

THE rejection of the Maastricht treaty by the Danish electorate is rich in lessons. In particular, it highlights the degree to which West European politics has become interlinked over the last few years. 50,000 Danish votes were enough to set off a chain reaction in several countries, raising the debate on European Union, causing a sharp crisis within some political movements that had already been divided by the issue, as well as a debate on the rights of populations to decide their future. What will happen if, on June 18, Ireland also rejects the treaty?

CLAUDE GABRIEL

THE other important lesson concerns the Danish vote itself. Was it not the clearest example of the crisis of European parliamentary regimes? The Danish parliament had ratified the treaty by 130 votes to 25. Most parties, including the Social Democrats and the union leaderships, called for a yes vote. The so-called representatives of the people had therefore expressed their will.

It took a simple referendum to destroy these pretensions. At the very least, real democracy should mean that the government would have to resign and new elections be organized. In any event, this centre-right government has no authority to renegotiate the treaty and define Denmark's place in the EEC. However, the same people remain in power as if nothing had happened. It is particularly interesting to see the new proponents of European citizenship upset by the discovery that several thousand Danish citizens can derail the train of European unification.

There were clearly many different motivations at play within the no vote. Several parties of the right and left campaigned against the treaty. Throughout Europe anti-Maastricht positions are quite ideologically diverse and span the far-left to the far-right. It would therefore be wrong to interpret the defeat of the treaty as such in a nationalist sense or, on the other hand, as having a radical social content. The majority was quite diverse.

The situation in Ireland has some similarities. Some votes against European Union there will represent anti-abortion sentiment while others could vote no for precisely the opposite reason, to protest against the loop-holes that would allow Ireland to

escape the European-wide provisions guaranteeing abortion!

In Denmark, several arguments were advanced by various left currents; against political integration, in opposition to a European-wide defense system, against the social aspects of the treaty, for the defense of the environment and so on. But these were not the key issues.

Rejection of establishment

The Danes rejected the decision of the establishment and the demagoguery of the political cliques. All of which adds up to a serious political crisis in that country. Those on the radical left who called for a no vote now have the possibility and obligation to launch a vigorous anti-capitalist campaign, given that the Danish bourgeoisie has explained that they will make the workers pay for the no vote and that some investments will be transferred out of the country. But the victory over Maastricht will reinforce the institutional and juridical imbroglia without automatically clarifying the social stakes.

It will be interesting to see how a country can be simultaneously outside of the Maastricht treaty but part of the Single Act ratified in 1986, which prohibits all barriers to free circulation of capital and goods. The Danish bourgeoisie can now use the rules of the big market to punish

the electorate. The manner in which the union rank and file (the majority of which voted no) and the social movements intervene in this question will be key. If handled correctly, the no vote can be transformed into a social victory. If not, the defeat of the treaty will be merely a pyrrhic victory.

As far as the future of the treaty itself is concerned, Paris and Bonn have announced that everything will go ahead as planned, with or without Denmark. Of course, nothing prevents them from altering the treaty (which required unanimous approval) and proceeding with 11 instead of 12 member states. However, there are other obstacles. Denmark, along with Luxembourg and France, has already met the criteria of entry into the Economic and monetary union (EMU) (rates of inflation, budget deficit, public debt, long term interest rate). Thus, the Danes were without doubt those who would "benefit" the most from the monetary union. Even so, Danish respect for the monetarist parameters of the treaty would not exclude the maintenance of austerity

policies.

But to justify this, the government could not on the other hand use the pretext of "catching up". This is the opposite of the situation in countries like Italy, Spain, Greece, Belgium, Britain, and so on. In those countries the Maastricht argument will be largely used to justify attacks on social benefits in order to reduce the public deficit, hold down inflation, reabsorb the debt, and so on. Thus the Danish referendum could give a few good ideas to the social movements in these countries.

Hard core loses member

Economic and monetary union is therefore quite fragile politically. The famous "hard core" that was supposed to grow has now lost one of its members. And since Denmark is one of the signatories of the Single Act and the Treaty of Rome, special new rules of association must now be invented. The juridical complexities will become a nightmare, not to mention the fate of the Danish members of the European parliament at Strasbourg, the Danish functionaries in the Brussels commission, the future Danish presidency of the EEC, **5**



The Danish No to Maastricht

THE Danish no vote in the referendum on the Maastricht Treaty on June 2 sent shock waves through the Danish establishment and the entire European Community. The voters rejected the project for European Political Union by a majority of 50.7%.

In the days that followed, political leaders both in Denmark and other EC countries were eager to claim that the Danish referendum would have no consequences in terms of the ratification of the treaty by the other EC member states. However, it is already clear that the Danish no has given voice to widespread scepticism about European Union throughout the EC.

BODIL RASMUSSEN

THE attempt by the European bourgeoisie to build a political superstructure to the Single Market has been temporarily braked. New discussions are arising in several countries. But the forces opposing European Union in the different countries are diverse.

In Denmark, a yes vote was urged by most political parties; only 28 of 175 deputies voted against Maastricht in parliament. Most leading employers and trade union leaders and nearly all newspapers were also in favour of ratification. This fact alone makes the no vote impressive. But who were the no voters?

There was a no majority in all the major cities. This urban majority was smaller than in the 1986 referendum on the Single Act — which overall went the other way. The main reason for this was the change in

the position of the Social Democratic leadership; in 1986, under pressure from their electorate, they had recommended a no vote, while this year they were arguing in favour of the treaty.

Contrary to 1986, this time there was also a majority against in the departments hardest hit by unemployment. Some of these departments have large populations of farmers and fishers who are directly affected by Community decisions and among whom dissatisfaction with the EC is growing.

In all other departments the no vote was up on 1986.

We can see then that the no vote came from nearly all parts of society, but also that a majority of the working class, and especially those hardest hit by the economic crisis, voted against.

attempt to resolve the crisis at the expense of the people. The results of the Danish referendum must be used to advance the interests of the European working class.

It is now possible to assess the significance of the signature of the Single Act in relation to its current stage. The formal aspects of monetization and political union can be rejected while remaining within the free-change zone and the "big market" along with all the trappings of the EEC. Capitalist reorganization cannot be avoided through a simple set-back to one of its aspects. The correct rejection of Maastricht will only have an impact if a coherent, internationalist, subversive and radically democratic alternative is developed. ★

Several opinion polls have also revealed a higher level of opposition among women (57% against Maastricht) than men (57% for). This is especially significant given that on the whole racist and militarist views are less popular among women than men. Before the referendum many argued that young people especially were "supporting the idea of a united Europe" and would thus be voting yes. In fact, here the gender division was especially clear, with young women voting no and young men yes.

Leaders' advice ignored

64% of Social Democratic voters seem to have ignored the recommendation of their party's leaders, thus underlining the fact that working class rejection was a major factor in the result. All the national level trade union leaders called for a yes, but locally several unions joined the no campaign. The chairman of one of the biggest federations, SID, which organizes unskilled industrial workers was strongly criticized for his support for a yes vote in defiance of a union conference statement opposing European Union.

Some 12-15% of the electorate of the two big bourgeois parties that form the government, the Conservative People's Party and the Liberals, voted against, while the two bourgeois parties that urged a no vote, the Christian People's Party and the far right Progress Party, were followed by 64-67% of their voters.

It is of course true that many different opinions and interests went to make up the no majority. However, the following arguments had a major significance in the debate before the referendum.

- The EC and the Maastricht Treaty are felt to be undemocratic. This is partly due to the fact that Denmark, as a small country, will have little influence in the EC, but also because there is general criticism and suspicion of the EC as a supernational, distant and bureaucratic apparatus. "The EC is doing something for democracy — abolishing it" according to one of the no campaign posters.

- There is a widespread — although not always accurate — idea that social standards are better in Denmark than in other EC countries and that integration would mean a fall in standards. It was stressed that the only aim of the European Federal Bank to be established as a part of European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) is price stability, leaving little room for the struggle against unemployment.

- General mistrust of the politicians advocating union. Even before the referendum the government had been weakened by a number of political scandals and accused of deceiving parliament. The referendum may therefore have been used as a means to protest against the political esta-

Continued from previous page

and so on.

All this will merely reinforce the notion of an EEC operating at several different speeds or in concentric circles. Paradoxically, the twelve, who were planning on becoming fifteen by adding Austria, Sweden, and Finland, suddenly find themselves back to eleven. It is even more paradoxical that this occurs at a time when Greece is preparing to enter the Western European Union (WEU) military alliance and when Paris and Bonn have decided to form a common armed force, inviting others to join. The essential feature of these contradictory developments is the

blishment, responsible for severe austerity policies in recent years. An opinion poll after the result indicated that 40% saw it as about European Union, 13% as a protest against the government and 32% as a protest against the political system as a whole.

Arrogance of politicians

To this must be added certain declarations by top politicians and bureaucrats such as the Danish Foreign Minister (known for his arrogance), the Danish EC Commissioner Christoffersen, the Danish Secretary of the EC Council of Ministers, Niels Erbsol and by European Commission President Jacques Delors himself about the catastrophic consequences of a no vote, which only irritated people further.

● Specific attention was drawn to the military dimension of European Union. Denmark is not a member of the West European Union which will be called on to accomplish military tasks in relation to the Maastricht Treaty. Even the pro-Union parties have reservations about a common defence policy.

● National feelings about such things as a common European currency, the future of the Danish language and so on undoubtedly played a role.

● Finally, fear of an "invasion" of poor people from Southern Europe was also raised by right wing opponents of the Union. If we pay social welfare to Portuguese workers coming to Denmark, there will be less for the Danes, they argued.

Thus the Danish no was not exclusively the expression of progressive sentiments. On the one hand, it expressed elements of social protest against the ruling politicians and demands for more democracy and a more open Europe than is envisaged in Maastricht, and on the other there were also elements of nationalism, a narrow outlook and even racism behind the majority.

There were three main arguments for a yes: Improved possibilities to take environmental measures; the goal of a united Europe as a factor ensuring peace and developing international cooperation; and, finally, the economic necessity of being a part of Europe — and the terrible consequences of not being.

The Social Democracy underlined in particular the need for solutions to environmental problems and the fight against unemployment. Although the Social Democratic vision is more dream than reality, it certainly has

Referendums on the European Community in Denmark

	Yes	No	
1972	63.4%	36.6%	(EC membership)
1986	56.2%	43.8%	(Single Act)
1992	49.3%	50.7%	(European Union)

some appeal for people who wanted international solutions to today's problems.

The no was a rejection specifically of the Maastricht Treaty, but at the same time it expressed a wider repudiation of the majority of Danish politicians. This will pose serious problems for the current minority government.

Danish involvement in the Political and Economic Union has been one of the bourgeois government's main political projects in recent times and has also to a certain degree formed the basis of cooperation between the government and Social Democracy. Initial reactions by the yes politicians to the voting down of this project have been marked by confusion and insecurity. A majority in parliament agreed to postpone the decision about Denmark's future relations with the other 11 EC countries until the autumn. Meanwhile, the bourgeois government is trying to find a way to get Denmark affiliated to parts of Maas-

tricht without provoking major sectors of the treaty's opponents.

This may be very difficult, both because of the attitude of other EC governments and the political situation in Denmark. Shortly after the referendum several newspapers, trade union leaders (who campaigned for a yes) and the Social Democracy proposed new parliamentary elections. Other trade union leaders have called for the government to resign. But the government has rejected both proposals, able in this case to count on the support of all other bourgeois parties whether for or against Maastricht. Thus, it seems that the government can survive for a while, but only on the basis of a parliamentary majority including the Progress Party, which is against Maastricht and is unlikely to approve any new negotiations about any form of European Political Union. Without agreement with either the Progress Party or Social Democracy, the government will be without a parliamentary majority and a new political crisis will be in the making.

Problems for the Social Democrats

The Social Democracy faces new problems as a result of the referendum result. In April this year, frustration in the party after ten years out of government led to an internal struggle and the election of a new chairperson, Myrup-Rasmussen. This struggle weakened the party campaign in favour of a yes, which would have been difficult anyway given the party electorate's traditional strong opposition to the EC.

The new leader has promised to get more Social Democratic influence in coming negotiations with the government. After the referendum, however, this promise will be hard to fulfil. For instance, some of the small bourgeois parties that sometimes cooperate with the Social Democracy have reacted very negatively to the Social Democratic call for new elections.

The broad and diverse movement for a no was united around one thing only: Vote no! This was enough for this campaign, but there is no common view on alternatives to Maastricht or a common attitude to the EC in general.

The Socialist People's Party (SF — a left reformist party with 15 MPs), factions of Denmark '92 and the People's Movement against the EC today accept Danish member-

Main "no" groups

Socialist People's Party (SF): A left reformist party with 15 seats in parliament. Was a member of the People's Movement against the EC for many years, but left it a year ago.

The Progress Party: A rightwing party with a populist racist rhetoric and policy. 12 seats in parliament.

The People's Movement against the EC: Created in 1972 before the referendum on Danish membership of the EC. After a split last year, the movement is today composed of bourgeois individuals, members and ex-members of the CP, some Stalinist groups and members of the Left Socialists. Four seats in the European parliament.

Danmark '92: A broad alliance of individuals against the Maastricht Treaty created after the splits in the People's Movement. Their main anti-Maastricht arguments have been of a democratic character. One of their main representatives, Drude Dahlerup, is a well-known feminist in Denmark.

Trade Unions against the Political Union: An alliance of local trade unions and shop stewards. Composed of both Social Democrats and the rest of the left in the trade unions. Some of its leading personalities have been members of a Stalinist group which split from the CP some years ago. ★

FRANCE — Mitterrand shuffles the pack

EVEN before the Danish rejection of the Maastricht treaty, the European Union had been an object of intense discussion and debate across the French political spectrum. President Mitterrand's announcement that France too would hold a referendum on the treaty has both complicated this debate and exacerbated long festering contradictions within all the established political parties.

The deep fissures within the French political system are most clearly seen within the principal bourgeois opposition coalition bloc of the Union for French Democracy (UDF) and the neo-Gaullist Rally for the Republic (RPR). While most of the UDF has continued to follow former president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's strong support for Maastricht, the RPR has been sharply divided between opponents of the treaty, its supporters, and those who favour renegotiation.

Some supporters of the treaty on the right fear that Mitterrand intends to use the referendum as a way of capitalizing on the wide support for the treaty to shore up declining support for his presidency and the Socialist Party (SP), at a time of record unemployment and financial scandals.

Many also believe that the convergence between the bulk of the SP and key UDF figures could eventually translate into a centre-left government coalition. These fears were exacerbated several days after the announcement of the referendum when pro-Maastricht forces within the SP and UDF announced a joint campaign in favour of a yes vote.

A similar recomposition is also occurring on the anti-Maastricht left. SP oppositionists like former defence minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement have joined forces with French Communist Party (PCF) oppositionist Charles Fiterman and other well-known figures in signing an appeal in which they attack the treaty for its economic liberalism, failure to address social inequalities and environmental concerns, as well as its anti-democratic character. The treaty, they maintain, must be renegotiated and then submitted to a referendum.

The ecologists also find themselves split over the issue, with the Greens against the treaty and Generation Ecologie in favour.

The French Communist Party (PCF) has likewise been wracked by debate over Maastricht. While the PCF majority around George Marchais have been strong opponents of the treaty from the beginning and had campaigned for weeks for a referendum, several minority currents have joined together to demand renegotiation.

At the party's recent Central Committee meeting, Fiterman caused a stir when he demanded that the discussions include his text as well as that of the majority. For their part, the Marchais leadership argues along two lines; on one hand, they denounce the inadequate social provisions of the European union while on the other they complain that it represents a blow against French sovereignty.

On the far left, the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR — French section of the Fourth International), has long opposed the European Union as a scheme to further the interests of European capital to the detriment of European and immigrant labour. Though the LCR laments the confusion that will arise from calling for a no vote in the company of such reactionary formations as the neo-fascist National Front (FN) and the mainstream right, it believes that the opening provided by the referendum to explain their point of view, however imperfect, must be exploited.

Lutte Ouvrière (LO), another revolutionary socialist organization, has sought to explain European Union as a futile attempt by European capital to break out of the confines of an anachronistic series of nation-states. While the logic of their position seems to support the process as a way of undermining the nation-state, they call for an abstention in the referendum.

Though French workers, like the Danes and the Irish, will have the opportunity to vote against the bosses' European plan, the failure of the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties and their various opposition currents to provide a principled opposition to Maastricht, coupled with the character of the referendum, (which will merely ask voters to approve or reject the treaty) and the limited resources of the LCR, means that it will be difficult for a coherent, class-based alternative to Maastricht to be put forward.

— Keith Mann ★

ship of the EC, and are calling for a renegotiation of the Maastricht Treaty. According to a pre-referendum motion from SF, Denmark should reject the parts of the Maastricht Treaty on economic union and the common foreign and defence policy. With some reservations, they want to accept or negotiate a common consumers' policy, environmental policy and social charter. Similar proposals have been raised by the two big no organizations, who add that they don't want any common EC policy on internal security, police force or citizenship.

At the other end of the political spectrum, the Progress Party and other bourgeois opponents of Maastricht want Denmark to stay in the Single Market but without Political Union, and they reject all proposals about new negotiations.

SF, the Progress Party and in part the small Christian Party are the only parties to represent the no voters in parliament. Accordingly they are in the best position to interpret the no majority and react to government initiatives. However, it is a problem for no voters and the left that the SF's chairman, Holger K. Nielsen, a few days after the referendum, started talking about "interpreting" it. Despite the fact that the vote had been on the Maastricht Treaty as a whole, he has started to indicate parts of the treaty to be rejected and parts to be kept. This kind of talk can very easily be used by the government in its attempts to get a majority for a "Maastricht minus 10 percent".

At the same time, SF, but above all Denmark '92 and the People's Movement against the EC, have been influenced by the popular response to the Danish referendum in Norway, Sweden and the other EC countries. During the campaign, there has been some collaboration with movements and parties in other countries, and this will continue after the referendum.

The Unity Slate¹, parts of the People's Movement against the EC (mostly some Stalinist groups) and parts of Trade Unions against the Political Union (Stalinist groups again) have rejected the idea of new negotiations over the Maastricht Treaty and stand firm on resistance to the EC as such. While the People's Movement forces offer a narrow, nationalist alternative to the EC, the Unity Slate try to give some international answers.

The internationalist no

In the pre-referendum campaign, the Unity Slate argued against the Maastricht Treaty because it is undemocratic, would lead to a lowering of social and environmental standards, involves a racist immigration policy and was a step towards a European army.

The Unity Slate also explained that a

The SAP and the no vote

THE Socialist Workers Party (SAP — Danish section of the Fourth International) took part in the Unity Slate campaign. But the SAP also launched the Campaign against Fortress Europe, which argued for a no on the basis of anti-militarism, anti-imperialism and anti-racism.

Although the campaign was very modest compared with those of the big no organizations, it was able to gather several young people around its activities, especially in the Copenhagen area. The campaign's main activities were:

- A conference in February with 100 participants, mostly young people, discussing the exploitation of the Third World by Western Europe, racism and militarism in Europe and so on.

- Distribution of 20,000 copies of a leaflet with arguments against the Maastricht Treaty.

- Several events highlighting the EC's military and immigration policies.

- A bicycle tour through Denmark against Fortress Europe with meetings and activities in seven cities. ★

Danish ratification of the treaty would mean worse conditions to fight for socialist and ecological solutions to big problems such as pollution and unemployment.

As an alternative, the Slate proposed that Denmark develop relations with countries outside the EC: in Scandinavia, Eastern Europe and the Third World. And they also offered some rather vague perspectives of a "voluntary cooperation between countries all over Europe" and a "Europe without frontiers".

With many people voting no for social and democratic reasons and with the political establishment in crisis, new opportunities are opening up for the left and in particular for the Unity Slate. The latter can realize these possibilities if it acts on the basis of social and democratic protest, maintains its resistance to the EC and develops a coherent international policy. ★

1. The Unity Slate is a left-wing coalition created in 1989 composed of the Left Socialists (VS), the Communist Party, the Socialist Workers Party (SAP — Danish section of the Fourth International) and other left groups. The Slate got 1.7% of votes in the last parliamentary elections.

The end of Czechoslovakia?

THE June 5-6, 1992 elections in Czecho-Slovakia showed a massive rejection of economic shock therapy in Slovakia, but a narrow victory for the right in the Czech Republic. This divergence, coupled with the total defeat of the moderate, ex-dissident Civic Movement (OH) and the expected replacement of president Vaclav Havel, makes the collapse of the Czecho-Slovak federation almost inevitable.

ADAM NEZVAL — June 10, 1992.

SOCCIALIST and nationalist parties won 65% of the votes in Slovakia, in a massive repudiation of the shock therapy that has devastated the poorer, Eastern republic. The Slovak parliament will now declare sovereignty and attempt to negotiate a loose confederation with the Czech Republic. The left nationalist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) which won 48% of seats in the Slovak parliament, is demanding a "new reform for Slovakia" — with or without the Czechs — by the end of the year.

Like nationalism elsewhere in the ex-Soviet bloc, the resurgence of Slovak nationalism has economic roots. Nevertheless, the particular developments in Czecho-Slovakia have pushed the national revival along progressive lines. Populist HZDS leader Vladimir Meciar told pre-election meetings that "unemployment in Slovakia is three times the rate in the Czech Lands¹ which have enjoyed over 90% of Czecho-Slovakia's boom in foreign investment and tourism since 1989... The pro-Prague government is returning Slovakia to its pre-war position as an agricultural and labour reserve for the richer Czech Lands". Meciar criticizes Czech subservience to German capital and argues that independence in the world economy can best be achieved through the rebuilding of trade and political links with neighbouring Poland, Hungary and Ukraine.

The HZDS' "new reform" is based on massive job creation and a state-led restructuring of the economy. Worker and management buyouts are to be favoured in future privatizations and foreign investment subject to stricter conditions. The vote for parties supporting this strategy was so strong that the ruling pro-Czech ODU failed to achieve the 5% needed to enter the new parliament.

Differences are bound to emerge within

HZDS over Meciar's support for plans to build monstrous barrages on the Danube and other Slovak rivers to generate half of Slovakia's energy needs and build enough nuclear power stations to provide the other half. As with Public Against Violence (the Slovak equivalent of Civic Forum in the 1989 revolution) HZDS includes federalists, separatists, pro-capitalist and social democratic forces and neither its policies nor voters' expectations are crystallized beyond the "new reform" and an undefined "Slovak sovereignty or confederation".

The election also revealed the gulf between the Slovak parties and the national minorities that make up 20% of Slovakia's population. Almost all Hungarian speaking voters supported rightist and pro-Czech parties; an understandable reaction to a HZDS which intends to forbid the use of Hungarian in public service enterprises. Only one in five of Slovakia's Romany minority (10% of Slovakia's population) voted, a result of their increasing marginalization — 60% of Romanies are unemployed compared to 12-15% of "white" Slovaks — and the intense racism directed against them.

Christian Democrats split

With the failure of the pro-capitalist parties and the recent split of Christian Democrats into separatist and federalist wings, the role of opposition goes to the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL', the ex-Communist Party) now the second largest party in the Slovak parliament with 20% of the seats. SDL' leader Peter Weiss says his party supports most HZDS policies but will go further in demanding that progressive measures are carried out. Both Stalinist and social democratic tendencies in the SDL' will doubtless win new members

1. 12% compared to 2.7% according to official figures, 15% and 4% according to opposition estimates.

as the HZDS wavers on economic and social questions.

Those dissatisfied with the opportunism of SDL' leaders will pass to the defiant Union of Communists of Slovakia (ZKS) the radical Workers' Forum (FR) or the Bratislava-based Left Alternative (LA). These groups polled only 1%, but their demonstrations will continue to draw militant workers and activists encouraged but not satisfied with the election results.

The Slovak Social Democratic Party (SDSS), led by 1968 leader Alexander Dubcek, only just made it over the 5% barrier. A loyal defender of the Prague government until the elections, Dubcek is now stressing his desire to cooperate with the HZDS (who don't need him) and the SDL' (which he snubbed as "communist" when early opinion polls gave his party 10% support). The speed of this reorientation gives the measure of the SDSS' attachment to socialist or other principles.

Slender majority

In the richer western Czech Republic, Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus will depend on the centre-right People's Party (CSL) and the far right Republicans (SPR-RSC) for a slender 16 seat majority in the 200 seat Czech parliament.

The Czech right is dominated by the largest Czech party, Klaus' Civic Democratic Party (ODS) which defends the current reform model. Although Klaus is a federalist, he is under pressure from the impatient Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA) which wants Czechs to separate from "Communist" Slovakia and seek German protection in their "return to western Europe". The ODU won 6% of seats in the Czech parliament.

Despite a series of orchestrated scandals, most recently a published list of 251 liberal and leftist journalists allegedly previously in the employ of the Stalinist secret police, voters failed to be moved by anti-Communism; most people's priorities are the economy and the future of the federation.

Three left of centre lists stood against the governing coalition. The Czech Communist Party-led Left Bloc (LB) has become the largest opposition grouping with about 16% of the vote. Its associations with the previous regime will hinder cooperation with the Social Democrats (CSSD — 8%) and the Liberal Social Union (LSU — an alliance of the Green, Socialist and collective farmers' parties with 7%).

According to Vrata Votava, a supporter of the Fourth International elected to the Czech parliament on the Left Bloc list, "the widespread privatization under way will make 1993 the year of mass redundancies and subject the economy to the whims

Petr Uhl

LONG-STANDING Fourth International supporter Petr Uhl decided not to run in the legislative elections and is taking a break from public political life in order to concentrate on his professional activities. This decision reflects in part Petr's opinion that he is unable at this time to influence the development of his country, either as an individual or a member of a group. As part of this temporary pause in political activity, Petr will no longer be considered as a member of the Fourth International, although his fundamental goals remain the same as those of the International and he will continue to fight for the defence and extension of democratic rights.

After having paid for his opposition to the bureaucratic regime with nine years in prison, Petr had a high profile in the "Velvet Revolution". He found himself charged with new responsibilities in a turbulent and difficult period. A member of a small anti-Stalinist and anti-capitalist group, he became the director of the national press agency, the CTK (called the CSTK since 1991), and was soon after elected Deputy on the Civic Forum (OF) ticket at a time when that organization enjoyed wide popular support.

Within the OF, Petr opposed the transformation of the organization into a party controlled by Vaclav Klaus, a committed partisan of the "market economy". He opposed the Civic Movement's lack of a project for building a left organization. One of his last activities as a Deputy was to organize protests against the so-called *lustrace* law (which targets alleged collaborators with the Stalinist regime). He brought together 99 of the 300 federal deputies around an appeal to the constitutional court against this law. When he appeared in court in Brno as a part of this campaign, his opponents organized a public attack on him, which was widely condemned in the press.

Petr also supported an appeal signed by 70 deputies against a provision in the penal code that put communist propaganda on the same level as the propagation of fascist ideas. ★

of German capital. Our alternative to privatization is the lease of state factories to the workforce, with government-backed credits for cooperatives and small businesses. The Left Bloc also opposes the privatization of health and state childcare and the return of hospitals and schools to the church".

The far right Republicans got 6% of the Czech vote and enter the Czech parliament for the first time. Their charismatic leader Sladek has won wide sympathy for his anti-Romany racism, even if other demands like the re-integration of sub-Carpathian Ruthenia (forcibly annexed to Ukraine after the Second World War) attract little support.

Battle of elites

The divergent views of the Czech and Slovak elites over the economic reforms makes the end of the federation sure sooner or later. Both elites are trying to portray the other as responsible, in order to maximize international support. For Czech Communist Party leader Jiri Svoboda "any split up of Czecho-Slovakia will be the fault of the Czech right. Their reform has proved socially unacceptable in Slovakia and they would rather cut the federation than slow down the restoration of capitalism. They would rather have capitalism in half a country".

In the meantime, the strong showing of the HZDS in Slovakia will block the passing of rightist policies in the Czecho-Slovakia's Assembly (parliament) where

legislation must be passed by a separate majority of both Czech and Slovak deputies. While the federation still exists, the HZDS by itself is able to decide whether the Klaus group can pass any legislation. HZDS leader Meciar seems to have taken the decision to support Klaus in the short term, while consolidating power in Slovakia. Any support for a continuation of federal inspired pro-market reforms will, however, benefit the separatist Slovak National Party (SNS) and the SDL'.

A number of trade union sponsored candidates were elected on Czech social democratic and Left Bloc lists. Though the Slovak Marxist ZKS polled under 1%, individuals like Vrata Votava were elected on the Czech Left Bloc list (Votava with the added support of a part of the anarchist movement). Overall, however, the Marxist left in the new parliaments is overwhelmingly drawn from the ex-ruling parties, the Czech KSCM and the Slovak SDL'.

Of the 16% support these parties received in the elections, sociological research suggests that 12% came from older voters (two thirds of CP voters are over 45) nostalgic for the past, worried about their pensions and price rises, or concerned about growing German influence over economic and political life. The rest come from voters who see the CPs as the best chance for building a new left party.²

The ex-ruling parties not only contain social democratic currents but are competing with smaller social democratic parties for the support of the growing trade union movement. An analysis of the treatment of

self-management, co-management and cooperatives in the election programmes of the Czech CP-led Left Bloc and the Liberal Social Union shows the extensive common ground but also the confusion over the nature of an economic "third way".

Worker participation

"Participation of workers in the management of enterprises is of cardinal importance for the competitiveness and economic development of the country. Democracy inside the enterprise is the main democratizing and development trend in the modern world economy", argues the Liberal Social Union, "It is typical of the Czechoslovak 'reform' that it goes against this trend and that that part of the old system which should have been developed was instead abolished. Instead of the trade unions really becoming active at the enterprise level and joining with management to solve enterprise problems, instead of other forms of worker participation being introduced, and instead of decentralizing decision making as far as possible to the level of the work team, in Czechoslovakia employees have been practically excluded from the game. All the above is labelled 'socialist manoeuvres'".³

Both the LSU and the Left Bloc have criticized the current coupon privatization as a lottery which at best will turn citizens into powerless small shareholders and at worst rob them of their share of state property and their savings. Instead they defend the original aim of the current coupon privatization, that of distributing a minority of shares to employees as a motivation package.

The formation of cooperatives and self-management are also put forward as a way of harnessing entrepreneurial energies in the population and as a means of de-stationization in their own right. "Why should privatization projects be judged behind closed doors by unqualified and unaccountable

civil servants and their advisors, most of whom have never seen the enterprise they are deciding about? Why isn't the decision made under public control at the government level, where the problematic is best understood? Why does a government which rejects all industrial policy as a return to before November [1989] act in reality like the Communist Party apparatus at the time of deepest Stalinism?"⁴

For Left Bloc strategist Radim Valencik "privatization has become the end goal of the reforms. Originally, sale to a private owner was only one means of de-stationization. 'Privatization plans' for the forming of cooperatives, or for worker buyouts should at least be given equal consideration. Indeed, favouring such plans would be a genuine way of returning the property to the people, unlike these joke coupon books".

Both the LSU and LB make concrete demands for participatory property forms to have equal access to credit and tax advantages for small businesses. Left Bloc economist Zdenek Haba also suggests that cooperatives and self-managed enterprises be allowed to lease rather than buy the enterprises where they work "to allow ordinary workers to take part in privatization alongside old apparatchiks and the new mafia". The LSU proposes leasing for all small businesses to allow entrepreneurs to put their capital to work immediately rather than seeing it flow — through privatization auctions — into state reserves.

Some representatives of both parties suggest that a majority share for employees will hinder the subjugation of production to foreign capital and will ensure that restructuring is carried out in a humane fashion.

The general model of both programmes is one of fully independent enterprises in a market framework. The Left Bloc sees the problem with the former Yugoslav "self-management" model as lying in the hidden power of the competing bureaucracies

through their control of the credit system. The Communist militant-led Czech and Moravian National Investment Fund is hoping to set up a self-management bank and development centre along the lines of the Mondragon system in the Basque country.

The LSU and Left Bloc proposals for worker involvement face a number of problems and only the behaviour of these parties in parliament will show exactly what their ideas mean in terms of legislation, political campaigns or worker initiatives.

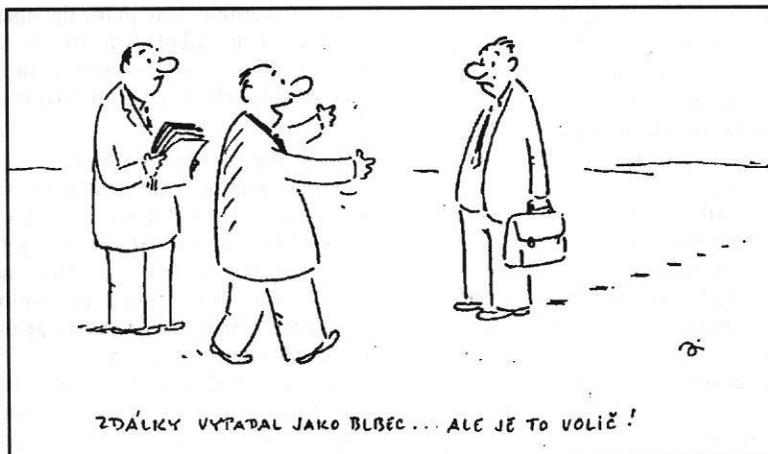
The LSU co-management plan, for example, is based on the quality circles and co-management practised before the Second World War by the Bata shoe firm. In fact, Bata achieved very high productivity by combining worker involvement and a range of non-pay incentives (housing, sports and education subsidies) with suppression of trade union activity and a company police force investigating workers' private lives.

Both parties present management buyouts as a form of self-management and a valid realization of the LSU's promised "priority in ownership of national property to those who work with it".⁵ The Communist Czech and Moravian National Investment Fund also bases its self-management programme on worker-management coalitions. So far, however, management in many factories has used the rhetoric of self-management, or self-management privatization funds, to gain effective control, if not ownership, of "workers'" shares with the aim of maximizing managers' autonomy from state or majority shareholders.

Radical programme

At the same time, it is also not clear whether the two parties appreciate how radical their programme is. Are they really willing to allow the creation of new property forms, or change the national system of credit allocation? This would certainly come into conflict with the LSU's commitment to the "social market economy".

Nevertheless, the development of the above ideas finally convinced a number of workers of the falsity of the central argument of the right wing under Finance Minister Klaus — borrowed from Margaret Thatcher; the claim that, whatever the cost of the reforms *there is no alternative*. The coming months will demonstrate how far left parties in both republics are willing to go in support of democratic and socialist alternatives. ★



"From a distance it looked like a madman, but in fact it's a voter!" (cartoon by Vladimír Jiránek from *Lidové noviny*)

2. See for example the AISA party supporter profiles commissioned by the *Mlada fronta dnes* newspaper.

3. *Ekonomický program*, LSU, April 1992, p. 22.

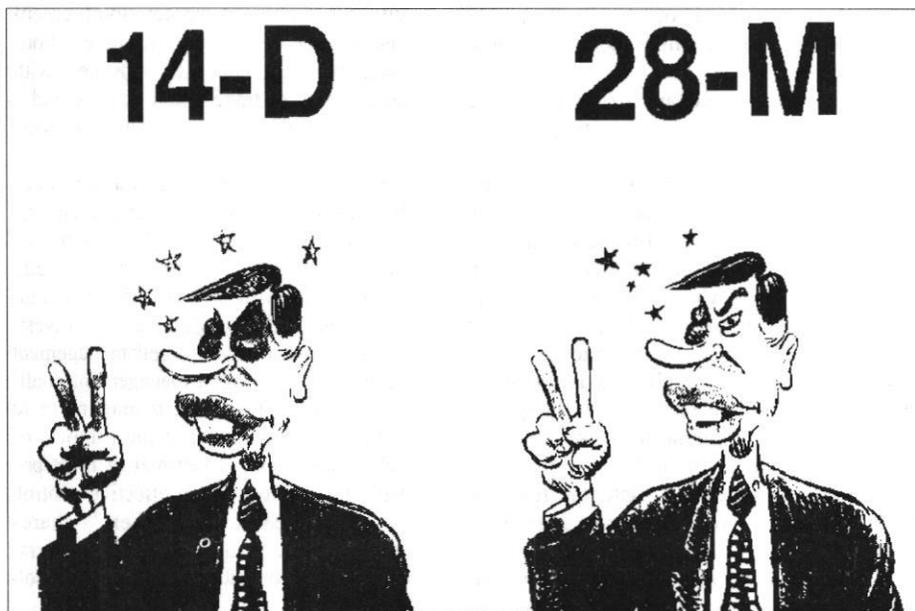
4. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

Resisting convergence

IN ITS enthusiasm to take its place at the top table of the European Economic Union, the Spanish government is mounting an unprecedented attack on the working class. In spite of promises of a hypothetical bright "European" future, the workers have resisted; since the end of 1991 there have been a series of regional general strikes, leading up to a social movement of a breadth unknown since the general strike of December 14, 1988.

International Viewpoint spoke to Joaquin Nieto, a member of the executive commission of the Workers' Commission (CCOO — one of Spain's main trade union confederations).



SINCE 1991 certain regions of the Spanish State, notably Asturias, have witnessed movements of resistance to the government's plans for the economy. The leaders of the big union confederations, the General Union of Workers (UGT) and the Workers Commissions (CCOO), called for a half day general strike on May 28, 1992. How did this come about?

There are three factors at work. Firstly, there has been mounting discontent in response to the economic and social policy of the Socialist government, whose credibility is fading (as with its French counterpart, corruption scandals have played a role in discrediting it).

The anger has expressed itself in a rise in mobilizations and wage conflicts; since autumn 1991 we have seen a series of general strikes in various regions against the creation of post-industrial wastelands. There have been important movements in Leon, and a general strike in Asturias, in Cartagena

and in Galicia on April 2, 1992. On the same date, 100,000 workers struck in Aviles in Asturias and there was also an action in Hernani in Guipuzkoa.

There has been a sharp rise in strikes; the number of strike days in 1991 was well above the 1990 level, while the first four months of 1992 have seen two or three times as many days lost to strikes as in the whole of 1991. The Spanish state is now well ahead in the European strike table.

The factor which finally set the powder keg alight was the government's persistence in its anti-worker offensive despite all the protests. A very tough economic programme is being prepared so that Spain can meet the requirements set in the Maastricht Treaty for it to be in the leading group of Economic and Monetary Union.

The government's "convergence" plan involves a savage attack on the unemployed, the workers and the public sector as a whole, including a decree sharply reducing unemployment benefits. The most recent government measure

announced involves restrictions on the right to strike in the hope of checking the expression of discontent. May 28 was thus a further escalation, perhaps on the way to what is really needed — a general strike in the autumn.

The union movement in the Spanish state is currently discussing Maastricht, which the government is claiming is the reason for the current measures. In the same way as the Confederation of European Unions, the CCOO and the UGT have expressed critical support for the Maastricht accords, which in my view is a mistake.

The union confederations have also expressed their concern about the fact that the macro-economic homogeneity embodied in the Treaty is not reflected at the social level and they have been critical of the fact that the centralization of economic decision-making has not been accompanied by central political decision-making structures. Such criticisms are justified but partial. However, recently we have increasingly been hearing criticisms of the European project as a whole, for example from the United Left (IU — a coalition led by the Spanish Communist Party).

■ **The ruling Spanish Socialist Workers Party (PSOE) has had to resort to exceptional measures reminiscent of Franco's time to get its decree on unemployment passed.**

This measure was not adopted by the usual parliamentary channels but in the form of a decree decided by the Council of Ministers and then published in the official state bulletin. It was neither discussed in parliament nor submitted for consideration to the unions. This *decreto* is a sign of a very authoritarian way of governing; here in the Spanish state we are highly sensitive to this kind of thing, which reminds us of the dictatorship which used to govern by decree.

Then, the government tried to sugar the pill by putting forward a draft law to parliament. They did this in order to head off any union resistance. The general strike of December 14, 1988 was chiefly in protest against an employment plan which discriminated against youth arriving on the job market. The government had to withdraw this plan and it has never been heard of again. Thus, this time, to avoid a similar embarrassment the government wanted to give the law parliamentary legitimacy and make it harder for it to be with-

drawn.

■ **What is the content of this decree?**

It is not yet finalized; it may be amended in parliament. However the proposal is one that affects all wage-earners. The plan is to increase the length of time one has to work before becoming entitled to unemployment benefits from six months to one year. Very many workers in the Spanish state work on six month contracts, in agricultural or tourism for example, and would be deprived of unemployment benefit. Furthermore, the decree reduces the rate of benefit by between 10 and 15%. Here unemployment is the highest in the EEC — at 17% or some 2.6 million people who have little social security. More than half of those without work (1.4 million people) get nothing — and this is only officially registered unemployment. There is also the army of long-term unemployed, and above all of women, who have given up wearing themselves out trying to get pittance out of the state. Thus there are probably some two million unemployed people who get nothing.

■ **Why, after a long period of foot-dragging, have the unions leaders decided to call for a general strike?**

Besides the violence of the government's attacks, the union leaders are also under strong internal pressure. The need to mount a comprehensive campaign against the government's programme was already raised in people's minds by the 1988 strike, which has left very vivid memories among the workers.

Now, after the various regional general strikes, rank-and-file pressure for a large-scale action is rising. The union leaders meanwhile can see that the government's attacks will have long-term implications. They know they have to reply if they are not to lose credibility. During the discussions on what to do, it was middle-level union officials as well as the left that protested against the restriction of this action to a half-day. They realize that a whole day action has a different social impact, and that, furthermore, a half-day action could create conflicts among workers, with, depending on the working day, some going on strike, others missing only an hour or two, with different losses in terms of wages.

The discussion itself is a healthy development, breaking out of the pattern of a leadership decision being seen as something that cannot be questioned — or the idea that an opposition proposal must necessarily be voted down. This is part of a broader development at

least in the CCOO; at the latter's recent congress it was clear that the left's proposals were meeting with a more favourable echo than hitherto. Indeed some of our amendments were adopted; previously the mere fact that they came from the union left would have condemned the most rational proposal to defeat.

■ **Do you expect to see increasing unity between the UGT and the CCOO?**

It has continued since the 1988 general strike, despite conflicts during the union elections. It is inspired by the common pressures we are under and by an awareness of the enemy's determination and the scale of the defeat it wants to inflict on us. Maintaining unity is thus an obligation on all responsible union members.

I think that in the future we may take unity a step further; some of the biggest obstacles to increased unity between the two confederations have disappeared. The political references and links (the PSOE for the UGT and the Communist Party [PCE] for the CCOO) have frayed; the CCOO has simply cut its ties with the PCE while the UGT is at loggerheads with the PSOE — it seems indeed that the UGT would welcome the defeat of the PSOE in elections, since this would split the party.

Furthermore, the mixed system of union representation in all spheres has been accepted on both sides. Even so, the two confederations have different cultures; today it still remains true that most of the CCOO's cadres come out of the anti-Franco struggle, while those of the UGT have been educated after Franco's fall. Unification is not on the agenda.

■ **What happened on May 28, 1992?**

Different strike calls were issued in different places. In some places — in some parts of Euskadi, in the Balearic Islands, in Murcia, in Huelva (Andalusia), in the south of Andalusia and in the canton of Gibraltar there were calls for 24-hour strikes, as was also true for some industrial branches including the mines and steel and among teachers, with the support of students' organizations. The rest observed a half day strike between 5 and 12 o'clock. In this period, electricity consumption in fact fell by 68%, indicating that production had been seriously affected.

■ **You thus consider the strike to**

By royal decree

EXISTING strike legislation, which is based on a royal decree of 1977, before the adoption of the constitution, is already highly restrictive. In the course of different social conflicts, the unions have succeeded in expanding their rights with the exception of the issue of the minimum public service, which the government uses against the right to strike.

The law currently being considered is inspired by the Francoist legislation of 1970 to 1975, without the penalties entailed by the latter. It legally allows the employment of strikebreakers, makes strikes in some sectors illegal and complicates the procedures required to call a strike. The level of minimum public service will be established by the authorities who reserve the right to enforce them in any case whatsoever. Finally, a whole range of individual sanctions, including the sacking of those involved in illegal strike action or ignoring the requirement to provide a minimum public service and collective sanctions, including against union delegates and bodies held responsible for calling "illegal" strikes, are to be introduced. ★

have been a success. What kinds of demonstrations of support were there from the general population?

The fact that there was no unified strike call affected the mobilization. Where a whole day strike was called it was total. Where the strike was partial, the paralysis was almost total in the centres of work, above all in industry, construction and services but there was less impact on social life as a whole. In Madrid the big shops stayed open, but the smaller retail sector was hard hit, above all in the workers' neighbourhoods and the city centre.

The strike was supported by 174 organizations, including all the social movements, 30 ecological organizations, 20 women's associations, 40 youth and student groups, anti-poverty groups, Gypsies, rank-and-file Christians and so on. Even the Catholic hierarchy felt obliged to respond to pressure from below and eight Bishops publicly expressed support for the mobilization. The ecological organizations issued a manifesto in support of the strike, they met with the CCOO and the UGT and made commitments concerning a common approach

to ecological problems. The many informal contacts need to be consolidated.

The unions' strike appeal had a significant impact on the workers, disproving assertions that the unions no longer have worker support. The unions are thus right to consider the action a success; the statements from the other side to the effect that it failed because life did not totally cease are simply demagoggy.

It seems clear that, had the unions called for a 24-hour strike, the dynamic would have been stronger. We have counted 140 demonstrations on May 28, with tens of thousands in the big cities. The biggest was in Madrid (the radio estimated 100,000 people) with the next biggest being in Barcelona.

■ There was an impressive police presence in all the big cities.

The government took this strike very seriously and tried to browbeat the workers by a show of force. Such a police presence had not been seen since the end of the dictatorship; in Madrid, for example, the official figure for the number of police deployed was 17,000. Sometimes you would have a 100 strong strike picket surrounded by 400 riot police. The Ministry of the Interior organized an entire spectacle with police cars rushing about with lights flashing and sirens blasting; a helicopter fluttered all day long over Madrid and so on. Even the most pro-government press reported on this climate. This deployment was making a point to everybody, in a country which well knows the meaning of repression.

There is a clear authoritarian shift going on. A few months ago the so-called Corcuera law (after the minister of the interior) was adopted. This stipulates that the police can enter private premises without a warrant and that people can be held in custody without habeas corpus; the law also restricts the right to strike. The law was passed on the pretext of the need to fight drug trafficking but its main target is the workers. It has already been used against strike pickets during the wage disputes at the end of 1991 and the start of 1992.

What public services functioned on May 28 were able to do so only due to the police presence. In Madrid and Valencia the definition of a minimum service was strict — for example, 40% of buses must run — and thus under police surveillance public transport was ensured in these cities. But it should be pointed out that the buses were largely empty. Even if the unions were not able to prevent buses running the lack of passengers indicated the real level of public support for the strike.

■ Many European countries have seen sharp falls in levels of unionization. What is the situation in the Spanish state? The workers' response to the unions' appeal on the other hand seems to suggest that the CCOO and UGT retain the ability to mobilize.

The rate of unionization in the Spanish state is low — around 20% of wage earners. Unionization has however seen a rise since the strike of December 1988, spreading into new sectors. In the public sector, unions have registered three and fourfold increases in membership. Unionization has remained stable in industry and weak in the small and medium sized firms that employ 80% of this country's workers.

At the end of the dictatorship in 1976-77 the unions experienced a dramatic increase in membership, but were unable to hold on to their gains; they went down the road of social pacts, betraying the workers' hopes. The workers first protested and then left the unions. The fact is, the union leaders did not understand the fragile nature of these post-Franco affiliations. 40 years of dictatorship leave their mark in terms of people's commitment to collective activity of all kinds.

The bosses frequently try to use the low level of unionization to claim that the unions are unrepresentative. But one could say the same for the political parties. The PSOE for example has no more than 150,000 members, of whom 148,000 have public office. Thus as a genuine social organization it is simply zero. However it rules on the basis of its vote (in which abstentions are not counted). Union representation in the Spanish state is based on elections in which between 80 and 95% of the workers participate. These are real elections with competing programmes and ideas between candidates known to the voters. Some 250,000 union delegates are elected every four years; thus the unions have a powerful source of democratic legitimacy. This is expressed in their ability to mobilize — as was seen on May 28.

Finally, the level of militancy and commitment needs to be taken into account. In places with low rates of unionization, union activists have to be highly committed; in many cases merely joining a union means confrontation with the boss. When the government or the bosses use the argument that the unions are not representative, they know they are lying. They have had to accurately measure the reality according to the resistance their measures have encountered. ★

The May massacre

THE Thai army likes to present itself as the upholder of the nation's values — above the private interests that concern the world of business and free from the corruption of everyday politics. The massacre in Bangkok of dozens — probably hundreds — of people in the course of the big pro-democracy demonstrations of May 17-20, 1992, has once more shown what such pretensions are really worth.

These dramatic days also highlighted the acute crisis of the regime, which had been concealed for a time by the euphoria of economic growth between 1987 and 1990. While the new urban middle classes have yet to find a place in the existing political structures, the political role of the armed forces is being challenged and lucrative alliances between high-ranking officers and corrupt politicians are under threat.

It is as yet impossible to precisely measure the impact of this crisis on the country's economic development, on the international position of the government, which is involved in the settlement of the Sino-Indochinese conflicts, or on the rebirth of popular movements which were hard hit by the previous massacres in 1976 and the sweeping repression that followed.

PAUL PETITJEAN

THANKS to the massive spread of videos, Thai citizens were able to see with their own eyes what they already knew, but which government censorship had kept off the TV screens; the extreme violence of the repression during those three dark days of May 1992. They saw soldiers armed with M-16 assault rifles firing in bursts into an unarmed crowd, kicking and stamping on prisoners, the wounded or dead, laid out on the ground.

The Royal Hotel, turned into an improvised hospital, was invaded and the victims torn from the hands of their helpers, the rooms searched and mass arrests made of those who had sought refuge there. The number of victims cannot be known. At the end of May, the government admitted to 50 dead, but it is estimated that a thousand people are missing. The press has published pages and pages listing the names of people sought by family and friends.

Witnesses also watched while the army loaded trucks full of bodies to be taken away and hidden, as they did in 1976, and sharpshooters took aim at the leaders of demonstrations.

Provoking a bloodbath

These events leave little doubt about the determination of the military chiefs to repeat their successful scenario of 16 years ago, provoking a bloodbath in order to bring the movement to an end within a few hours, terrorize and decapitate the opposition and consolidate their grip on power.

Fifteen months passed between the "cold" coup d'état of February 23, 1991 and the massacre of May 1992.

In February 1991 a military group known as Ro-So-Cho, led by General Suchinda Kraprayoon, overthrew the civilian government of Chatichai Choonhavan in the name of the struggle against corruption and the "parliamentary dictatorship" of the corrupt parties. Concerned about its image, the junta promised elections for the start of 1992, set up a commission of inquiry entrusted with thoroughly investigating the previous regime's betrayal of its mandate and appointed a government mainly made up of "competent technocrats".

It also however pushed ahead with creating instruments to ensure the army's enduring political influence. It established an obedient parliament to adopt a new constitution enshrining a semi-elective regime; this includes a



270 member senate, nominated by the junta, which has significant powers, such as taking part in votes of no confidence, alongside the elected 360 member parliament. It created a new party, the Samakkhi Tham, and won over or placed trustworthy men at the head of the civilian parties such as the Social Action Party and the Chart Thai ("Thai Nation") of the ousted prime minister Chatichai.

The junta was able for a time to benefit from the previous government's unpopularity, but the prospect of a long period of military control aroused resistance. At the end of 1991, the junta was obliged to amend its draft constitution, but this was not enough to pacify its critics. The moral credit of the military high command was eroding fast. Apart from its evident will to cling to power, it had toned down its anti-corruption campaign to better negotiate a coalition government.

Military majority

Backstairs manoeuvring ended after the March 22 election with the formation of a majority bloc of five pro-military parties, including the Samakkhi Tham (79 seats), the Chart Thai (74 seats) and the Social Action Party (31 seats). Suchinda, now prime minister, met the demands of these parties by bringing into the government 11 people who his own commission of inquiry had accused of betrayal of trust.

However, the three main opposition parties succeeded in winning more than 150 seats; 72 for the New Aspiration led by former commander in chief Chavalit Yongchaiyut, 44 for the Democratic Party, and 41 for the Palang Daharma ("Buddhist Virtue") of the ascetic ex-general and former governor of Bangkok, Chamlong Srimuang.

The crisis rapidly came to head over the issue of the appointment of a non-elected prime minister (as the constitution allows "if the situation demands

it"). The nomination to the post on April 7, 1992 of General Suchinda, the commander in chief of the army, symbolizing military domination, was the final straw. On April 20, 50,000 people held a demonstration in Bangkok, and on May 4 the charismatic leader of the Buddhist Virtue Party, Chamlong, went on hunger strike. Now there were between 100 and 150,000 protestors on the streets of the capital.

Inflammatory speeches

During the bloody days that followed, the high command made its choice: it would cling on at all costs and strike as hard as it had to do this. The coalition government offered a compromise but then withdrew it. The General-Prime Minister Suchinda made an inflammatory speech, threatening the democratic movement with violent reprisals, making a barely disguised accusation that Chavalit, the architect of the counter-insurrection policies of the 1980s, was himself a Communist and claiming that Chamlong wanted to harm Buddhism, the state religion. He also later claimed that the demonstrators wanted to attack the royal family. Communism, like insulting Buddhism or the royal family, is a capital offence in Thailand; this speech thus gave the justification for the bloodbath to come.

The democratic movement responded swiftly; the demonstrations resumed, this time with 150 to 200,000 people. On May 17, the confrontations began. A police station was set on fire, Chamlong was arrested and the army opened fire.

In the minds of the militant generation of the 1970s, the May 1992 events evoked the sad memory of the killings on the campus of Thammasat University on October 6, 1976. Indeed, the high command wanted a repeat of the same scenario, in the hope of breaking the back of the movement in a few hours at the cost of hundreds of deaths. However this time the mobilization continued,



upsetting the military's expectations and sharpening conflicts within the regime, until, on the night of May 20 and 21, the king broke his silence on television to impose a compromise between Suchinda and Chamlong. The former undertook to release the arrested, the latter to put a stop to the street demonstrations. This is, in fact, just what happened in October 14, 1973, when the army wanted to forcibly disperse a huge student and popular demonstration against the military dictatorship. After two days of confrontation, the king intervened to force the generals to surrender the reins of power.

The comparison between 1973, 1976 and 1992 is illuminating from several angles, both in terms of the similarities and the differences. Let us first of all note some continuities, apart from the use of a bloodbath, the persistence of military rule and the role of the royal palace. Today, as before, the army is at the centre of the crisis. The 1976 massacre was the prelude to the re-establishment of the military regime that had been overthrown three years previously. That of 1992, coming little more than a year after the 1991 coup, is intended to institutionalize military control.

This is not a simply a matter of the armed forces "taking power". For the past 60 years they have been entrenched within the institutional structures, a situation with which there are no strict comparisons in the region apart from Indonesia. The story began in 1932 when a coalition of officers, bureaucrats and liberal academics overthrew the absolute monarchy to replace it with a constitutional monarchy. A year later the military turned on their erstwhile allies and kept power for themselves for decades.

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This has had the effect of leaving the

Thai political landscape littered with (ex-) generals. Most prime ministers have been active or retired generals. This was true of Prem Tinsulanonda, prime minister from 1980 to 1988 and currently one of the influential "private advisers" of the king, and of Chatichai Choonhavan, who succeeded him from 1988 until the 1991 coup. Then there is Suchinda, the head of the junta, who became prime minister after the elections of March this year and finally Somboon Rahong, the governmental parties' new candidate. Just as symptomatically, the two main official opposition personalities are

also former generals — Chamlong, who inspired the May demonstrations and Chavalit, nominated head of the parliamentary opposition by the king.

Armed forces take key ministries

Traditionally the military take certain key ministries, including defence, internal affairs and foreign affairs. They directly or indirectly control, via the state, a significant part of the country's television and radio. On top of their family ties with business, they have other ways of enriching themselves, through heading nationalized enterprises, control of banks, exactions on export revenues and commissions on arms purchases (as is the case with Suchinda).

Factional conflicts in the army have an impact on the whole political system, and play a role in the present crisis. General Suchinda, now 58 years old, graduated in 1953 from the Chulachamklao military academy. He finished his studies in the USA, saw action in Vietnam and worked in Washington where he cemented his friendships in the Pentagon. When he became prime minister he was controlling the whole military hierarchy with his graduation class, the "Class five" of around 130 officers, including his brother-in-law, General Issarapong Noonpakdi, head of the army and the air marshal Kaset Rojananin, who succeeded him as head of the armed forces. The situation is made volatile by the fact that the high-ranking officers from classes three and four resent the monopoly on power of class five, while even within the latter there are competitive tensions.

The Thai system of power is based on a balance and a certain level of interchange between business circles, the

summits of the administrative bureaucracy, the higher officer corps and the royal family. The balance is renewed through a perpetual round of unstable alliances and overlapping relations of patronage.

Although stripped of most of its formal power, the royal family has carefully cultivated its real power. The latter is not so much a function of its fortune (which is, however, substantial, particularly in land and property) as of its sanctified authority. The legitimacy of this 200-year old dynasty was never undermined by the humiliations of colonization as in neighbouring countries.

Thailand, located between French controlled Indochina and English controlled Malaysia, exploited inter-imperialist competition to avoid becoming a direct colony, with all the political, ideological and social traumas that would have meant. The royal family understands the modern world perfectly well, but it also knows how to use patronage, religion, traditional ceremonies and legislation — all relayed on the television — to underpin its moral authority. Even today, the "crime" of *lèse-majesté* (for example, making a joke about a member of the royal family) is punishable by death.

A political monarchy

The king is, however, far from being all powerful. He has to know how to compromise in the light of the balance of forces. The royal family is itself often divided, but plays a full part in political life. Little can be done in Thailand against the categorical opposition of the palace. The king steps in to solve crises, in 1973 against the generals in power, in 1976 by tacitly supporting a coup, or by imposing a compromise as in 1992.

The military remains entrenched at the heart of the regime and the authority of the royal family is intact. But the country is changing. The current crisis has shown that social change is having a growing political impact, as was already perceptible twenty years ago at the time of the student mobilizations. Running against the tide of economic development, the alliance between the army and the bourgeoisie seems increasingly hard to maintain. Since 1973 the system of patronage between senior officers and business people has been dissolving. The bourgeoisie, socially stronger, wants to give most formal powers to the civilian parliament, cutting back the prerogatives of the military. The latter, however, are not inclined to go back to barracks; this was the basic reason for the 1991 coup.

The mixed bag of urban forces descri-

bed as the middle class also feels itself less powerful than in the past. It does not feel represented either by the traditional clientelist parties nor the military. The Party of Buddhist Virtue, led by the ascetic Chamlong, in sober peasant garb and known as Mister Clean on account of his struggle against corruption, won 32 of Bangkok's 35 seats at the recent elections.

The democratic movement — which is not restricted to the capital — that has come to the fore in recent months is complex. Shantytown dwellers took part in the demonstrations and one often found technical high-school students, known as the "mobsters", forming motorcycle columns and launching attacks on soldiers using iron bars and Molotov cocktails — not without being disowned by the leaders of the movement.

The Confederation for Democracy embodied in Chamlong brings together academics, students, unionists, members of the liberal professions, human rights' defence groups, non-governmental organizations, religious communities and so on.

Sociological changes

Reflecting the sociological changes in the country — growing urbanization (Bangkok has ten million of the country's 55 million inhabitants), explosive development of the service sector, including tourism, development of education and so on — the democratic mobilizations of 1991-92 have borne the stamp of the middle class. But political factors are also important, and it is here perhaps that the deepest differences between the crises of 1973, 1976 and 1992 are to be found.

Although somewhat later than in the neighbouring countries, the 1973 uprising in Thailand violently revealed an overall social crisis, combining strictly national elements — the crisis of the regime, of political references, of the agrarian social structure and so on — and the impact of the imperialist war in Indochina which had transformed the kingdom into a land airbase and a holiday camp for GIs. The fall of the dictatorship set free a considerable democratic potential for popular self-organization; the student movement naturally turned towards the new workers' unions and peasant associations. Despite its political and organizational weakness, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) enjoyed great moral prestige.

The 1976 coup d'état did not only represent the military's desire to regain power. It also had a clear counter-revo-

lutionary significance, that of halting the development of a new generation of the radical left far more able than the traditional leadership of the CPT — old and mostly in exile in China — to understand and inspire the struggles of contemporary Thailand. Thousands of students and worker and peasant cadres then fled the repression to join the Communist guerilla movement.

The new dictatorship was unable to smash the revolutionary movement — at least before the CPT



entered into crisis on its own account, unable to politically integrate new forces or break the umbilical cord with Beijing in response to the Sino-Indochinese conflict of 1979-80. In the mid-1980s, the CPT disappeared as a real political force, under the impact of its own internal crisis, the Thai government's counter-insurrection policy and the unfavourable development of the international situation.

The militant generation of the 1970s disintegrated, although some turned to humanitarian, environmental and social activity, and although many of the former 1970's students participated in the 1992 demonstrations. The military regained control of many unions and the independent peasant movement became weaker. The organized political left was thus absent from the scene during the current crisis. Indeed this has been one of its distinguishing features, despite

General Suchinda's rantings about the hand of Communism, which he clearly felt was sufficient reason to murder several hundred people. The void on the left is filled by outfits such as General Chamlong's. But it is quite possible that the 1990s will see a resumption of social, worker and rural struggles. Will these allow the reformation of an organized left? And what lessons will the new militant generation, which has just gone through a bloody test, draw?

General Suchinda has had to resign as prime minister. In two readings Parliament has voted through four constitutional amendments limiting the power of the military — the prime minister must be an elected representative, the Senate will no longer take part in no confidence votes, the president of the National Assembly will be that of the Parliament not the Senate and the second annual sitting of the Assembly will deal with all questions. It requires a vote at a third sitting, planned for June 10, to finally make these amendments law.

However, the governmental five-party coalition has not yet broken up. They have even provocatively proposed another general, Somboon Rahong, leader of the Chart Thai party, for prime minister. The parliamentary opposition has rejected his candidacy and there is talk of a possible dissolution of the Assembly.

The most serious remaining issue is that of the reaction of the army brass. 190 senior army officers met in Bangkok on May 28, among them the heads of all the country's military regions, to reaffirm their support to the high command.

Far from trying to make amends, the army violently rejected the condemnations directed at it. General Kaset even claimed that "certain forces" wanted to destroy the military institution and cause chaos.

The kingdom has again been subjected to the threat of a coup, should the opposition try to gain too much out of the situation or should the self-amnesty of those responsible for the massacre be challenged.

Before resigning, Suchinda prepared an amnesty decree, signed by the king, for all the protagonists of the bloody days of May 17-20.

This was at once an insult to the demonstrators, who had done nothing to apologize for, and a scandal insofar as it lets off the butchers responsible for the killings.

It is an unacceptable manoeuvre, which tries to put an equals sign between the victims and the murderer and put those in power beyond the law. ★

Poisonous gifts

THE environmental organization Greenpeace has sounded the alarm. Along lines seen in other Third World countries, more than thirty-five plans for the commercialization of toxic waste have been proposed to Central American governments since 1978. Some have been rejected by the region's authorities, but others are currently being implemented. If drastic measures are not taken, Central America could become the model dumping ground for the developed world.

JOAN PALOMES*

IT'S a familiar story: the developed world generates dangerous and radioactive toxic wastes which is explained as the price of industrialization, the production of consumer goods and high standards of living. But, paradoxically, part of these wastes are transferred to countries that have not industrialized and whose people do not enjoy consumer goods and a high standard of living. This is the price of under-development.

The way in which the environment has become a subject of controversy highlights the terrible inequality and injustice that characterizes the relationship between these two worlds; the environmental question now appears on the agenda of high-level summit meetings only because East-West tensions, which had dominated all other questions, have faded. Today, the North is forced to deal with these problems.

There is an enormous contrast between the North and the South concerning hunger and misery, science and technology, austerity and the market. The degradation of the environment has become emblematic of the unequal dialogue between the North and the South. This dialogue has high-

lighted the relations between the two regions and the long history of degradation and pillage.

Monocultures have exhausted the land. Pesticides and fungicides are poisonous. Dangerous industries have been transferred to the Third World and have been responsible for veritable genocides. Forests as large as some countries have been blindly destroyed in order to furnish northern homes or to print large editions of newspapers that denounce the destruction of these same forests. The never-ending mining of underground riches has exhausted mineral deposits. The sea, the air and life itself have been contaminated.

Central America has not escaped these phenomena. Exhausted gold mines, sea life on the verge of extinction, vast areas razed. Fertile lands have been condemned to single crops such as bananas or cotton. All this is the consequence of an international economic disorder; of a civilization of waste; of a culture based on profit.

According to the United Nations Commission on Environment and Development, 90% of toxic waste is produced by the industrialized countries. It is estimated that in 1984 nearly 400 million metric tons

were generated — nearly 70% from the chemical industry. The methods used by different countries to rid themselves of these dangerous residues are as diverse as they are unreliable: treatment factories, which is the most widespread system, used primarily in northern European countries; tanks and surface barrels where 75% of toxic waste is deposited; surface dumping sites; the discharging of waste into the sea (in international waters); and finally, the most practical and economic method of waste disposal: the exportation of industrial waste to other countries, particularly the Third World.

Between 1986 and 1988, more than three million metric tons of dangerous waste was sent to developing countries. According to Greenpeace, "this figure is an underestimate, for the real figure is much higher due to the illegal and clandestine traffic in wastes." Environmental legislation in the industrialized countries is strict enough to inspire many industries to opt for this cheap solution. The high costs of depositing waste, obligatory security guarantees in the northern countries, and the ambiguity, if not the absence of environmental legislation in the underdeveloped countries, are factors that encourage this process.

An interesting precedent

As far as environmental legislation is concerned, there is an interesting precedent in the Third World: the 1991 Bamako accord, according to which the countries of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) adopted a total ban on this type of traffic in toxic wastes. According to a report by Greenpeace, "this is the most thoroughgoing legislation that exists in the field of toxic and nuclear wastes and is an example for the Central American region."

Only Belize has passed what could be described as useful environmental legislation. Guatemala and Costa Rica have incredibly weak environmental laws. These laws allow the importation of toxic waste to be used for "commercial and scientific use" or "recycling". Panama, El Salvador and Nicaragua are still waiting for their parliaments to pass laws concerning the traffic in toxic wastes. Honduras still has no law whatsoever on this question.

The most insidious aspect of the hidden elements of the traffic in toxic waste involves the juicy contracts made by large north American and European companies specializing in the traffic in this material. The profits made by prosperous local businessmen who serve as intermediaries for these companies are not to be sneezed at. According to Erwin Garzona, leader of the campaign against the traffic of toxic waste in Central America, "the profitability of

Victims of insecticides

NEARLY two thousand banana workers from Costa Rica have registered a complaint against several multinational firms, including the Standard Fruit company and Shell Oil, both of whom were responsible for the use and distribution of the pesticide DBCP in Guatemala.

More than three thousand agricultural workers became sterile after the use of DBCP in the 1970s in Standard's banana plantations on Costa Rica's Atlantic coast (DBCP was outlawed in California in 1977). Even if these workers win their suit in the first such action that has ever taken place in the United States, no compensation can ever rectify the personal anguish that this forced sterilization has caused: alcoholism, suicide and so on. Other workers were not sterilized; they were merely "contaminated". This could have unknown consequences on their offspring.

DBCP is a particularly effective insecticide against the insects that attack bananas, but it is also a poison for human beings. The company never warned the workers of the risks they faced and furnished no protection whatsoever.

From *Pensamiento Propio*. ★

The Central American dumping ground

GREENPEACE recorded twelve cases of toxic waste trafficking in Central America for the period between January and August 1991 alone.

Guatemala: In January of that year Terra International Services of Miami, Energy Resources, and the N.V. and Trade Company from New York put forward a proposal to build an incineration factory in Guatemala that would use 1.2 million metric tons of fuel per year made up of halogenic solvents with a benzene base from Bayer and Dow company. This project could also include the recycling of used solvents and the generation of "drinkable water". It also involved building cheap housing with the ashes. In spite of its rejection by the national environmental commission, this offer still stands for Guatemala, El Salvador and Costa Rica.

In September of the same year, several loads of radioactive waste entered Guatemala via Mexico, and were deposited in the Department of Peten. According to several sources, the labels on the barrels falsified their actual contents. In March 1991, the Mexican press and a Guatemalan deputy revealed that the Armin trading company of New York had sought to deposit waste from Japan in a ravine near the capital and in the vicinity of a highly populated section of the city — in spite of the opposition of the residents. The municipality of Guatemala and the Agency for International Cooperation had signed an accord — in contradiction to Guatemalan law, which states that dumping grounds have to be located far from populated city areas. The plan was finally cancelled after a public outcry.

El Salvador: In April 1990, a Miami firm announced that it had received authorization from president Cristiani and the army to export ashes from a factory garbage incinerator in Philadelphia; it was destined to be used to build roads. This project was rejected by El Salvador and then by Nicaragua. In October 1990, a Houston factory offered several metric tons of toxic ashes, industrial and radio-active waste from Europe and the United States for construction projects in the Gulf of Fonseca. The ecological and sanitary consequences for this closed and humid ecosystem would have been drastic. A private group from the United States was ready to finance the construction of 500 lodgings, schools, clinics and sporting institutions on land in the Gulf region. The project was rejected by the Salvadoran government.

Nicaragua: In December 1990, a Miami firm made a proposal to the new government of Violeta Chamorro to import tire and rubber refuse to be used for fabricating fuel in an already existing electrical energy factory. This would have produced organochlorure, heavy metal and ash pollutants.

Honduras: In Honduras, a Florida firm discharged one thousand cases of cardboard that had previously been used to pack radio-active material. The normal inspections were not carried out and the boxes were never located.

(From: *The toxic waste business in Central America: an activity to ban*, Greenpeace). ★

these actions is more than guaranteed. The firms pay \$1,000 — and often more — per ton. And we have many examples of loads of waste that are more than 1,000 metric tons."

The firms which are the most involved in exporting waste products are based in Miami. One consortium in particular involves several firms including Energy Resources, Terra International Services, Amin Trade Company and World Wide Energy. It is run by two Cubans, Roberto Gurin and Evelio Lopez. Garzona explained that they "establish contracts with European and North American industries. There is also a special contract with the United States army for the transfer of

waste products."

Their Latin American counterparts have no ecological scruples when profits are concerned. In general, the transactions are negotiated with functionaries or entrepreneurs very close to the governments involved such as Leonardo Callejas, economic councillor to the president of Honduras, and Emin Abufelle, director of La Mosquita Investments, a firm that has imported toxic waste and residual ashes from the United States. The rich Guatemalan businessman Isidro Kisillos, director of the Amy Drive company, is also involved with toxic wastes as are all the sectors of the country tied to the beer industry.

If the lucrative "mercantile" aspect of

this traffic appears shocking, the fact that they are presented as "developmental projects" is nothing less than cynical. The importation of toxic waste is generally associated with plans for the installation of incineration factories and other technologies that present a modern image of development of these activities. The waste traffickers claim that their actions will lead to the creation of more jobs, the construction of an infrastructure, infusion of hard currency etc. They even go so far as to claim that thanks to the use of industrial waste as a substitute for oil, the incineration factories could fabricate cheaper energy.

Immense pollution

The amount of pollution that these industries produce will be immense: gas leaks, ashes — with a high rate of dyoxine — and underground infiltrations of waste will occur and cause incalculable damage to the ecosystem.

The ashes discharged from the factories of large cities in the United States have been frequently offered "free" to Third World countries in order to build roads and cheap housing. It must be pointed out that these ashes contain high rates of heavy metal, furano, and dyoxine, all of which are active carcinogenic agents. This is called "social and economic development". Nothing is said about the incalculable damage to the environment that these wastes cause, nor on the harmful effects they have on human health: cancer, genetic mutations, sterility, damage to the nervous system and so on.

According to the latest Greenpeace report on the traffic in toxic waste, among the waste "offered" to Central America are "asbestos, toxic ashes from incinerating plants, rubber waste, industrial chemical products, nuclear waste, sewage sludge, lead residue, and toxic paint waste." Together, all this contains highly toxic substances, and in the worst of cases, high-density radio-active elements which will be toxic for 100,000 years — a thousand centuries!

Energetic and detailed legislation on the environment must be passed that leaves no room for ambiguity. As Erwin Garzona has pointed out, "local and regional legislation on the environment is essential.

"But a systematic campaign to educate public opinion is also necessary. The media, ecological groups, and environmental movements have an urgent task ahead of them." ★

* This article first appeared in the September 1991 edition of *Pensamiento Propio*, published in Managua.

A new power

MARCH 22 to 27, 1992 saw the first meeting of women from Central America and the Caribbean in Montelimar, Nicaragua under the slogan "a new woman, a new power". More than 500 women took part, peasants, academics, unionists, artists, fighters, Black, White, Native, from Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Belize.

ANNE DURIEUX

THE THEMES dealt with at the meeting illustrate the high level of development of the Central American women's movement. While it does not in its majority define itself as feminist — rather as a movement pursuing demands specific to women — it is becoming increasingly feminist both in terms of its practice and its discussions.

A whole series of intensely "political" themes were addressed, including the strategy the women's movement should pursue, myths and realities of feminism, participation in mixed organizations, the effects of war and neo-liberal policies on women, the situation of refugee and displaced women.

Other themes, hitherto taboo, also aroused great interest — domestic violence, domestic labour, power relations in the family, prostitution, homosexuality and heterosexuality, as well as the creativity and spirituality of women.

Endemic social injustice

Most of the region's women's organizations are highly influenced by the endemic social injustice and poverty, war and violence, and (apart from Costa Rica) the lack of democracy.

Most of the associations were initially formed in response to pressing needs, for survival, to defend human rights or as part of mixed unions and parties. However over the years these groups have challenged their lack of independence.

In Honduras for example, the women's organizations arose from the struggle for political rights, often in the union milieu, before coming together to form the Federation of Women's Organizations in 1951. These women's groups were formed in the fight for a return to constitutional government, and it is only in the past five years that organizations taking up women's rights have been set up.

groups, academics and managers took place in two ways.

On the one hand, a permanent women's forum has been set up to work out concrete proposals for the women's commission of the National Assembly — for example to reform the Family or Labour Code and on the land reform.

On the other, several seminars have been organized, as well as a national meeting on the need to work in a unitary manner and how to arrive at unity.

In Guatemala, apart from the women's organizations closely tied to the popular struggle or concerned with the struggle for survival, there are two longer standing groups, of widows (Conavigua) and of the families of the disappeared and political prisoners (the GAM — Mutual Support Group), which are made up in their majority of Native women who have only just begun to think about specifically women's issues.

It is rare to come across women who call themselves feminists — those who do are to be found above all in the cities and universities. The only association calling itself feminist in Guatemala is Terra Viva.

A symbol of struggle

The figure of Adelaide Foppa, a poetess and co-founder of the review *Fem*, who was assassinated at the start of the 1980s, is a symbol for the struggle of Guatemalan women. Rigoberta Menchu, the tireless peasant revolutionary of Quiche, has explicitly stated her opposition to feminism.

Costa Rica has some features that set it apart in the region, including relative (if declining) prosperity, an absence of armed civil conflict and a well-known democratic tradition.

These factors go some way to explaining the particularly long standing nature of the women's movement as well as its strength and independence and rather more clearcut feminist character. The existence of two organized lesbian groups is also exceptio-

nal for the region.

The group Las Entendidas will soon have been in existence for five years; it has encouraged the birth of another organization, Las Humanas. These two groups have had the courage to organize the second Latin American and Caribbean meeting of lesbian feminists in 1990.

Despite government repression — the interior minister prohibited women from entering the country during the meeting — it was something of a success.

Las Entendidas, Las Humanas and other lesbians were the "stars" of the meeting in Nicaragua. For the first time in Central America the taboo subject of lesbianism was openly addressed in three seminars which had to be repeated to meet the interest.

In the space of five days, the women who came to the meeting believing that lesbianism was a horrible hormonal disorder or a mental disease and certainly a mortal sin were convinced that, if you don't have to be Black to fight against racism or have been raped to oppose rape, you don't have to be a lesbian to defend freedom of sexual choice.

Before leaving they promised their solidarity to lesbians and their hopes to inspire a more profound discussion of the issue of patriarchy in their countries.

The other "stars" of the meeting were the delegations from Nicaragua and El Salvador. The women from Nicaragua had at the start to endure fierce criticism from certain elements in the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Women Militants (AMNLAE), tied to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), who denounced them as "petty bourgeois" and accused them of betraying the people's struggle.

In the end, however, some AMNLAE leaders took part in the meeting along with many women FSLN activists.

No easy models

A lot of the region's women arrived in Nicaragua hoping to find a model, but the Nicaraguan women pointed out that experiences cannot be exported. Their contributions underlined the need for real political, economic and ideological autonomy for the women's movement.

The defeat of the FSLN in the 1990 elections was an important lesson; after a period of doubts and confusion, many women have begun to take advantage of what seems to them to be increased and new freedom to re-establish an independent personal life and do more women's work, no longer out of party duty but from conviction.

Women had begun to ask questions concerning power structures and rank-and-file democracy which brought them under the influence of feminism.



The climate of confidence and the energy of this meeting inspired some women to talk for the first time and with great sincerity about the machismo inside political organizations and among male comrades in arms, about sexual harassment and rape in the guerilla armies, as well as the drama involved in being a woman suspected of being a lesbian in the maquis.

The memories were heard in silence by the Salvadoran women who would clearly have liked to have shared their own. For the latter the issue of autonomy in relation to the organizations of the left and especially the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) is a burning one.

All the Salvadoran women's groups are in one way or another products of the left and the FMLN. Initially formed to recruit women and to organize tasks for the companions of militants — support for the struggle and collection of funds — some of these groups are still closely controlled by political parties and sometimes even have male officials.

At the same time some women and groups have questioned this situation for several years and sought to win more independence.

Intellectual autonomy needed

But, as participants in the seminar on autonomy — mostly Nicaraguans and Salvadorans — pointed out, organizational and even financial autonomy are not enough. Also needed is intellectual autonomy, and this is the most difficult to achieve.

However, the Sandinista defeat in Nicaragua and the signing of the peace agreement in El Salvador, as well as the questioning of socialism occasioned by the disappearance of the Soviet Union, have led many Salvadoran women to challenge organizational and political principles which have been dominant for more than 12 years.

One Salvadoran woman explained that to take one's distance from the party was like becoming an orphan. However, many women asked: "what should you do when the FMLN completely forgets women during negotiations or in the project of

national reconstruction and democratization?"

At the moment Salvadoran women's groups are divided into two main tendencies. One of them focuses on developing its autonomy despite the risks of a split this entails.

The new Women's Cooperation is part of this current. It brings together in a flexible and open form more than 25 organizations of all kinds and organized the preparation of the first national meeting and the participation in the Nicaragua meeting.

On the other side is the Coordination of Women's Organizations (COM), which brings together the four longstanding women's organization, all of which are closely linked to political parties. However there have been efforts to bring the two groups together, above all on the part of the Cooperation.

In order to establish unity before the 1994 elections, allow women to have an input into national political life and deepen their analysis of the patriarchy in their country, the Salvadoran women agreed, after much hesitation, to organize the next continental feminist meeting in El Salvador, probably in November 1992.

Five basic requirements identified

The Montelimar meeting brought together women with different outlooks, and saw genuine discussion in which views changed. Five basic requirements for organizing a Central American women's movement were identified.

Firstly, it is necessary to look at the context in which this movement has developed and its links with the class struggle. This link is both a strength and a specific feature that must be taken into account.

The absence until now of a real impact by the women's movement on political life can be explained by lack of unity which, in its turn, is a result of a lack of an overall project that could form the backbone of united action. And this flows from the absence of ideological autonomy — the winning of which is one of the big challenges.

Finally, the working out of a unifying project, requires mechanisms which allow the whole richness of the Central American experience to be integrated.

There has to be space for all the very different social experiences to be expressed, in order to build a women's movement that can take root among peasant women and women in the popular neighbourhoods, which can seek out the Native and Black roots common to all Central Americans, as well as the religious faith which merges into a revolutionary faith. ★

From one world order to another

"AS people and as Indians", according to the 5th Assembly of the World Council of Indian Peoples held in 1987 in the Peruvian capital of Lima, "we must use the 500th anniversary as the moment to make a critical and constructive balance sheet that goes beyond the disputes between the European great powers. They have conceived of this history in a way that allows them to avoid any serious historical judgement on the people's liberation struggles and on the notion of a real dialogue and cultural exchange between civilizations."¹

MAURICE LEMOINE

ALL the evidence shows that this message has not got through. In January 1992 Luis Yanez-Barnevo, president of the Spanish national commission on the 500th anniversary, exalted over: "the civil work that led to the construction of 250 cities in the first 50 years [after the 'Discovery'], the creation of universities, the undertaking of evangelization, the development of law, hydraulic works and the building of roads... an immense work of colonization in space and time".²

There is no sense in blaming today's Hidalgo for crimes committed by his ancestors 500 years ago, in a completely different historical context. But one could at least have asked that he should not sim-

* This article first appeared in the summer issue of *Volcans*, a Central American solidarity magazine published in Paris. Further information about *Volcans* can be obtained from EDREV, 14, Rue de Nanteuil, 75015 Paris, France.

1. Quoted in *DIAL*, no. 1543, November 29, 1990.
2. *El Pais*, January 21, 1992.

ply forget.

When Christopher Columbus disembarked in "America", the continents already had between 60 and 80 million inhabitants — 150 years later a mere 3.5 million of these Native Americans remained.

Some 40,000 Native Americans, mainly Guatemalans, but also delegations from other peoples, marched through the streets of the Guatemalan town of Quetzaltenango in October 1991, to draw attention to these facts. However they were not just commemorating the terrible past. As they stayed for more than five hours in the blazing sun, these Quichés, Kakchiquele and descendants of the Mayas also demanded the abolition of the civil self-defence patrols³, no more forced recruitment by the military *comisionados* and an end to the repression which has claimed 100,000 lives in the country in the past 30 years. Thus, the opposition to the celebrations of the 500th anniversary is not to do with some "morbid cult of memory", obsessed with mulling over the horrors of the past; it is a protest by a group which still exists, and continues to suffer.

Underlining the real issues

Rigoberta Menchu, a Guatemalan Indian woman who has witnessed the terrible deaths of her father, mother and one of her brothers, and is today in exile, underlined the real issues in Washington in 1991: "We are, without doubt, interested in any research which throws light on the pre-Hispanic cultures and on the historical situation arising from the 'conquest of the Indian peoples', as many put it. But at this century's end, any commemorations must above all focus on today and today's struggles. That is to say, the 500th anniversary should be the beginning of the end of 500 years of oppression and discrimination against millions of inhabitants of our continent".

And, indeed, there would be better ways of marking this event than spending fortunes to present the deeds of the Conquistadores as progressive acts or allowing Spain and, through Spain, Europe, to fete the grandeur of its past and its "civilizing mission".

America, and notably so-called Latin America, remains partly Indian. To this day, and despite the tragic situation of some peoples approaching extinction, there are some 40 million people who identify themselves as belonging to an indigenous group, including Inuits, Iroquois and Apaches in the North, and Caribs, Taínos, Zapotecs, Mayas, Cunas, Chibchas, Xabantes, Quechuas, Aymaras, Yanomanis, Guaranis, and Mapuches in the South. They live as peasants, forest-dwellers or immigrants in the shanty towns, according to rhythms that are not

those of the dominant society. In both North and South they face discrimination whether open or underhand, which deprives them of any form of political power.

Nonetheless, history cannot be rewritten. America has also become an irreversibly mixed society where Indians, Blacks and whites have been thrown together into the melting pot of centuries of turmoil. And while it is true that it is the Indian who suffers the most heavy oppression and that antagonism between Indians and Ladinos [people of Spanish/Indian mixed race] has endured, it is also true that the Ladinos too find the doors of social progress, education and civil participation closed against them, victims of the same exploitation.

The curse of history

The response to the 500th anniversary festivities reflects all the richness, all the weight of the curse of history and its contradictions. In 1988 the Indian organizations of Ecuador affirmed that "without Indian self-government and without control of our territories, autonomy has no meaning" and launched an appeal for a national campaign to be called "500 Years of Resistance". In October 1989, in the Colombian capital Bogota, some 30 Indian and popular organizations from six or seven Latin American and Caribbean countries met, on the invitation of the Indian organizations of the Andean region and Brazilian trade union circle.

The need to bring together diverse ethno-cultural forces in joint work led to the campaign changing into "500 Years of Indian and Popular Resistance". A continental meeting of Indian peoples also took place in the Ecuadorian capital Quito in 1990 on the invitation of the Confederation of the Indian Nations of Ecuador (CONAIE), the National Indian Organization of Colombia and the SAIIC from the United States.

Finally, and only a year before the anniversary itself, Guatemala hosted the second meeting of the "500 Years of Indian, Black and Popular resistance". Here a division appeared among the 249 delegates from 28 countries representing 49 Indian peoples and popular groups — including, for the first time Afro-American groups.

On the one side were Indian organizations concerned with defending their cultures and on the other were the popular non-Indian organizations marked by socialist ideology, and traditions of political and trade union action.

The debate was reflected in the final document which states: "there was a desire for unity, but no real unity. There is still much work to be done: we must not res-

trict our activity to the documents; we have to take the issue of culture into account and find room for it".

The concept of development which the Indian peoples have is closely tied to their vision of the universe, their ethics, their collective identity and their particular fashion of viewing the world. The Ladinos, on the other hand, have a Western model.

Nonetheless, the urge to work together and even develop a common approach to the great problems of the moment is there. The questioning by sectors of Latin American society of "what the European and North American invasion of our continent during 499 years of colonialism and missionary religion has done" draws the issue of the place of the original inhabitants out of the shadows of folklore. At the same time, the condemnation is not only of the past, but of the world order of the present.

"At a time when the United States, now the sole global superpower, is launching an 'Initiative for the Americas' which will add a new link in the already long chain of oppression in Latin America; when cholera, that mediaeval malady, is killing millions of Latin Americans in Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil and Central America because they have lost their right to health-care as a result of pressure to pay the interest on the unpayable foreign debt; when a realignment is taking place among the imperialist countries, involving the formation of new power blocs and the development of new confrontations in the repartition of the world; when Europe, through Spain, has come to America to talk about an Iberian-American integration of neo-colonialist stamp; and where the East-West conflict has disappeared and the Empire can turn its attention to the South, bringing oppression and death in its wake.⁴

Appeal to Europe

At the end of the meeting in Xelaju Noj (Quetzaltenango), an appeal was made to the European countries and the Vatican that the anniversary should not be celebrated. But no one is more deaf than he who does not wish to hear.

Despite the fact that many in the Latin American church are calling for a calm but honest account of the past, the Assembly of Latin American Bishops, meeting in San Domingo, is planning a big celebration in a few months of the 5th centenary of the bringing of the Gospel to the New World and the "marvellous fruits of civilization and progress" brought forth by the "liberating ferment of Christianity".⁵

The prospect is that of a "new mission" and, no doubt, a repudiation of the "preferential option for the poor" promoted by the liberation theologians.

Joaquin Balaguer, the president of the Dominican Republic, one of Latin Ameri-

ca's poorest countries, has taken this opportunity to devote several million dollars to the building of a huge lighthouse in honour of Columbus, a project which involves the expulsion of thousands of families from the site.

Meanwhile, the United Nations has omitted to invite the Amazon tribes to the Rio Environment conference. However a World Conference of Native Peoples will take place from May 25 to 30, not far from the big event. The aim of this is for the Native Peoples to agree on their own Earth Charter, and present this to the summit for ratification.

A sign of the times

Perhaps a sign of all this agitation was the fact that the first Ibero-American summit in Guadalajara in July 1991 recognized "the important Native contribution to universal culture" and promised to "support the cultural identities of the existing Native Peoples and the perpetuation of their languages".

Furthermore, occupied since 1981 by the problems of Native Populations, the UN Commission on Human Rights adopted on February 28, 1991 a draft resolution calling for an "International Year of Native Populations".

Several Latin American Indian organizations are part of the working group charged with working out a draft Universal Declaration of the Rights of Native Peoples to be submitted for approval to the UN general assembly.⁶ In the end, 1993 — after the end of the 500th anniversary celebrations — has been adopted as the international year.

In April 1991, Rigoberta Menchu declared "We Indians are no longer inclined to serve as cheap labour, objects of study, voting fodder, second class citizens, subjects of missionary work or second class soldiers sent to murder their own people. We have had enough of this! We will become historical actors, and the masters of our own destiny". A continent wide strike is planned for October 8 to 12, 1992 to coincide with a "Native, Black and Popular" meeting which is being organized for Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. ★

3. Created in 1981 under General Lucas Garcia to fight armed insurgency, the PAC have about 1 million members, theoretically volunteers. According to the Inter-American Human Rights Commission of the Organization of American States in 1986 these patrols "are too heavy a burden for an Indian population that is already very poor and devastated; they work against their ethnic identity, the development of the customs, languages, ways of life, economy and culture."

4. Final document of the 500 Years of Native, Black and Popular Resistance Campaign, October 1, 1991.

5. *Les rendez-vous de Saint-Domingue*, edited by Ignace Berten and René Luneau, published by Centurion, Paris.

6. *DIAL*, no. 1589, May 2, 1991.

The road to nowhere

LAST November world attention was focused on the Israeli-Palestinian "peace" conference taking place under United States auspices in Madrid. Seven months later, despite all the fanfare, the Palestinians are no nearer achieving their national rights and the state of Israel no more inclined to compromise than before.

Riad Malki is a lecturer at Bir Zeit university on the West Bank and a leader of the Palestinian national movement inside the occupied territories. The following interview with him first appeared in the April 29 edition of the Belgian revolutionary Marxist newspaper *La Gauche*.

WHAT, in your opinion, is the significance of the Madrid peace conference and the subsequent Arab-Israeli negotiations?

In my opinion, their main objective is to oblige the Palestinians to make the necessary concessions to politically liquidate the Palestinian question, that is to normalize in every area the relations between Israel and the Arab world.

In particular, it is about putting an end to the economic and political embargo that the Arab countries have imposed on Israel since 1948. The Palestinians are the bridge over which it is necessary to pass to attain this goal. It is they who are going to be sacrificed to this normalization.

It is necessary to give world opinion the impression that the Palestinians are participating in the conference, but at the same time marginalize to the maximum this participation by ruling out any independent Palestinian delegation.

This is why Israel has demanded that the framework is that of a Jordanian-Palestinian delegation, including only Palestinians from the occupied territories, but not from Jerusalem or the diaspora. We can see that the Israelis have completely succeeded in imposing their point of view.

Under what conditions would you yourself have agreed to participate in the negotiations?

The line of the leading bodies of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was that this participation should be independent and under the leadership of the PLO, in the framework of an international conference under United Nations auspices and on the basis of the relevant UN resolutions, which could alone impose international legitimacy.

Moreover, we demanded a transitional period during which Israel would evacuate

the Occupied Territories while international protection of the Palestinians would be established, with the creation of a Palestinian state as its objective. These were our conditions at the beginning. We are very far from that!

What assessment would you make of what has happened so far?

I believe that this participation, or rather the presence of the Palestinians at Madrid and elsewhere is extremely dangerous, because it comes after the acceptance of all the Israeli conditions. It follows that one also has to accept the results of this conference.

It is obvious that there will be no Palestinian state coming out of this conference. The right to political autonomy will not be recognized.

We will be guided towards a purely administrative autonomy. By accepting this masquerade, we also agree to renounce the possibility of the right of return for Palestinians from abroad. To accept all that is to destroy the foundations on which the PLO has been created and has struggled. It is extremely dangerous. Today everybody knows that after Madrid, Washington and Moscow, there are still no gains for the Palestinian people. It is not surprising because the basis on which this conference has been convened can yield no gains.

At the beginning, the Palestinian delegation said publicly that the first thing that the Palestinians were demanding was the immediate halting of settlements in the occupied territories. It has clung to this illusion for several months. Now that the USA is exerting pressure on the delegation, this is no longer heard. The delegation has recently presented a document in which it gives its conception of administrative autonomy in the territories. The Pales-



tinian state has fallen by the wayside.

I admit that if there was a gain of some kind, like an end to the settlements, I would have recognized that these negotiations had borne some fruits. But it is precisely the opposite that has happened. My original attitude has thus been confirmed.

■ How are the Palestinians currently reacting?

At present, even the Palestinians who were in favour of the conference no longer hope for anything. The decision of the PLO leadership to convene the Palestinian National Council indicates the admission of this defeat. Everybody knows that the Council will make a balance sheet of six wasted months. I believe that the PLO has understood that the Palestinian people are increasingly hostile to these negotiations.

The problem is the non-existence of real democracy inside the PLO. If there had been such democracy, we would never have gone to Madrid. This lack of internal democracy is a problem that we recognize and that we must face within the framework of the PLO.

■ It seems that the internal leadership in the Occupied Territories has not played a real role. For example, little importance is accorded to the role of civil disobedience, such as the call for Palestinians not to work in the construction of the settlements.

It is necessary to state explicitly that the Unified Leadership inside the territories is an extension of the external leadership. The errors of the exterior are reflected inside. Of course, there could not be an independent internal leadership. The participation from inside must take place in the framework of the PLO.

The weight of the interior is not negligible, as was especially true in the first year of the *intifada*. But the internal leadership is financially dependent on the external leadership. That is why the external leadership can influence decisions. It is absolutely necessary to reverse this trend, so that the internal leadership has its place in the PLO and is supported by the exterior.

In the case you mentioned, the internal

leadership has taken a clear decision to stop any participation of Palestinian workers in the construction of settlements. But a political leadership must be responsible. It must at the same time create alternatives so that the workers can make a living.

But the internal leadership does not possess the financial means to create alternative employment. And these means have not yet been provided by the external leadership. Within the Unified Leadership of the Interior, we say that what is needed is a policy of revolutionary economic development in the occupied territories. The priority is to arrive at self-sufficiency in food. Then it will be necessary to work on the quality of the products.

■ Is there a lot of support for this perspective in the Unified Leadership?

Yes, the Unified Leadership has instituted a Supreme Council of Economic Development, whose objective is the creation of a Palestinian state with a Palestinian national economy. But the external leadership has not taken this seriously and has erected obstacles. Moreover, the question of the Madrid peace conference has become the priority question. Aid has been mainly directed towards the projects of those who were in favour of the conference.

■ Is it because of the influence of the Arab bourgeoisies that the external leadership behaves like this?

The leadership of the PLO in the exterior doesn't like to see the power of the internal leadership developing because it sees this as a limitation of its own power. For the same reasons, it does not want to see a decentralization of political decisions. That is why it is not in agreement with the creation of the Supreme Council of the Economy or other things.

Many PLO decisions are not logical. To give work to some tens of thousands of Palestinians, it is necessary to invest. The leadership of the PLO has resources, but it chooses to invest them in diplomacy, in expensive diplomatic delegations.

■ Then I return to my question: what is the weight of the Arab bourgeoisies?

It is true that the PLO is in the image of the Arab world. The leadership of the PLO is thus a bourgeois leadership which tries to be on good terms with the entire Arab world, whether it is dictatorships or progressive regimes.

It is a part of this mosaic. And it is a fact that, because of their financial weight these regimes have influence on the PLO leadership. ★

POVERTY is in the news again. Six million people here are living below the poverty line and the figure will certainly rise in the near future.

According to the definition of the European Community Council of Ministers in 1975, the poor "are individuals and families whose income is so low that they are excluded from the way of life which is seen to be the acceptable minimum".

This minimum is generally considered to be around 50% of the average income. According to this criterion, poverty stood at 7% in 1983 and 10% seven years later, affecting six million people in the former Federal Republic (West Germany).

The essential reason for the growing impoverishment is mass unemployment and the inadequate social security payments for those without work. In 1980 there were fewer than 100,000 households whose primary reason for receiving social security benefits was unemployment; in 1989 this had risen to 479,000.

The most striking demonstration of the growth in poverty is the sharp rise in the number of those receiving social security. At 3.35 million — two million of them women — this has reached a historic high point.

The real figure is much higher since, according to a survey by the Ministry for Youth, Family and Health, only half of those entitled to social security actually claim it, whether for lack of information, shame, fear of social exposure or because they want to avoid being held responsible for paying for children or old people.

According to Federal social security law, social security ought to enable the recipient to a "dignified life". It is a so-called social obligation that is only paid if the recipient has no other source of income. The major item of social security is the shopping basket. The rules concerning the shopping basket allow for:

- 47 grams of meat a day, or 31.8 kilos a year, which is a third of the average meat consumption;
- 40 grams of sausage and 21 grams of cheese a day;
- a bus journey every ten days;
- every ten days a glass of beer;
- one lightbulb a year.

These are shocking figures and their meaning for the claimants is terrible. This shopping basket is simply the muzzle to stop the poor from expressing their needs.

Claimants are recruited to do "socially useful" work without wage payments. They receive between two and five marks an hour — as so-called compensation for additional expenditure. Such forced labour schemes mainly take place in the public sector. If such work is refused, benefit can be reduced or cut off.

There are no social security statistics for

Poverty in Germany

WEST Germany is universally known as one of the richest countries of the world, its social security system the envy of many. However, even here, the imperatives of competition have led to a sharp rise in that essential feature of capitalist society: poverty.

MARC FISCHER*

East Germany. The German Union for Public and Social Welfare estimates that that in 1992 "well over 100,000 applications will be made". At the moment most East Germans who have lost their jobs are getting unemployment pay. However, if after a year they fall into the lower category of unemployment benefit recipients, they will also be claiming for social security. Thus in the near future, the circle of welfare claimants in East Germany is set to rise sharply.

It is already more or less common knowledge that to have work does not mean to have enough to live on. For example, a woman shopworker in Nordrhein-Westfalen gets a gross wage of 1550 DM a month. In Bavaria, the starting wage for a chambermaid is 1312 DM. Thus poverty is also found amongst those in work.

If we take the above-cited European Community definition, we can paint the following picture:

a) A big majority of women workers in industry and commerce earn less than half the wage threshold. This amounts to about two million people.

b) Women white collar workers are in a somewhat better situation. Here some 20% of women employed in commercial and financial institutions fall beneath the threshold.

c) Men, and above all workers, are also affected if they work in the consumer goods sector and in the food industry.

Increase in part-time jobs

But this is only for those in full-time employment. In the course of the development of chronic mass unemployment, working contracts have perceptibly changed. While the total number of full time workers decreased by 150,000 between 1980 and 1989, the number of part-time jobs rose by over 450,000 in the same period.

It is generally the case that normal contracts — meaning permanent jobs with full social cover — are now much less common, while insecure forms of employment have spread.

Among the "abnormal" forms of work are, apart from part-time work, short-term contracts, (including various "work crea-

tion" schemes), out-contracting (both legal and illegal), home work and pseudo-self-employment. It is estimated that some 25% of jobs now fall into this category.

The employers' hiring practices have now developed to the point where every second new job contract is not permanent. This affects especially women, apprentices and the less skilled. This leads to a division of the workforce between a growing army of marginal workers, with insecure and lower paid contracts and a decreasing number of core workers.

Currently, women's average wages are some 25% below those of men. In fact only a small proportion of women workers earn enough to be independent.

And while the situation of the employed woman is bad enough, unemployment — which disproportionately affects women — usually means a descent below the poverty line.

The majority of women in receipt of unemployment benefit get less than 1000 DMs a month; 85% of them are eligible for social security. This is the result of the officially enshrined wage discrimination which means that women receive significantly lower benefits than men.

But this is not all. Only 56% of women meet the conditions of the unemployment bureau, compared to 75% of men. The other big group of women in the Federal republic who live below the poverty line are those bringing up children alone.

It is almost exclusively women who find themselves in this situation and even those with a job usually have a miserable time. While on average the income of fathers with responsibility for children is about the same as that for a standard family, the income of mothers in this situation is significantly lower.

In order to arrive at the average net pension, the authorities calculate on the basis of an "average assured person" who has worked for between 40 and 45 years. However this hides the real situation.

In fact male workers have an average of 35.7 working years behind them when they retire and women a mere 22.6. In the white collar sector the figures are 37.3 and 27 years. This means that average white collar pensions are 1,885 DM for men and 855

for women and unemployment insurance 1,352 DM for men and 508 for women. These figures have a striking consequence: retired women are the biggest single group among the poor.

Low pensions are the most important reason — even more than unemployment — for the rising number of social security claimants. Indeed, some 60% of the total social security bill goes to pensioners.

Rising homelessness

Growing poverty and sharpening social problems are also reflected in the dramatic housing shortage and rising homelessness. The number of homeless has, according to one estimate, reached the level of one million. This embraces four main groups:

1) Those actually on the streets, who do not have any roof of their own — some 500,000;

2) Those threatened with losing their home in the immediate future, that is, who confront eviction for one reason or another in the short term — about 100,000;

3) Those potentially threatened with losing their home, that is with finding themselves in category 2 in the foreseeable future (200,000 people);

4) Those who have grossly insufficient living space, about 700,000 people.

Groups two and three overlap to a large extent with group four, which is how we arrive at the figure of a million.

The housing crisis is condemning ever more people who were previously socially integrated to marginalization. People without a fixed abode are non-people. If you don't have a home, you can't find work and if you don't work you can't find a home. This vicious circle is sucking in more and more people. Every day some 150 people become homeless, falling into social oblivion.

Poverty does not only mean a lack of material goods. It also means a loss of control over one's independence. The authorities rule your life with all manner of regulations, controls and intrusions.

Above all, after a prolonged period on social security, poverty becomes an all-embracing experience. To have much less than others means reduced access to social life, it means being isolated and pushed back on oneself. For many to go down to the social security office is equivalent to passing into the shadows of a society which still seems to give everyone a chance.

Fear of failure and social relegation is a part of poverty. This fear makes you ready to take any job and live in any kind of hole. And that is why poverty is there. ★

* This article first appeared in the June 1992 issue of *Avanti*, published by the Revolutionary Socialist Group (GRS), sympathizers of the Fourth International in the former East Germany.

The eleven days of the ÖTV

THE industrial conflict which seemed to be looming in West Germany a few weeks ago has for the moment been defused, with a series of compromise settlements between unions and employers. However, a vote by public sector workers rejecting the deal agreed by their leaders shows the tensions just below the surface of the patched up edifice of social partnership, as Angela Klein explains.

ANGELA KLEIN — June 4, 1992.

THE agreement signed by the leadership of the ÖTV public sector workers' union on May 10, 1992 was rejected by the membership in a referendum organized by the union, with 44% voting for and 56% against.

Usually a 75% vote is needed to launch a strike, with only 25% needed to accept a deal made by the leadership with the employers — this is in particular the case with the big engineering union, the IG-Metall. The internal rules of the ÖTV are more democratic, 50% being needed to ratify an agreement.

The public sector workers leader, Monika Wulf-Mathies, has come out of the strike with her position significantly weakened, although during the strike she had seemed untouchable. Discontent and opposition have been showing up inside the ÖTV for some time.

No history of militancy

The union does not have any history of militancy and its leadership tends to the right. While its members have shown themselves very determined in struggle they have also been unsympathetic to the positions of the left. Members and leaders have closed ranks against the "social worker" types influenced by the struggles of 1968 and after.

Generally direct opposition to the leadership has not been tolerated and there have recently been expulsions on grounds of disobedience. However these anti-democratic practises have frequently been criticized.

The strike has changed everything. The leadership did not want it; it was forced into against its will, by the

government's determination to impose a new wage policy in the interests of the employers, something that it had already failed to achieve with the steelworkers and bank employees. The government's inability to understand the political climate in the country pushed the ÖTV into action.

Once it had no option but to lead a strike, the union leadership decided to get serious and win an agreement that would be seen as a defeat for the government. Reacting to the government's rejection of a compromise proposed by the "independent" arbitrator and a 90% vote for a strike, Wulf-Mathies said: "Now, we are no longer fighting for a compromise; we are in struggle and we are fighting for the 9.5% we asked for at the start".

The union did indeed then take action, with all the membership following the leadership, including the critics.

On the "left" the only people to criticize the union — using, it must be said, arguments very similar to those of the employers — were the Greens and some associations. They were saying that it was not the time to raise such demands, the union was not showing solidarity with the East and so on.

Union leader takes high profile

The ÖTV leader had a high profile in the strike; she went from city to city visiting the strikers, listening to their problems and acting as their representative to the press. The strike was organized democratically; it was decentralized, and the rank-and-file were entrusted with deciding which enter-

prises and offices to shut down.

Wulf-Mathies answered the government's demagogic arguments firmly, with counter-arguments that expressed the feelings of the great majority of her members and of the population as a whole.

She clearly understood that a public sector strike might prove highly unpopular with the public. She also put herself forward as the spokesperson for all those in the West who have lost out as a result of unification; while defending unification, she pointed out that the workers were bearing three quarters of the costs, and insisted that the rich should pay more.

This was a highly political strike, both in terms of the strikers' motivation (teaching the government a lesson), the stakes involved for the Kohl government (how to resolve the problems posed by unification) and its confrontational character.

This meant that the union side presented its case in terms that went beyond strictly trade union issues in order to gain public sympathy. The public did indeed support the strike, even in its most difficult moments.

Furthermore, the strikers were encouraged by the militancy of the IG-Metall and print and construction unions, who were at the time involved in negotiations and threatening strike action. The accumulation of conflicts raised the spectre of a general strike.

Essential services maintained

The strike was conducted flexibly with the aim of causing the least amount of irritation to users. In hospitals the administration was halted but emergency services were maintained, showing how this kind of problem can be dealt with by the unions themselves without any need for any government imposed strike-breaking "minimum service".

The trains that did not run during the week were back in service at the weekends to allow people to leave for their homes; the waste piling up in the streets was moved in special cases, such as local festivals.

The strike was massive from the start. The ÖTV was well aware that such a movement could not last long, that the determination of the leadership must be clear from the start and that it must hurt.

At the start there were 30 to 50,000 strikers, rising to 450,000 by the end. Every sector was drawn in: city transport, post, railways — especially on

prestige projects such as Intercity Express (ICE) — cleaning services, hospitals, schools and further education and, finally, airports.

The culminating point of the strike was without doubt the total closure for 24 hours of Frankfurt Airport, Europe's largest. All it took to shut it down was to bring the firefighters out on strike. The Lufthansa airline demanded that the personnel from the nearby US airbase replace those in Frankfurt, and when this was refused, took the Hesse government to court, claiming that the authorities forbade the Americans to step in.

All this shows the vitality of the German union movement, with its organizational strength, unity in struggle and awareness of its ability to rapidly bring the country to a halt.

It was no accident that the debate on public sector privatization started again during the strike, this being seen as a means of breaking union power.

In the 1980s some industrial enterprises were privatized and the postal service was partially denationalized. Plans to privatize the railways are underway.

Some state enterprises started using private cleaning firms during the strike; and after the strike there will certainly be a big campaign for wide-ranging privatization.

Despite its victorious struggle, the ÖTV now has to confront a major challenge to traditional forms of union struggle. The bosses are abandoning, at least partially, their line of seeking conciliation rather than confrontation, at least when they had the money.

Budgets squeezed on all sides

Today budgets are being squeezed on all sides and it will take a hard fight to preserve workers' gains. A big effort will also be needed to combat the privatization plans and unionize workers in the private sector as well as victims of deregulation.

For the moment, the question of union democracy is on the agenda at the ÖTV congress to be held June 19-25.

Even if the agreement represented a



“Don't saw off the branch we're all sitting on”

defeat for the government, at least on the political level, public sector employees are not satisfied with the deal either and want to resume the strike. Issues of open negotiations and the possibility for the rank-and-file to influence them have been raised.

Despite the results of the struggle, in which all the militants supported the leadership, opposition inside the ÖTV has grown. It remains heterogeneous, poorly structured and politically weak and it is highly unlikely that there will be a challenge to Wulf-Mathies' leadership, but it may become a more organized force around the issue of union democracy.

Furthermore, the current debates express the new confidence of hundreds of thousands of unionists, many of whom have just had their first experience of strike action.

In the engineering sector, the bosses realized that, contrary to what they had been hoping, the mood on the shop floor was much more radical than among the union leaders and decided to be flexible. The IG-Metall leadership, meanwhile, was fearful of launching a struggle in such a tense political atmosphere.

This is why they signed an agree-

ment which the membership considers very bad — even though at the same time the bosses' side has been denouncing it as irresponsible. In fact the employers view it as a first step towards the wage policy shift they want.

After the two big unions, the ÖTV and IG-Metall, had settled, agreements were also reached in printing and construction. Now wage negotiations have started in East Germany to adapt wage levels to the new conditions.

Combativity of movement remains intact

This strike wave testifies to the changing balance of social and political forces in reunited Germany. The union movement's combativity remains intact — it has not suffered the erosion and the defeats seen in some other European countries. But, at the same time, it is confronted by new problems for which its leaders are ill prepared. Their response at the moment is to defend established positions, but this will not be enough. The challenge therefore is to build a union left able to develop an adequate response. ★

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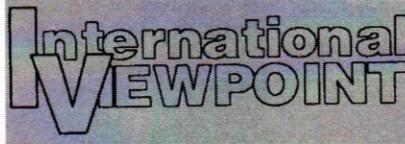
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