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Prospects for the legislative elections

A SURVEY of voters in the May 8 presidential elections showed that 74% of workers voted for Mitterrand, 69% of young people between the ages of 25 and 34, and 57% of youth between the ages of 18 and 24, as well as 52% of women (*Libération*, May 10). The fact that a majority of women voted for the left candidate represents a culmination of important changes in France.

The social categories in which the poll indicated that Chirac got the majority were farmers (64%), employers (65%), retirees (53%) and people over the age of 65 (54%), as well as shopkeepers (73%).

GERRY FOLEY

THE RESULTS also indicated that Mitterrand's strategy of aiming for the liberal bourgeois vote had failed. Only 13% of those who voted for Raymond Barre of the UDF, the supposedly more liberal bourgeois party, voted for Mitterrand. In fact, the crossovers from the National Front (NF) were signifi-

cantly higher (22%).

It seems, therefore, that the Socialist Party president got the bulk of the working-class vote captured by the NF. "If not all Mitterrand's voters are on the left, the profile of his electorate is a classically left one," *Libération* commented in its May 10 issue. In any case, it seems that even the

limited promises of economic benefits for the working class and poor offered by the Socialists counted for a lot more electorally than their displays of "moderation" and overtures to bourgeois politicians.

Polarization seems likely to increase in the June 5-12 legislative elections, according to the polls taken before the opening of the official campaign. A survey on May 14 indicated a first-round vote of 42% for the Socialist Party, about 8% higher than François Mitterrand's first-round vote in the presidential elections and 5% higher than a poll taken on May 8.

Even on the day of the second round, the lines were already drawn more clearly than Mitterrand apparently wanted. The poll indicated that 58% of all voters and 65% of those who voted for the So-

cialist Party president wanted new parliamentary elections. Mitterrand sought to avoid dissolving the assembly by getting enough UDF deputies to support his government. These maneuvers failed.

The SP then tried to get bourgeois politicians to run on its "presidential majority slate." Again it failed. There are just 40 non-SPers on the slate, 17 from the bourgeois Left Radicals and 23 independent "progressives," including the Marseilles millionaire Bernard Tapie. After a Socialist victory, however, bourgeois politicians may demonstrate more interest in the SP's offers, when such alliances would hold the SP back rather than help a majority SP government into office.

Maneuver to create left/centre coalition

A poll done on May 14 gave the left 49.5%, as against 47.5% for the right. It also pointed to a continuing polarization of the left vote in the legislative elections, a drop in the far-left vote from 4.5% in the first round of the presidential elections to 1% and a further decline in the Communist Party vote. The two mainstream bourgeois parties have increased the pressure for polarization by deciding to run a joint slate under the title of the URC [Union and Rally of the Center].

The legislative elections present high hurdles for the far-left groups. It is necessary to have a slate of 80 to get just eight minutes' TV time. The minimum cost for running a candidate is from 20,000 to 30,000 francs. That means from 1,600,000 to 2,400,000 francs for a slate of 80 candidates.

Lutte Ouvrière, a far left group that claims to be Trotskyist, proposed a joint slate to the Communist Party, and after receiving a refusal announced that it would not run candidates. The Movement for a Workers Party, dominated by the current led by Pierre Lambert, which ran a weak campaign in the presidential elections, decided to sit this one out.

The French Greens are not identified with the left per se, but most of their voters went over to Mitterrand in the second round. The Green candidate in the 1981 presidential election, Brice Lalonde, was given a post in the Rocard cabinet. They decided not to run a national slate in the legislative elections, although Green candidates will run in Alsace, where the party's presidential candidate Antoine Waechter got especially high votes in the first round.

The dissident current recently expelled from the Communist Party, the *rénovateurs*, decided not to try to run candidates, apparently because that would interfere with their linking up with a new dissident current in the CP that surfaced after the presidential elections, the *réconstructeurs*.

Thus, the only serious attempt to offer a far-left alternative in the legislative elections is the slate of about 50 candidates pre-



sented by the committees that supported the candidacy of Pierre Juquin for president. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), French section of the Fourth International, participates in the committees.

SP succeeds in polarizing left vote

In one Paris constituency, David Assouline — an LCR member and leader of the massive student mobilizations in December 1986 — will run against Alain Devaquet, who introduced the legislation that touched off the student struggles. Assouline was also Juquin's campaign manager (see IV 138).

The Socialist Party offered the Juquin committees three deputies within the framework of the "presidential majority." The proposal was rejected.

The Socialist Party's success in polarizing the left vote, however, has given it a very fluid electoral constituency. A considerable part of Mitterrand's vote in the second round had to come from people who supported the Communist Party and the far left, which together got over 11% of the total vote in the first round. Greens who voted for Mitterrand in the second round, many of whom are probably left-opposition minded, would account for about 3% of the total vote.

Therefore, together these categories would make well over a quarter of Mitterrand's vote. Furthermore, a large part of the historic Communist Party vote apparently went to Mitterrand already in the first round. The threat of an aggressive and reactionary right helped to mobilize left voters for Mitterrand.

However, the mood after Mitterrand's election seemed much less confident than that following Mitterrand's first victory in 1981. Many of those interviewed on TV expressed distrust of Mitterrand and an SP government. It is apparent also that, unlike in 1981, workers are not expecting the government to fight their battles for them.

National Front likely to lose deputies

It remains to be seen whether the "presidential majority" will be as successful in mobilizing left voters in the legislative elections, in which the right is united and on the defensive. That may be a more difficult and perilous battle for the SP than the presidential elections. But the left has the benefit of momentum.

Before the opening of the official campaign, the polls pointed to a drop of about a third in the National Front vote. Le Pen faces three unfavorable factors. The abolition of proportional representation means that the NF is likely to lose most of its deputies. Secondly, the legislative elections are less open to a protest vote or for making a point

on a single issue like immigrant workers. Thirdly, the union of the respectable right is a big obstacle to local deals between the NF and the more right-wing elements of Chirac's party.

However, Le Pen's movement is likely to win local strongholds, particularly in Marseilles, and it is not a normal electoral animal. It feeds on growing discontent and disorientation among mass popular layers. In that respect, the election of a weak Socialist government at a time when the economic picture is darkening threatens to open up new opportunities for the National Front. Le Pen has already begun a demagogic barrage against the presidential majority's "pink millionaire" candidate in Marseilles.

In its May 19 issue, François Sitel wrote in the LCR paper *Rouge*: "Two years of Chirac's policy have been enough to convince the majority of the voters of the need to get rid of his government. In the last days of the presidential campaign, the connivances with the extreme right turned into indecent invitations for an open alliance. The threat represented by the rise of the fascist and racist Le Pen current became more menacing. The urgent need to defeat the right was confirmed by the presidential election. It is necessary in the legislative elections to win a left majority and a government based on that."

"How can you fight Le Pen without dumping austerity?"

"This is necessary to undertake a real left policy. Mitterrand and the SP's project of an alliance with the right is totally reprehensible.

"How can you fight Le Pen without dumping the austerity policy and the rotten combinations that feed it? How can you do that by allying with those...who are the direct enemies of the workers because they are the loyal representatives of the bosses?

"Change must come through struggles....Only united mobilization can win the demands of the workers — a 35-hour week, a 6,000 franc minimum wage and a guaranteed income on that level, defence of social security, independence for Kanaky.

"A policy of breaking with the bourgeoisie, its representatives, its parties and its interests.

"A policy based on unity, mobilization and self-organization of the workers following the example of the current struggles at Chausson, SNECMA, Michelin and the mobilizations in the winter of 1986.

"We must wage this battle. The best way is by running candidates on this basis. Can the committees formed during the Juquin campaign do it? The signs are that they can. These committees have already demonstrated their capacities, in particular on May 1." Whatever the outcome of the French legislative elections, the need for a real left alternative will become more pressing. ★

"NATO" election results in unstable parliament

A SNAP election was called by rightist premier Poul Schlüter on May 10 to get a mandate for subordinating Denmark to the discipline of NATO. This was his response to a majority vote by the Socialist People's Party, the social democrats and the Radical Liberals for reaffirming ships carrying nuclear weapons from Danish ports. (The Radical Liberals, a small bourgeois party with an anti-militarist tradition, have been the Achilles heel of the rightist coalition.)

GERRY FOLEY

SCHLÜTER's move had a certain, limited success. The parties identified with opposition to NATO or its military policies all suffered losses. The Socialist People's Party (SF), a left social-democratic formation originating from a split in the Communist Party, suffered a loss of 1.6%. The Left Socialist Party (VS) dropped from 1.2% to 0.6%, falling far short of the 2% required for representation in parliament. The Communist Party dropped from 0.9% to 0.8%. The Radical Liberals lost 0.6%, falling to 5.6%. The pro-NATO social-democratic party gained 0.5%.

But the government parties did not gain in the voting either. The two main parties in the coalition, the Conservatives (Schlüter's party) and the Liberals, had roughly balancing gains and losses, the former losing 1.5% and the latter gaining 1.3%. The big-

gest winner was the anti-immigrant ultra-right demagogic Progress Party of Mogens Glistrup, which nearly doubled its vote, going from 5.5% to 9%, a gain of 4.2%.

Despite the losses of the anti-NATO forces, the overall effect of the election was to weaken the government and destabilize parliament. The "respectable right" did not get enough seats to form a majority government. In fact, its vote declined. In an editorial on the election results in its May 14 issue, the Copenhagen daily *Politiken* noted: "In the 1984 election the government parties got 48% of the vote; in 1987, they fell to under 45%; this time these parties got only 43.5%."

The "respectable right" can continue in office only by getting passive or active support from either Glistrup on the one side, or the workers' parties on the other. The right's parliamentary game is further complicated by the fact that the Radical Liberals and the Progress Party are sharply opposed, and it seems difficult to form any sort of bloc including both.

Like Le Pen's score in France, the vote for Glistrup's Progress Party seems to reflect contradictory currents. Some observers think that a large part of it could be an anti-political vote, in particular a protest against too many elections. The last parliamentary election was less than a year ago.

The Radical Liberal party is based largely on well-off professionals, who favor anti-working class economic policies but are traditionally anti-militarist and philosophically liberal. Thus, it remains an awkward partner for the bigger parties of the right, and an obstacle to any understanding with the Progress Party.

There are 179 seats in the Danish parliament (175 for Denmark and four for Greenland and the Faeroe Islands). The two working-class parties have a total of 79 seats, well below a majority. The parliamentary right parties have a total of 80 seats, also well below a majority. The Progress Party has 16. In fact, if a far left party or bloc had topped the 2% barrier, the working-class parties would have had four more seats and a clear lead over the parliamentary right.

The Socialist Workers Party (SAP), the Danish section of the Fourth International, supported a common slate with the CP and the VS. But the bloc was broken at the last minute by the Communist Party. After this, the SAP decided to run candidates on the VS list.

Two types of governments have been talked about. One is a combination of the SF, the Social Democrats and the Radical Liberals (89 seats); the other is a minority government of the parliamentary rightist

parties. The social democrats allowed a minority rightist government to rule in the past. There is also said to be some support in the Progress Party parliamentary group for supporting a government of the parliamentary right from the outside, but the presence of the Radical Liberals in a coalition would be a big stumbling block to that.

Participation in a coalition with the Social Democrats and the Radicals would force the SF to accept austerity policies. Nonetheless, the SF leadership decided on May 12 to go for such a combination. "With only one vote against," the Copenhagen daily *Information* reported, "the national executive gave its negotiators a mandate that was chemically clean of demands that the Radicals could be expected to oppose."

Information also said: "Several participants in SF's national executive told us that there is an overwhelming mood in the party



leadership to overcome the differences on economic policy that have until now led the Radicals to write off SF as a firm partner."

In an editorial in the May 12 issue of its paper, *Klassekampen*, the SAP made the following comment on the setback for the left in the elections: "Despite the fact that opposition to nuclear weapons and NATO has been the distinguishing mark of the SF since its birth, this party managed to 'fudge' both on the question that provoked this election and on a series of others — 'Yes we are against NATO, but we don't want to talk about that,' 'Yes we are a workers' party, but the workers have to prepare themselves for a wage freeze,' 'Yes, the Radicals are a reactionary bourgeois party, but if necessary we will collaborate with them'."

The SAP stressed the setback caused by the Communist Party's decision to go it alone: "The SF left lots of room for a left alternative. After the last election it was clear that neither the VS or the CP had much of a chance to get over the threshold. The way to assure a left presence in parliament was electoral cooperation...the main responsi-

bility for the failure to achieve that lies with the CP....When the CP broke away, it opened up the way for the argument about not 'wasting your vote'."

Even so there were other opportunities that were lost: "The SAP and VS took a small step in the right direction, when we ran candidates on the same slate. In the course of the campaign, the Humanists declared that they were supporting Slate Y [the VS], but the VS did not seize the opportunity to present Slate Y as a power that wanted collaboration on the left. Even if the VS stood firm in its opposition to NATO, forced pension saving and incomes policy, the party was not up to clarifying its political profile, which was obscured in the last election.

"Especially on radio and TV, the VS did not stand out as a clear left alternative to SF. The party's decision not to criticize other workers' parties certainly appealed to many people....But it was a political error, because it remained unclear what decisive difference there was between the VS and SF."

The lessons had to be drawn from the advance of the Progress Party, the SAP stressed: "The way forward is not taking responsibility for an irresponsible capitalist economy and 'realistically' accepting the rules of an unserious parliamentary playground. There is a need for a clear and aggressive left that criticizes the system and acts outside parliament, which unconditionally defends the interests of the working people and other oppressed layers."

The lack of a clear left alternative had opened up the way for reactionary demagogues whose sphere of activity would not be limited to a deadlocked and discredited parliament. "With a clear and aggressive proposal for a 'solution,' the Progress Party was able to almost double its votes and become the winner in the elections. The extreme right has gained strength from a racist policy...and a sharp criticism of parliamentary frivolity.

"This is going to have consequences not only for the parliament. The Progress Party's gains will make it easier for racist gangs and Nazi groups that find a breeding ground among Glistrup's followers."

In the context of great economic instability (Denmark is heavily dependent on foreign trade, has a huge foreign debt and high unemployment), parliamentary breakdown and a number of racist outbreaks in the recent period, the advance of the Progress Party is threatening. It points up the need for two things that were notably lacking in this election — a clear working-class alternative and a working-class united front. ★

Seafarers' strike: a lost opportunity to challenge anti-union laws

THE P&O strikers at Dover have been betrayed by the right-wing leadership of the National Union of Seamen (NUS), a traditionally moderate union.

On Thursday, May 12, the NUS national executive committee, on the recommendation of general secretary Sam McCluskie, ordered all those striking in solidarity with the Dover crews to cease all action and return to normal working the following day. As a result of this, the Dover strikers, who have voted to continue their strike, are now dangerously isolated in the course of a major struggle with the biggest shipping employer in Britain.

ALAN THORNETT

THE DOVER strike began early in February in response to draconian working conditions imposed by management, which would have made 500 seafarers redundant out of a workforce of 2,300. P&O demanded seven days on and seven days off working — 24 hours a day, seven days in a row. This represents a huge increase in working hours for less pay. The crews would work 16 hours in each 24 hour period, with the other eight hours unpaid but during which they would be required to remain on board and on call. The strikers argued that this would damage the life and the health of the crews and seriously endanger safety.

It is a measure of the determination and ruthlessness of the employers' offensive in Britain today that the management responsible for the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster can impose such conditions so soon afterwards. The new conditions are linked both to inter-company competition within the ferry industry in anticipation of the Channel tunnel, and the generalized employers' offensive orchestrated by the Tory government.

The Dover strike arose directly out of this. In January, crews working for the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company occupied the ships in opposition to new working practices. When the NUS balloted all its members who worked for ferry companies for strike action in their support, it was defined as "secondary action" by the High Court and declared illegal under the Tory

trade union laws.

The law has become a massive factor in the trade-union movement in Britain today. Strikes are only legal if aimed solely at the direct employer and have been agreed by secret ballot. Once a strike has been declared illegal, the courts are empowered to close the union down by seizing its assets. They can also impose unlimited fines and unlimited damages for loss of trade.

McCluskie at first said that the national strike should continue, and that he was prepared to defy the law and go to prison if necessary. He then called off the strike and complied with the law. His decision was a disaster for the NUS and rendered it virtually ineffective, since its only real strength is in its ability to call national action involving the whole of the industry. Strikes against individual employers can be quickly isolated and defeated. This is now the situation faced by the P&O strikers.

Only one vote against strike action

After the general return to work, P&O crews at Dover stayed out on their own account. Dover is not a traditionally militant port, yet in a secret ballot of the 2,300 seafarers only one voted against strike action. That level of solidarity remained for the first two months of the strike.

McCluskie was opposed to the Dover

strike from the outset, saying that it was unwinable, and that he was "not prepared to be another Arthur Scargill". He tried repeatedly to obtain a vote to call it off, but was rejected each time at mass meetings.

Although they are isolated, the Dover strikers are clearly fighting the battle for the whole industry. If P&O, by far the largest operator, were to be successful, other employers would follow suit. They are also fighting for the NUS, since winning the Dover strike is the only way it could remain a viable union. The NUS has already suffered because of the huge reduction in the British Merchant Fleet in recent years, which has reduced the NUS to a total membership of 20,000.

The strike has been maintained by the self-organization of the rank and file and financial support from the labour movement. Food kitchens in Dover and four other nearby towns provide a cooked meal every day for over 1,000 families. The most important rank and file leadership is in Deal (five miles from Dover) where the Kent National Union of Mineworkers gave their offices to the strikers. They have been strongly supported by Terry French and other victimized miners travelling the country to generate support from early in the dispute.

Later, a women's support group was formed, comprising both wives of striking men and women strikers themselves. They have played an increasingly important role as the strike has progressed. This development in such a male-dominated industry is a direct result of the role played by Women Against Pit Closures (WAPC) during the miners' strike. Kent WAPC activists have been working with them.

P&O announce sacking of Dover strikers

In mid-April, direct pressure from the Dover strikers forced the NUS national executive to hold a ballot of all NUS members for a national strike in their support. P&O went to the High Court and obtained an injunction ordering the ballot to be stopped and the ballot papers impounded! McCluskie promptly complied, and Dover remained isolated.

At the end of April, however, there was a dramatic development. P&O announced the sacking of all those on strike and the employment of scab crews to replace them, the ending of all collective agreements and the de-recognition of the NUS.

The rank and file responded immediately, and the strike spread to Dover Sealink crews who refused to cross the picket line. McCluskie spread it further, with a surprise declaration that no British ferry should sail from any British port. Within 24 hours, action spread to 19 other ports.

The P&O move split the strikers for the first time. Management claimed that a majority had responded to their call and signed the new contracts — a figure grossly exaggerated and hotly contested by the NUS.



On the picket line at Dover (DR)

Several hundred strikers agreed to return to work and formed the basis of P&O's scab operation. P&O flew the scab crews to Rotterdam to bring back two ferries so as to begin a skeleton service from Dover to Belgium ports. They began to bus the scab crews through the Dover picket line.

On May 3, Sealink — whose entire fleet was at a standstill because of supporting action — went to the High Court and obtained an injunction requiring a return to work on all their ships forthwith. It was again an outright confrontation between the NUS and the courts. McCluskie was on the line again!

To the profound surprise of militants inside and outside the industry, he made a public statement saying that the union should defy the law, accept the consequences, and extend the action beyond the ferries: "This decision will lead to a spread of industrial action to British ships throughout the world. Members will stay out until a just settlement is reached with P&O."

Soon afterwards, the national executive of the NUS called an all-out strike of the whole of their membership, including those on deep-sea ships. Announcing the decision, McCluskie said: "The NUS is not bricks and mortar, typewriters and desks. It is the men and women who go to sea and stand together to defend their right to work and fight for justice. If forced to choose between protecting the property of the union or standing by my members, I will always choose the latter."

Direct challenge to Tory anti-union laws

It was a momentous decision. Since the Tory anti-union laws were used against the NUM in the 1984-85 miners' strike, it has been clear that the only effective response is to defy the law, spread the action and call on the labour movement for support. This has been the problem with all the major strikes since the miners' strike. During the

1986-87 Wapping dispute, the print unions' official policy was that they would not break the law. They were equally determined not to spread the action beyond the Wapping plant. It was precisely this policy which brought isolation and defeat. Now, the NUS' decision raised the possibility of a challenge to the Tory laws themselves.

McCluskie forced to act

McCluskie enlisted militant rank and file leaders from Deal to implement his call. They travelled the ports from ship to ship, calling them out. Virtually every ship came out, with the exception of several small memberships on prestige cruise liners. All ferry crews struck at all ports, along with supply ships to the North Sea oil rigs. In several ports, ships were occupied after crews were sacked for taking supporting action.

The High Court fined the NUS £150,000 (about \$280,000) and ordered the sequestration of all its assets. This involved the seizure of its £2,800,000 (\$5,200,000) funds, the closure of all its local and national offices, the freezing of wages to its staff, the suspension of its pension fund, the impounding of the union's cars and the cutting off of its telephones.

McCluskie's response to this decision was that the strike would go on and the union would continue to defy the courts. If necessary, he said, he would be prepared to "run the union from a tent on Clapham Common"! (an open space close to the NUS national headquarters in London). The executive then issued the following statement :

"When other members of the NUS attempted to take action in support of their P&O colleagues, the law declared that the union must cease to exist. This may be the law, but it is not justice".

It was a remarkable development, with a right winger leading the most important challenge to the anti-union laws since the

end of the miners' strike. And there was a clear dynamic to the situation. If the NUS continued to defy the courts, the penalties would, if the law was applied to the full, increase to a point where the rest of the labour movement could be drawn in.

If the course of events and the implications of what is happening to the trade-union movement can force McCluskie to act, this must be at least possible with other right-wing and left-wing leaderships, including the national union confederation, the TUC. This is an important political point, since others on the far left, such as the British Socialist Workers' Party, argue that the bureaucrats can never be forced to act and to mobilize the movement, therefore we should forget about them and simply organize among the rank and file. This misunderstands the relationship between the rank and file and the union leaderships, denies the ability of rank and file organization to force the official structures to act, and concedes the movement to the bureaucrats.

The response of the labour movement in general to the sequestration was to raise cash for the NUS from official donations to shop floor collections. Even the Labour Party Shadow Cabinet called for financial support, confronting a threat from P&O to take them to court for supporting an illegal strike. At the same time support groups, some of which still existed since the miners' strike, began to function or be set up.

The response of McCluskie was to go the TUC and from there, with TUC general secretary Norman Willis, to the conciliation service ACAS, where they began discussions with the chairman of Sealink, James Sherwood. He agreed to try and get P&O chairman Jeffrey Sterling back to the negotiating table. (McCluskie had made an earlier, unsuccessful attempt to use Sealink in this way.) Behind the scenes, Willis was telling McCluskie that the TUC could give no practical support while the strike was

with the courts.

P&O chairman Jeffrey Sterling is not a chance character in this strike. He is closely connected to the Tory party, and was a member of the Tory party's advisory body that drew up the anti-union legislation now being used. P&O also contributed £100,000 to Tory party funds last year — something that is allegedly not unconnected to the government's decision not to hold an enquiry into the *Herald of Free Enterprise* disaster.

After several days of negotiations a deal was stitched up by which the NUS would exempt Sealink from strike action and they, in return, would put extra ships on P&O's strike-bound routes crewed by 450 of the sacked P&O strikers. The jobs would be temporary, ceasing to exist when the strike came to an end. Willis was so keen on this rotten deal that he even said the TUC would pay the wages of the rest of the strikers, for a period, if they would accept it! McCluskie fought hard to make the deal stick, but it was rejected at a meeting of representatives from all the ports. It was not a firm rejection, however, since their terms were 750 jobs with Sealink.

Lorry drivers became involved in the situation when a backlog built up on each side of the Channel. Drivers blocked the ports in an attempt to force the two sides into a settlement. Although some of the drivers directed their criticism towards the intransigence of P&O management, the action was overall reactionary. The drivers were almost all non-unionized, and many of them anti-union owner/drivers who simply wanted the strike ended on any basis.

Within a few days of the NUS' decision to defy the law, it was clear that the strike had to develop further or reach a crisis point. The pressures of the situation were such that the action either had to spread beyond the shipping industry or face a collapse of the leadership. A crucial factor was the role of the courts. The law was deliberately not used to the full, in order to avoid pushing the situation to a new level. For a week, no further action was taken against the NUS whilst the momentum of the strike stagnated. On May 11, the High Court made its next move. The NUS were fined another £150,000 and warned that bigger fines would follow if their contempt of court continued. The same day, Sealink threatened to sack all of its crews that remained on strike.

These moves were the final straw for the NUS leadership. The following day, May 12, they ordered all those taking supporting

action back to work. McCluskie argued that the odds were now too great and that the strike was crumbling. However, this was not the case. In fact, the strike was holding remarkably well considering that it was being given no direction by the leadership except for deals with another employer.

Remarkably, the Dover strikers met after the rest had returned to work and voted — again with only one against — to continue their strike.

But the return-to-work decision was a disaster both for the NUS and the Dover strikers, who were now back in an isolated position. McCluskie's new strategy for the

as well, and had clearly put pressure on McCluskie. They told the NUS that they would get no support of any kind while the strike was illegal. As soon as the return-to-work had taken place, the TUC announced a £1 million fund appeal to help the NUS! On the future of the strike, Willis had the same line as McCluskie and the *Morning Star*. He said: "The aim now is to hit P&O where it hurts — in the pocket. And I would urge anyone planning to cross the Channel from Dover not to sail with P&O but sail with Sealink!" He put forward the slogan: "Sail Safe and Say No to P&O"!

The Dover strikers are continuing the struggle and they must get full and unstinting support from the movement. The central problem, still, is to break the isolation they are now in. The policy of the NUS must be reversed. This is difficult since the NUS conference, meeting just after the return-to-work, endorsed McCluskie's action by a majority decision. But this has to be tackled just the same.

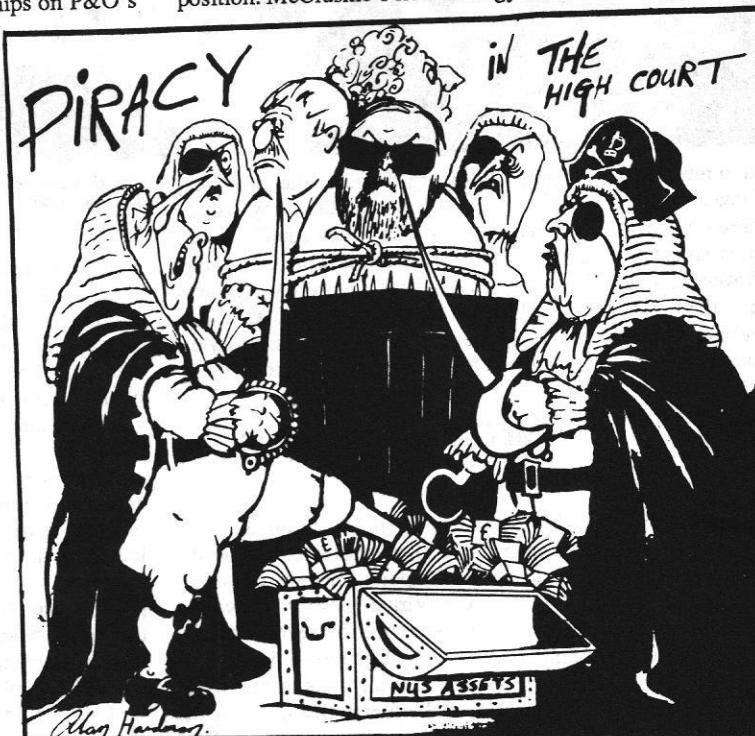
Other unions have a responsibility as well. P&O scab ships are still being handled by T&GWU dockers at Dover. In the past few days, dockers in the French CGT union at Calais have handled the first scab ship to go into a French port. This is difficult to reverse if ships are being handled in Britain.

The Dover strikers have to be maintained in their struggle, which is the responsibility of the labour movement. The work of the support groups has been strengthened over recent weeks, and that is important. This needs to be extended and strengthened more to generate financial support, support for the picket lines at Dover and the initiatives of the strikers, and also to discuss the progress of the strike and its problems.

A week after their betrayal of the strike, the NUS leadership has still not been allowed to purge its contempt of court and recover its funds.

The court is now saying that the picket at Dover is illegal, because there are more than six pickets and they are intimidating those who want to go to work. The more the courts are complied with, the more strictly they interpret the law to the advantage of the employers.

The law has been strengthened by the betrayal by the NUS leadership. It is a serious blow to the Dover strikers and a disaster for trade unionism in the shipping industry, but it also represents the loss of a crucial opportunity to challenge laws which are the biggest single problem facing the trade union movement in Britain today. ★



strike was to link arms with Sealink and wage a "commercial war" against P&O! The NUS, he said, should urge the general public to use Sealink ferries instead of P&O's, on the basis of P&O's safety standards. This was a direct re-run of the diversionary "consumer boycott" policy of the print unions at Wapping.

This betrayal, however, is not just the responsibility of the right wing and the "new realists". It was fully supported by the Communist Party as well. The headline of their newspaper, the *Morning Star*, on the day following the sell-out (which did not contain a hint of criticism of the return-to-work instruction) was: "Sealink Declares War on P&O"! The article began: "Shipping company P&O finds itself besieged in a commercial war of attrition this morning. After the NUS yesterday instructed its members to cease all secondary action, rival operator Sealink announced that it is to increase its Dover services at the expense of P&O... P&O now faces the danger of being squeezed in an economic vice between the Dover picket line and Sealink's increasing share of cross-Channel traffic."

The TUC were firmly behind the betrayal

Benn and Heffer challenge Labour leadership



Tony Benn
(left) and
Eric Heffer
(DR)

TWO WELL KNOWN members of the Labour Party's left wing Campaign Group of MPs, Tony Benn and Eric Heffer, have decided to stand as candidates at next autumn's LP conference for leader and deputy leader of the party. With the majority party leadership swinging to the right under the pressures of Thatcherism, the left has welcomed this opportunity to put forward a socialist alternative that can challenge this rightward slide.

Finn Jensen interviewed Tony Benn about his decision to stand and the campaign around the candidacies in his Chesterfield constituency on April 29.

WHY ARE you and Eric Heffer standing for leader and deputy leader of the Labour Party? It seems widely accepted that you are not going to win, mainly because of the trade-union block vote.¹

I have been nominated for the leadership post in the Labour Party for the last five years. But at the time we wanted to do everything to defeat Margaret Thatcher. Therefore about a year ago — just before the general elections in June — some of us who had been meeting regularly thought that the best thing to do would be to have a conference on socialism, starting just after the elections.

We had this amazing conference in Ches-

terfield in October last year [see *IV* 131]. We had expected 500 people. There were 2,000! And the second conference, planned for June this year, might be even bigger because of the leadership contest. This movement gives people a lot of hope. Then, in January 1988, the Campaign Group [a left grouping of Labour MPs] discussed whether to put forward a candidate for the position of leader of the LP. Everyone thought it was wrong to do it so soon after the general elections.

But the pressure to stand against [LP leader] Neil Kinnock began to build up again. I personally had many doubts about it because I feared it would divert attention from the Chesterfield conferences, that it could lead to a major defeat that would be damaging to the left. But we consulted the movement. We sent letters to every constituency [local LP branch] and got a very encouraging response. And on March 21 at a meeting I did not attend they decided to nominate me and Eric. So I did not seek the leadership nomination, but when it was put to me, I accepted it.

■ What was the reaction?

The first thing that happened was a tremendous opposition to the idea of having an election, which was damaging to those who put it forward, because how can you oppose elections as such. So we won that argument. Now we have local elections on May 5, so we will concentrate on winning those before stepping up the campaign for leader and deputy leader.

What is happening in the national leadership of the party is that it is drawn not even toward centrism, but toward the Thatcher consensus: on NATO, the EEC, the single European Act, market forces and the rest. And the build up of opposition is very strong. Although I am a bit sceptical about it, there was a public opinion poll in the *Observer* last Sunday saying that 39% wanted to vote Labour and 14% of the total population wanted me to win as leader of the Labour Party. This represents over six million people!

The engineers' union (AEU) had its national committee last weekend and 35% of the delegates voted to support me. The constituency support is coming in. It is not that

we calculated beforehand that we would win. But what we are doing is injecting into British politics the case for socialism in a way that has not occurred for many, many years. And with the growing militancy of the seamen, miners, teachers, printers, health service workers, transport workers and so on, there is now a mood for a stronger opposition to Mrs. Thatcher, for a clearer opposition in the future, for the parliamentarians to be out in the struggles, as I was last night at Dover.

I think that the arguments for socialism are very powerful arguments at this particular moment. And it is, of course, a foundation for whatever happens later. Whether we should stand for election every year [for the leadership] is a tactical choice we can make later. But it is clear that while the party is being shifted to the right this argument has an impact, and may even have an impact on the leadership. For example, the leadership actually agreed to a resolution supporting the seamen. I don't know if they would have done that if there had not been a leadership contest. The leadership did not support the miners nor the health workers, but they supported the seamen on Wednesday. I have had 2,000-3,000 letters, running 12-1 in favour of standing as leader.

■ How do you see the campaign relating to the class struggle outside the Labour Party?

I have always related the struggle in the Labour Party to the class struggle in general. During the miners' strike, I did 211 meetings for the miners. I went on the picket line at five pits in Chesterfield every week. So it is not a new thing. But one of the arguments of our campaign is that we think all the MPs should support people in struggle, not just be limited to the parliamentary arena, and that they should present a clear alternative and campaign for it. It should be internationalist, socialist and democratic in character. And I think that among the individual members of the Labour Party that is what they want.

It might be that the trade-union votes will

1. The leadership election is determined by an electoral college made up of a bloc 40% of votes for the trade unions, 30% for the local constituencies and 30% for MPs.

go against us at the LP conference because of the way the voting works. But if the constituency parties give support to our campaign it would be a tremendous step if we got anywhere near half of their votes. And it would make it difficult for the leadership to dismiss socialism.

■ Your campaign has caused some problems in the Campaign Group. Some women left the Group [who were opposed to the leadership challenge], and you were not able to get a woman candidate for deputy leader.

It is not that it was not tried. I would have liked one of the two candidates to be a woman. We tried to persuade the obvious person, Audrey Wise, but she was not ready to do it. About the people who have left the Campaign Group — I am sorry that they left [some of them only left temporarily]. One of those who left now supports John Prescott's campaign for deputy leader, so there is political confusion among some of them....It represents a different political position to some extent.

■ If the LP's current leaders, Neil Kinnock and Roy Hattersley, get away with introducing all their right-wing policies, do you think that could lead to a split in the Labour Party in the longer term?

No. Historically, the right wing has left the Labour Party [the 1981 split to create the Social Democratic Party]. Something like 18 MPs have left the Labour Party, including a previous leader and two ex-deputy leaders. But the left is very loyal to the party because the party is the instrument of the working class movement. I am not in favour of splitting the party. Moreover, the majority of the policies in the party are those we stand for. So what we might see if our campaign is successful is more people going to the Social Democrats.

■ Your campaign seems to be stronger in the local LP constituencies and weaker in the trade unions. Why is that?

It depends how the trade unions organize their decision on who to support in the leadership election. I have sent out a letter to the trade unions, saying: "Will you please consult all your members", because one of the main purposes of the campaign is to get a discussion going. If the decision is taken at the top, there is no discussion. We are first of all interested in the widest discussion. And every constituency with five to ten wards [sub-branches] having a discussion will make 8,000-12,000 discussions on socialism. Secondly, if you have a concentration of members and you add all those minorities together, you have an idea of the strength of the argument. And the purpose of it is to re-establish the legitimacy of socialism in British politics.

10 ■ The Bennite left has often been compared to new political currents in Eu-

rope, like the Socialist People's Party (SF) in Denmark, the Greens in Germany, Pierre Juquin and the *rénovateurs* in France. Do you see yourself as part of a new political current in Europe?

No, I come from a very old political tradition. When the social democratic tradition in Europe moved towards bureaucracy, capitalism and militarism, we see the reappearance of an old radical, democratic and socialist tradition, with a new dimension around women, ecology and so on. I am sure that if the argument was put to the Labour Party, the majority for such policies would be there, but it takes time to do it. And the Chesterfield conference is such a start. So we are not on a split course. We want to keep links to the trade unions, which are unified in Britain in the Trade Union Congress and not divided along party lines.

■ Will the Chesterfield conference in June be centred around the Benn/Heffer campaign?

No, it is broader. It is a movement for socialism, not a political party. It is partly because of the success of this movement that the leadership campaign has come about. But we also hope that socialist ideas will spread into the feminist movement, the green movement, the peace movement, the Black movement and the Labour Party. So

the Benn/Heffer campaign is a matter for the Labour Party and affiliated trade-union members.

■ The seamen's strike is escalating and becoming more politically important...

What makes this dispute different is the de-recognition of the National Union of Seamen (NUS). The company, P&O, no longer wants to negotiate with the union. This is therefore the first major attempt to obliterate the trade unions. With the miners and the Ford workers, the bosses wanted to beat the unions. But now they want to obliterate them. And it has produced a tremendous response. P&O has put £100,000 into the Conservative Party. The manager of P&O was a key adviser to Norman Tebbit [the former chair of the Conservative Party].

The courts will, of course, implement the anti-trade union laws. We are witnessing similar attacks to those in the last century when peasants and workers were deported to Australia in order to destroy the movement. We therefore have to mobilize the maximum support for the seamen and their trade union.

At Chesterfield, for example, we will have a seaman speaking at our May Day rally. Every Labour Party member and trade unionist should come out in support of the seamen. ★

Key policies for the Benn/Heffer campaign

- ◆ We support the restoration of democratic rights to working people through their trade unions, and the liberation of local communities so that the councils they elect can provide a really high standard of essential services.
- ◆ We challenge discrimination and inequality based on sex, class, race, sexuality or faith.
- ◆ We believe that the whole apparatus of the state requires fundamental reform if the processes of government and the law are to be more open and more accountable to those they are supposed to serve.
- ◆ We uphold the right of women to control their own lives in the political, economic and personal spheres; we are committed to ensuring that women do have full opportunity to become political and economic decision-makers throughout society.
- ◆ We want to see proper provision for leisure, for earlier retirement, for lifelong education, for the encouragement of the Arts in all their forms, and the establishment of a genuinely fair mass media, free from monopoly private or state control.
- ◆ We demand measures to protect the environment and the animal kingdom from exploitation.
- ◆ We believe that Britain should announce its intention to withdraw from Northern Ireland, and should work with the Irish people, as good friends and neighbours, to help secure reunification and peace.
- ◆ We believe that Britain should be working more actively for peace throughout the world, by diverting arms expenditure to the needs of development; by adopting non-alignment, outside of all military blocs and without foreign bases on our soil; and should support efforts to secure cooperation across the whole of Europe, free from all restrictions under the Treaty of Rome.
- ◆ We want to encourage closer economic, industrial, social and political links between working people here and those in other countries; we support all those peoples in Africa, Asia, Latin America and elsewhere fighting for freedom against dictatorial and oppressive regimes; we believe in socialism and democracy in all parts of the world, east and west. ★

AROUND THE WORLD



MOZAMBIQUE

Renamo massacres

A US report accuses Renamo, the South African-supported guerrilla movement, of being responsible for massacres and atrocities in the zones that they occupy. The report was commissioned by the Refugee Programs office of the State Department to investigate why around 20,000-30,000 Mozambiquans were flooding into neighbouring countries every month.

At the end of April on the basis of the study Roy Stacy, the Vice-Secretary of State for African Affairs, accused the Mozambiquan rebels of perpetrating one of the worst holocausts since the second world war. In one year, 100,000 people have become victims of Renamo.

The investigator was sent by the United States to refugee camps in Zimbabwe, Malawi (where 450,000-500,000 Mozambiquans are living), Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique itself. He questioned nearly

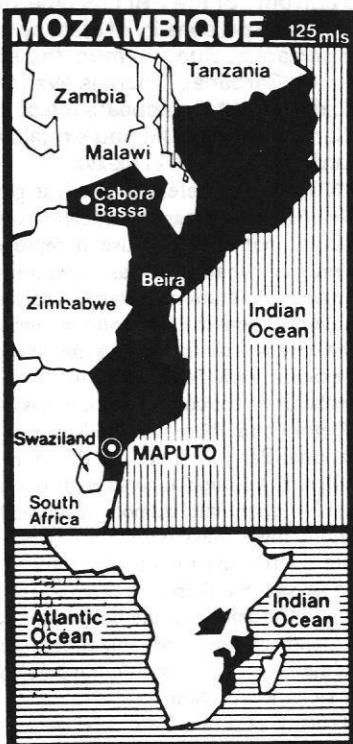
200 refugees, 90 per cent of whom said they had fled to avoid the conflict that is tearing their country apart. Their accounts of the reasons for the emigration clearly pointed the finger of accusation at Renamo, although Frelimo [Front for the Liberation of Mozambique] forces were not entirely unblameworthy, even if to a much lesser extent.

Renamo resorts to violence to provide its rebels with things it needs to continue its struggle: provisions, money and labour. Renamo acts in a barbarous and inhumane way towards the populations in the zones it controls or crosses. The refugees spoke about the daily horror that Mozambiquans have suffered for years. Renamo resorts to kidnappings to replenish its ranks. Even children are not spared. Depending on their age they are either put to work in degrading jobs or enrolled as fighters from the age of 10 or 12.

According to this report, the rebels do not hesitate to massacre entire families to force villages to obey them. In addition to the massacres are the battles engaged by Renamo and the regular Maputo troops that result in many victims among the civilian population who are caught in the cross-fire.

While it appears that the conduct of Frelimo soldiers has clearly improved since 1986, Renamo's exactions multiply.

The United States has not officially accused South Africa of supporting Renamo. Even though Roy Stacy refrains from explicitly naming the Pretoria government, he stated that those who supported Renamo, wherever they are, cannot wash the blood off their hands unless they immediately stop all support for this unbelievable violence. ★



NIGERIA

Massive strike wave

THE RISE in prices for oil products (a 6% average increase), decided by the Nigerian government under pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), sparked off a wave of protests without precedent since President Babangida came to office in 1985.

The massive strike movement ended with an agreement at the beginning of May between the unions and the government. But it represents only a suspension of hostilities, given that many questions raised by the strikers were not resolved.

The unions won their demands that there would be no victimizations of strikers, and that arrested strike leaders would be released. The government promised to encourage negotiations on wages as soon as possible, and to rediscuss the question of petrol price rises — although the best that can probably be hoped for is that the recent increases will now be frozen.

This violent reaction was not really surprising given that the debate on abolishing subsidies has lasted some months, and that since the beginning of the negotiations with the IMF the ruling military group put off taking this decision, which all observers agreed would be unacceptable to the population.

The price rises became a symbol both of the IMF's "interference" in Nigeria and as a measure that has directly affected the whole population. Nigerians have suffered from a successive onslaught of economic reforms over the past years. The decision appeared all the more bizarre to Nigerians because their country is one of the world's big oil producers. They cannot understand why they no longer benefit from petrol prices that are among the lowest in the world.

The first reaction to the price rises was the tragic riots at Jos, put down at the cost of six deaths. The unions took over from the students, and slowly paralyzed the country, in particular the capital, Lagos. The insurance companies and the banks went on strike, and the suspension of their activity threatened other sectors.

A ban on all demonstrations or strikes, announced on April 25, had little effect. But this move showed that the government was ready to react rapidly to a crisis that could quickly become serious.

On May 1, Lagos international airport was closed following strikes caused by petrol price rises. Transport was minimal, and thousands of functionaries found it difficult to get to work. The tension grew and security was reinforced at strategic sites, in particular at the government's headquarters, Dodan Barracks, and around oil installations.

The government had only a very small room for manoeuvre. If the strike movement had taken on a national character, it would have developed into a showdown of forces. The chaos and complete disruption of central economic functions had jeopardized efforts to get the economy back on its feet — an economy devastated by years of bad management.

On the other hand, in order to continue its policies the government needed the backing of the IMF more than ever, and they will certainly not compromise around the question of oil product subsidies. It should be remembered that Nigeria's foreign debt is estimated at around \$26,000 million.

If a future national strike movement takes off, it could well be much more embarrassing for the government, which only just managed to avoid its oil industry being paralyzed. ★

"The PRT's election campaign is based on mass struggles"

FOR BETTER OR WORSE, the July 6 general elections in Mexico will mark a turning point for the country. The candidate of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) is calling for a sharp right turn to "free enterprise" and liquidating the remaining gains of the Mexican revolution. The elections are also coming in the midst of a severe and growing economic and political crisis, with the ruling party split for the first time.

In this context, the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT, the Mexican section of the Fourth International), is running an extensive campaign with some mass support. In the following interview, Sergio Rodríguez, a leader of the PRT, describes the crossroads that Mexico has reached and the Fourth Internationalists' campaign.

WHAT IS new in the Mexican elections that will be held on July 6 is that, in the context of an economic crisis, a political crisis has opened up in the PRI. How does the PRT analyze the situation?

Some people want to reduce the crisis the country is experiencing to just an economic one. But we think that it is something deeper, that there is a crisis of the whole system of domination set up in 1934. This system of domination has come into conflict with the economic projects that the bourgeoisie and the imperialists have for Mexico, especially the role of the trade-union bureaucracy and the forms of organizing the peasantry in Mexico.

The state that arose after the Mexican revolution was seen by a good part of the Mexican people as coming out of the revolution. In fact, the revolution combined different aspects. While it guaranteed the growth of the bourgeoisie, it also institutionalized many gains of the mass movement, in particular the revolutionary peasant movement.

For example, Article 123 of the constitution establishes an element of workers' control over production, the right to strike, an eight-hour day, a sort of sliding scale of wages and so on. In agriculture, the peasants have been allowed to possess the land collectively for generations in the *ejidos*.

Today, both the bourgeoisie and the state think that these elements no longer serve any purpose, that it is necessary to change

all the labor laws and transform the *ejidos* into agri-businesses. This change means that the ranks of the three million landless peasants that we have today would be swelled by the four or five million more that would be affected by this measure.

The bourgeoisie's starting point is that Mexican productivity has always been one of the lowest in the world. So, Mexico needs deepgoing changes. *Newsweek* has published an article on the project of the PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, in which he explains that it is a sort of Mexican *perestroika*, which is going to mean changing a political system as old as the one in the USSR.

"It is the beginning of the end of the Mexican social consensus"

This is the bourgeoisie's long-term plan. But the problem for them is it is not quite the same thing to advance a plan of this sort under a military dictatorship, without a social consensus, and to do it in a system whose basis is precisely social consensus. This policy is breaking the social consensus and thereby engendering a series of problems inside the PRI.

A new generation of PRI leaders has emerged, one that wants to institute this policy. It is no accident that the PRI candidate is 37 years old, and that he is displacing a whole older generation of PRI

politicians. The latter are very anti-democratic and very much implicated in corruption. But they also have popular roots and links to the peasant, trade-union and other mass organizations.

All these sectors are seen today as "dinosaurs," people who are not modern and who have to be shunted to the sidelines to open up the way for a new generation of people educated in the United States, who got their doctorates from places like Harvard, and who do not come directly from the social organizations traditionally controlled by the PRI.

In the last analysis, as I said, this phenomenon reflects a crisis of political domination in Mexico, the beginning of the end of the Mexican social consensus. This is why it is very important. What has given this regime the stability that it has enjoyed for so many years is that it presented itself to the people as the heir of the revolution. In putting this heritage in question, the regime is also putting in question the image that it has presented to the masses.

In fact, some political commentators in Mexico suggest that in the same way as Miguel Aleman changed the party's name to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (under Cárdenas, it was called the Party of the Mexican Revolution), Salinas de Gortari should make another change and call it the Institutional Modernizing Party or something in that style.

■ **It is in this context that the "democratic current" of the PRI has emerged. It includes a personality of great symbolic importance, Cuauhtemoc, the son of Lázaro Cárdenas. There is even talk in Mexico about the appearance of a new "Cardenism." Could you explain what Cardenism means in Mexico?**

"Cardenism" refers to the last government that had a clear identification with the masses, not only because it represented them but because it was continuing the Mexican revolution. Lázaro Cárdenas became president in 1934 and remained until 1940. He was really the great modernizer of Mexican politics. He modified all the mechanisms for controlling the masses.

Before him, there was the Revolutionary National Party founded by Plutarco Elías Calles. It had managed to institutionalize the revolution, but had not yet succeeded in conducting a mass policy, a policy of the state controlling the masses. This is why people say that there is a "Cárdenas" mass policy. Cárdenas got the bulk of the workers' and peasants' organizations and the middle layers to come into the Party of the Mexican Revolution.

Trotsky said that Cárdenas' party was a "popular frontist party," because within this party there were workers, peasants, sections of the bourgeoisie and so forth, and because it simultaneously conducted a very

1. On Cardenism, see *Notebooks for Study and Research* 6, "Populism in Latin America," £2.50, \$4. [Available from NSR, 2, rue Richard-Lenoir, 93108 Montreuil, France.]



radical anti-imperialist policy and advanced a project of consolidating a social pact among the classes.

"Cardenism" marked the consciousness of the workers in Mexico, because it carried through a series of important measures, which made gains possible for the Mexican proletariat and peasantry. The most important were those carried out in 1936, with the expropriation of the cotton-growing land in the northern part of the country, at a time when cotton was of great importance on the international market.

The landowners were American. This was the most important expropriation that we have seen in Mexico. It benefitted about 60,000 families. It took on a great significance because the landlords, *latifundistas* and White Guards opposed it, even using arms. Cárdenas armed the peasants to defend the land.

Moreover, in 1938, when oil workers went on strike to form a national union and get a contract signed, Cárdenas proposed nationalizing the oil industry. This had a fundamental historical significance for Mexico. It was a confrontation of the entire nation with imperialism, to such an extent that there started to be talk about the imperialist countries invading Mexico again, and that provoked an impressive mobilization. People brought their humble belongings to the government palace — chickens, turkeys and so on — to give to the government in order to help it pay the oil debt.

In general, Cárdenas gave a lot of land to the peasants, supported the workers' movement organizing to form the Mexican Workers' Confederation (CTM) and so on.

Internationally, he also played a very important role. His was the government that most openly backed the Spanish republic in 1936, much more so than the USSR or France.

Specifically, in the case of Mexico, the international brigades could count on the support of the government. It even called for the formation of such brigades. At the end of the Spanish civil war in 1939, the Cárdenas government offered many ships to transport refugees. In this way, it made it possible for many Spanish children to get to Mexico. It also offered asylum to Trotsky in 1938.

There is even a letter by Cárdenas in which he explains some very important things. It says that in a period when there was fascism in Germany and Stalinism in the USSR, when the entire world was experiencing defeat of the workers' movement, in Mexico the mass movement was making progress. It was a time when there were even possibilities for a social transformation, given the level of radicalization of the mass movement.

Thus, Cárdenas advanced quite a progressive and anti-imperialist policy. However, there was another facet of Cárdenas' policy, which Trotsky explained very well when he talked about the two aspects of Cardenism. At the same time as he nationalized the oil industry, he assured a totally anti-democratic state control over the masses by forcibly integrating the unions into the party. Later this had spectacular consequences, because if people wanted to work in a factory, not only did they have to sign on but they had to join the party and their dues were automatically deducted from their wages.

"Cárdenas advanced quite a progressive, anti-imperialist policy"

Cárdenas also instituted Paragraph B of Article 123 of the Constitution (on the right to strike), which deprived about 4 million Mexicans working for the state of the right to strike. Cárdenas' argument was that the state was revolutionary and "if the state is revolutionary, if workers are serving this state, we cannot give them the right to strike because that would destabilize the revolutionary state." And so, to this day, public workers do not have the right to strike.

In accordance with the same logic, he prevented the CTM from uniting the workers and peasants. Most of all he created the whole idea of arbitration, of a state arbitrating among classes, a state that every time there is a conflict considers itself above the contending parties and hands down unchallengeable verdicts — an idea that strongly influences the minds of workers. It lays down the law in trade-union and agrarian conflicts, and this projects the image of a state above classes.



To comprehend the power of this image, we have to look back at the oil conflict. In reality, the workers never proposed nationalizing the oil industry. They only called for a contract. So, when Cárdenas decided on nationalization, it was not seen by the masses as something won as a result of their struggle, of their mobilization, but as a great gift from the state.

Subsequent governments modified the system. But what Salinas de Gortari wants to do today is not to modify it but to wipe out every vestige of Cardenism from the Mexican state — specifically, the trade-union bureaucracy, the land settlement, Article 123, collective bargaining and so on.

That is why a current is re-emerging that calls itself "Cardenist." It is a current that feels totally shamed aside within the PRI, and which, from its point of view, thinks that this change is only going to bring on a process of radicalization and a higher level of confrontation with the state. In many respects, the neo-Cardenist project is an attempt to re-establish the social consensus, a mass policy of the Mexican state, in order to try redirect the masses into the state's channels.

■ There is a curious contradiction about the democratic current in the PRI. On the one hand, it wants to look modernist, and it is seen in that way by sections of society. It has a power of attraction for some intellectual strata "disillusioned" with the left, which is similar to the "new realism" represented in Europe by some social-democratic parties.

On the other hand, Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas supports maintaining traditional political methods considered out of date by the Mexican bourgeoisie. And the official candidate of the PRI is presenting himself as the herald of bourgeois economic "modernization." How is Cárdenas evolving under the effect of this contradiction?

The contradiction is a twofold one. Salinas de Gortari wants to apply capitalist modernization without going through the process of democratization, that is, with the old political structures, because he has no others. Cárdenas, who never uses the word "modernization," knows that some changes have to be made to assure the continuity of the traditional political structures.

There are broad sections of the masses and even sections of the bourgeoisie to whom Cárdenas' proposals seem socialist. The Mexican bourgeoisie is very divided on this question. The elder Cárdenas also formed an employers' association, the CANASINTRA, which organizes sections of small- and medium-sized industry. These sectors are totally opposed to Salinas de Gortari's modernization proposal, because this project involves joining the GATT [General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade], opening up to foreign capital, exporting goods produced in the *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) and so on. It will benefit that section of capital most integrated into imperialist financial capitalism. But it means bankruptcy pure and simple for small- and medium-sized industry.

The problem that arises from this contradiction is very complex, because Cárdenas has not said clearly what his economic program might be. For the moment, the only thing he is doing is claiming all the authority of the Cardenist tradition. It is a return to the old nationalism. That is where the problem lies, because everyone understands that from the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, modernization and change are necessary.

We think that Cárdenas has not yet revealed all of his vision for the country. For the moment, he is devoting himself exclusively to organizing his forces on the basis of the Cardenist ideology. But it is still not clear what his longer-term program is going to be.

■ In this process of organizing forces, it seems that Cárdenas has had some success — not only in the party, which is natural, but also in the left, including the most radical part of the left. That has a certain effect on the PRT. What is the real impact of this phenomenon?

Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas is repeating his father's experience. On the one hand, he is winning over a section of the PRI that has had enough of this modernization policy and this process of losing popularity and erosion of the social consensus that the PRI had guaranteed. It sees neo-Cardenism as a means for expressing itself politically. On the other hand, he is winning over sectors

outside the PRI, including within the radical left. In fact, he has even won over some members of our party, about 50, who have seen neo-Cardenism as offering a great opportunity to change the relationship of forces.

This is a hard thing to argue with, because there is a real basis for this idea. There are indeed large sections of the Mexican people who are sick of the PRI, and this mood cannot yet be channelled by the socialist left. Although we have made a lot of progress — because it is unquestionable that the socialist left has made progress in comparison with the position we were in from 1968-1975 — it is also true that it is not seen as an alternative to the PRI regime. Moreover, it is evident that Cuauhtemoc's Cardenism involves an element of illusion for major sections of the masses who think that he can inflict a defeat on the PRI.

"All the opposition campaigns are winning some mass support"

The comrades who have just formed the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), the regroupment of all the sectors coming from the revolutionary left who support Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas, want a bridge between the Cardenist national consciousness, the masses and the socialist project. But in reality, the position these comrades have taken can be summed up in the following formula — 99 per cent support for Cárdenas and one per cent criticism. They make no distinction between the dynamic of the movement supporting Cárdenas and its leadership and the political project of the Cardenist leadership.

However, what the masses seeing and listening to Cárdenas feel is totally different from what Cárdenas wants from the mass movement. This is where things get complicated. The political forces leading the Cardenist current know that Cuauhtemoc is not going to win the elections, because today in Mexico it is impossible to beat the PRI in the electoral arena. The elections are rigged. Cárdenas is trying to build a mass movement big enough to constitute a political force capable of preventing an overall change in the existing state.

He wants to use this movement to hold back the modernizers, to keep them from having a free hand to change the trade-union and peasant structures. Then, he wants to undertake negotiations with them on the basis of a favorable relationship of forces, which the Cardenists did not have when they were in the PRI, because in that party no one moves a muscle without the consent of the president of the republic.

Cardenism therefore represents a mass movement that is going to be useful for Cuauhtemoc in negotiating with the state. The result of such negotiation can only be re-establishment of the social pact based on

channeling the mass radicalization into serving simply as a means of pressure to block the bourgeois transformation of the Mexican state.

■ The emergence of Cardenism and its power of attraction for the masses are creating problems for the PRT but also for the Mexican Socialist Party (PMS)², which is running its own candidate in the elections. You might seem to be "splitters" with regard to a "useful" challenge to the PRI represented by Cárdenas' candidacy. In these conditions, how is the PRT's campaign for your candidate, Rosario Ibarra, going? How are you being seen by the masses?

The PRT comrades who decided to support Cárdenas' candidacy and who formed the MAS — along with comrades from other organizations coming, for example, from the Revolutionary Left Organization-Mass Line (OIR-LM, of Maoist origin) — say that in deciding not to support Cárdenas the PRT and the PMS are isolating the socialist left from the masses.

In reality, almost everyone in Mexico recognizes — and I think that even those comrades do — that all the opposition campaigns are winning some mass support.

To take one example, at a rally in La Laguna, about 60,000 peasants greeted Cárdenas like a revolutionary hero. The day before, the same people were forced to attend a rally for Salinas de Gortari, and they greeted him by throwing boiling water at him, even getting involved in fights with the PRI activists. And then they went quite happily to a Cárdenas rally. We say that this rally was a step forward, and that we should not have a sectarian attitude to that rally, because the people who attended it were breaking politically with the PRI.

Of course, we think that the leadership of this movement is bourgeois, nationalist and reformist. But the dynamic is totally positive. To give an idea, some women told Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas that if the government once again failed to respect the real results of the election, the people should take up arms again. Of course, Cárdenas appealed for calm, and said that people should not go too far.

In the recent past, there have been movements such as the "Democratic Tendency" in the electrical workers' union in the 1970s, which evolved toward the left and even reached socialist conceptions, but then went over to nationalist positions and ended up in the PRI. We are seeing an evolution of the same sort now — an independent movement that broke with the state, which already had a socialist outlook and today is being channelled into Cardenism. In reality, instead of being bridge to bring the masses toward socialism, groups like the MAS are a bridge to bring socialists to

2. The PMS is the product of a fusion in 1987 of the PSUM (the Mexican CP and some other groups) and a nationalist party, the Mexican Workers' Party.

Cardenism.

For all these reasons, even though there really are big risks of isolation, we are convinced that we have to go ahead in building an independent revolutionary force, not independent from the Cardenist masses, but from the state. We think that we have to take initiatives toward the popular layers that are turning toward Cárdenas, that we have to make concrete proposals for struggle to these Cardenist sectors, on such issues as wages, contracts, the foreign debt and so forth, understanding that it is necessary to address ourselves not only to the Cardenist masses but also their leaders. But it is only if we can create an independent organized mass force that we can really establish a dialogue with those masses.

This is why we are trying to create an independent force. We have already made progress. For example, after the earthquake in 1985, a United Coordinated Committee of Earthquake Victims (CUD) was formed. Many of those involved had never done anything political, and a lot of them had even been members of the PRI. Recently, the majority of the organizations in the CUD decided to support Rosario Ibarra and the PRT and are participating actively in our campaign.

We are talking about an organization that involves between 80,000 and 90,000 people in Mexico City alone. For us, this is a palpable demonstration of the incorrectness of the analysis that the masses as a whole have to go through a stage of nationalist consciousness before they come to a socialist one.

We are aware that the situation is complicated, but we also think that it is better than ever. Because we think that this crisis in the PRI is going to be so extensive that it will create problems even for Cárdenas. Because, for example, if he accepts a rigged election, if he agrees to enter negotiations in those conditions, it is possible that major sections of the Cardenist masses will break away.

The difference between the elder Cárdenas and his son is that the father offered the masses concrete things. But the son can no longer do this. We are in a period of economic crisis.

■ Can you describe some of the features of the campaign of Rosario Ibarra and the PRT?

This campaign is a bit special. We think that it is impossible to run a routine campaign, with rallies and so on. The radicalization is very strong in Mexico and popular discontent as well. In line with that, we decided to run a campaign that would take up the basic questions. We think that it is insufficient to make appeals for defeating the PRI at the polls, but that this is a good time to explain to people what is involved in a process of independent mass organization going beyond the period of the elections.

Therefore, we decided to conduct a campaign in which we could take advantage of the level of radicalization and militancy to

base ourselves on the mass struggles that are going on. In many places, we have occupied government offices, offices of the water company, the electricity company and the roads department in order to raise the problems faced by poor neighborhoods. We have occupied offices of distribution firms to protest against the poor supply of Mexico City. The police and the state have said that these occupations are illegal, that they have nothing to do with an election campaign as such, because we don't limit

and 90,000 people — and we still have three months to go. We plan to hold a big national rally at the end to demonstrate that there is a broad independent movement that is a major force in the country. We think that we may be able to attract more than 50,000 people to this rally in Mexico City.

At the same time, in the context of this crisis of the Mexican state, we want to advance the consciousness of the population on the meaning of the elections. We think that electoral fraud is going to be enormous



ourselves to appealing for votes.

In fact, that is not the key thing for us. The key thing is to base ourselves on the level of organization of the population, on the struggles that they are waging, and use the campaign to make progress on these questions. If a popular neighborhood is fighting to get electricity, we go into that neighborhood, and together with the people we occupy the offices of the electrical company and demand that electricity really be installed. And we have achieved successes. The same thing goes for land occupations, strikes and so on.

Our idea is to wage a radical campaign, one that boosts the process of organization and one that will also be useful for the struggles people are waging. We think that the campaign is producing very good results. We have held meetings, even in small towns, where we have attracted 2,000 to 3,000 people.

In the state of Sonora alone, on the US border, between 15,000 and 18,000 people have attended our rallies. In the state of Tlaxcala, the smallest in the country, we succeeded in attracting 5,000 people. In Puebla, 12,000 people have attended our rallies. In Mexico City, we have held rallies, such as the one for registering our candidates, that have attracted 20,000 people, and in which the CUD has played a major role.

So, as regards mobilization, we have had more success than in all our previous election campaigns. We have calculated that in a month and a half of our campaign, we have managed to mobilize between 80,000

this year, even bigger than in the past; it is going to involve millions of votes. And we think that this will clarify things among the country's various political forces.

We are preparing for this development, because we think that it will be the time for action, for a great civic movement to keep the right from taking over the issue of defending the basic democratic right to vote for who you want. If the right can capture this issue and manage to identify itself with the democratic feelings of the masses, we could lose everything that has been gained in the specific struggles.

We think that the PRT has to be the driving force in the fight against vote rigging. For example, in every rally, in every meeting, we explain the meaning of election fraud, and we are preparing people for the big struggle that will take place in Mexico after July 6.

This is regardless of whether the PRT itself is a victim of this fraud. This is where Rosario Ibarra's candidacy has a great significance, because of what she represents in terms of democratic liberties and the fight for democracy in Mexico.

At the same time, it is the weak point of Cárdenas' campaign, because he was governor of the state of Michoacan for the PRI, and was up to his neck there in electoral fraud.

His right-hand man, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo was the chair of the PRI in that state; in other words, he was responsible for carrying out this fraud for years. He recognizes that himself. They have no moral credibility for fighting fraud. ★

STREET FIGHTING YEARS

1966

- 28 February** Ghana: Kwame Nkrumah overthrown by putsch.
25 May China: Start of the Cultural Revolution.

3-10 December Berlin: Week of action against war in Vietnam. Student leader Rudi Dutschke calls for an extra-parliamentary opposition.

1967

- 8 January** Vietnam: Start of US offensive, 486,000 troops sent.
5 February Shanghai: Proclamation of a people's commune.
24 February China: Zhou En Lai demands an end to excessive purges.
21 April Greece: Military coup d'état.
25 April Bolivia: Régis Debray, left-wing French writer visiting Che Guevara, imprisoned.
16 May USSR: Alexander Solzhenitsyn protests against censorship at Soviet writers' congress.
22 May Egypt: President Nasser decides to blockade Gulf of Akaba.

LUTTES

- workers and 6,000 students demonstrate against US air bases.
12-24 July USA: Black revolts in Newark and Detroit. Black Panthers organise urban guerrilla warfare groups.
30 July Havana: Organization of Latin American Solidarity — OLAS — conference.
1 September China: Mao Zedong supports Zhou En Lai and condemns the ultra left. Return to calm.
9 October Bolivia: Che Guevara killed in captivity.
21 October International demonstrations in Washington (25,000), London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Oslo, Amsterdam and Tokyo against the Vietnam War.
13 November Japan: Student demonstration at Haneda airport against prime minister's departure to US.

1968

- 3 January** Czechoslovakia: Alexander Dubcek elected first secretary of CP, heralding "Prague Spring".
29 January Japan: Student unrest begins in medical schools.
30 January Vietnam: National Liberation Front (NLF) launches Tet Offensive.
17-18 February Berlin: International Vietnam solidarity demonstration.
27 February Spanish state: Universities of Madrid and Valencia

- closed because of continuing student unrest.
February Japan: Students join farmers in their fight against Sanriku airport.
8 March Warsaw: Clashes between police and students.
16 March Vietnam: US troops massacre 799 villagers at My Lai.
17 March London: Mass demonstration in Grosvenor Square against US policy in Vietnam.

- 21 March** Jordan: Battle of Karameh is first major armed confrontation between Israeli forces and the Palestine resistance.
22 March Paris: Students occupy administration tower at Nanterre campus demanding release of students arrested after anti-US imperialism demo. "22 March Movement" is born.
29 March Brazil: Two students killed by police in Rio de Janeiro.
31 March USA: Johnson announces partial end to bombing of North Vietnam and withdraws from presidential race.
3 April France: Council of Ministers adopts a proposal introducing criteria of selection for university entrance.
4 April USA: Black civil rights leader Martin Luther King assassinated in Memphis. Serious riots in several cities.
5 April Czechoslovakia: Dubcek grants freedom of the press.
11 April West Germany: assassination attempt against Rudi Dutschke provokes violent student demos.
20 April Britain: Tory MP Enoch Powell makes his famous anti-immigration "rivers of blood" speech.
26/27 April USA: Following international student strike against the war, students at Columbia University, New York occupy buildings.
27 April Britain: 1967 Abortion Act comes into force.
30 April Spanish state: Thousands of students join rallies called by the Workers' Commissions.
3 May Paris: Students locked out from Nanterre retreat to the Sorbonne. Dean calls police to evict them and close Sorbonne.
10 May Paris: Barricades built in Paris streets by students against police "cleaning out" the university area (Latin Quarter).
13 May France: General strike. Hundreds of thousands of workers, students and school students march in Paris and provincial cities. Students re-occupy the Sorbonne.
14 May Paris: Beginning of peace talks between US and Vietnamese NLF.
22 May France: General strike involves 8 million workers.
27 May France: Publication of "Grenelle Accords" between bosses and unions on minimum guaranteed wage, workhours, retirement age and trade-union rights. Rejected by rank-and-file.
 Senegal: Following general strike in schools and universities the army intervenes on campus. Several dead.
29 May France: President General Charles de Gaulle "disappears" for several hours to Baden-Baden to ascertain loyalty of top



army generals.

30 May France: De Gaulle dissolves National Assembly. Hundreds of thousands of Gaullists demonstrate their support in Paris.

31 May Senegal: General strike called but declared illegal.

May/June Britain: Women workers at Ford's Dagenham strike for equal bonus ratings with male workers.

6 June USA: Presidential candidate Robert (Bobby) Kennedy assassinated.

8 June Italy: Police remove occupying students from university building in Milan.

10 June Paris: School student Gilles Tautin is drowned in the Seine near the Renault-Flins factory after clashes with the police.

12 June France: All street demonstrations banned during election campaign. 22 March Movement and 7 far left groups, including the JCR, banned.

16 June Paris: Sorbonne evacuated in surprise attack.

18 June France: return to work in most engineering and car factories.

22 June Brazil: Students battle with police in Rio de Janeiro.

28 June USA: Police attack solidarity rally with French students in Berkeley, California.

30 June France: legislative elections. De Gaulle's party, the UDR, wins by an overwhelming majority.

4 July USA: Berkeley students win right to mass rally.

10 July France: Alain Krivine arrested for activity in the now banned JCR.

16 July Czechoslovakia: Dubcek government warned by USSR that its liberalization policy is unacceptable.

23 July Mexico: Start of student unrest.

24 July France: Amnesty law for Algerian war crimes.

25 July Vatican: Pope confirms Church ban on contraception.

26-27 July Mexico City: Violent clashes in Mexico between police and students, 17 dead.

27 July Czechoslovakia: Dubcek affirms his policies.

21 August Czechoslovakia: Invasion by Warsaw Pact forces.

13 September Czechoslovakia: Press censorship reintroduced.

18 September Mexico City: Army invades university, then the Olympic stadium two days later. 18 people killed, many wounded.

2 October Mexico City: More than 300 killed in student/police clashes at *Plaza des Tres Culturas*.

5 October Ireland: first major civil rights demonstration in the occupied Six Counties in the North.

12 October Mexico City: 1968 Olympic games open. Black American athletes Tommy Smith and John Carlos give Black Power salutes from winners' podium.

21 October Japan: Anti-Vietnam war actions by students and workers in Tokyo.

27 October London: 100,000 demonstrate against Vietnam War. Students occupy London School of Economics.

1 November Vietnam: end to American bombing of North.

5 November USA: Richard Nixon elected president.

12 November Italy: Nationwide student protests.

14 November Italy: General strike by 12 million workers.



16 November Ireland: 15,000 march in defiance of ban on all demos in the Six Counties.

22 November Ireland: Package of civil rights reforms announced by Northern prime minister.

1969

1 January Ireland: Belfast to Dungannon civil rights march.

16 January Czechoslovakia: Jan Palach burns himself to death in the centre of Prague in protest against the "de-liberalization".

19 January Japan: Police expel radical student organization Zengakuren from Tokyo university buildings. Provoke nationwide student occupations.

22 January Spanish state: Franco dictatorship decrees state of emergency.

17 April Ireland: Bernadette Devlin elected to Westminster. Czechoslovakia: Dubcek removed from leadership of CP.

27 April France: De Gaulle resigns after defeat in constitutional referendum.

6 May France: Alain Krivine candidate in presidential elections.

18 May Britain: National demo for equal rights for women.

1 June France: Krivine gets 1% of vote (249,000 votes).

5-7 June USSR: International conference of Communist Parties. Italians refuse to vote for main document.

21 July US astronaut Neil Armstrong is first person on the moon.

12 August Ireland:

"Battle of the Bogside" in Derry provoked by Loyalist demonstrations.

14 August Ireland: British troops sent into the Six Counties.

21 August USA: Woodstock pop festival.

1 September Britain: 200,000 hear Bob Dylan at Isle of Wight pop festival.

1 September Libya: Kadhafi leads coup d'état by Council of the Revolution.

15 October USA: Millions participate in moratorium on Vietnam. Massive demonstrations against war in New York, Boston and Washington.

17 November Japan: Massive, violent demonstration by students and workers against agreements on US use of Okinawa island.

1970

18 March Kampuchea: Norodom Sihanouk toppled and replaced by General Lon Nol.

26 June Ireland: Bernadette Devlin

imprisoned.

27 July Portugal: Death of former dictator Salazar.

26 August USA: National march for abortion rights.

17-22 September Jordan: "Black September" Crackdown on Palestinians. Thousands dead in Amman.

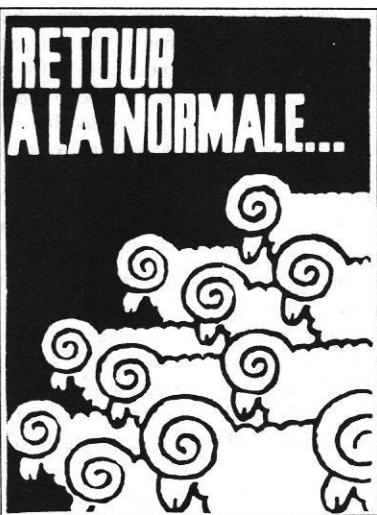
28 September Egypt: Nasser dies.

8 October USSR: Solzhenitsyn wins Nobel Prize.

4 November Chile: Unidad Popular candidate Salvador Allende elected president.

17 December Poland: Increasing unrest. Gierek replaces Gomulka as first secretary.

28 December Spanish state: Six Basque nationalists sentenced to death in Burgos trial. Franco commutes sentence to 30 years imprisonment. ★



«NOUS SOMMES LE POUVOIR»

IN TODAY'S CLIMATE, it is not surprising that the twentieth anniversary of May 1968 has been the occasion for running up the colors of political or economic "realism", or for a war of words about cultural change/renewal, changes in standards and so on. Platitudes drown out what is most specific in a concentrated social and political crisis such as May 1968.

CHARLES-ANDRE UDRY

WHAT MAY 68 represented was the emergence for a brief time (the last week of May) of a limited range of possibilities for thoroughgoing changes. It was not a phantasmagoria of maybes or a revolution right around the corner. It was the appearance on the social and political scene of crossroads, and, depending on how these were negotiated, other possibilities opened up or closed....

The May crisis, like all great social and political events, speaks with a number of voices, and for good reason. From May 3 to June 6, 1968, the protest of many sections of society converged. That opens up the floodgates for a plethora of interpretations.

The minister of the interior at the time, Raymond Marcellin, started the ball rolling with his "theory" of an international plot directed from Cuba and East Berlin. This was manna from heaven for the right-wing press. Then some innovative sociologists discovered the "crisis of higher education." As the first lesson in the syllabus, it is acceptable. As an explanation for a crisis that led former prefect of police Maurice Grimaud to write, "fear is taking hold of the state apparatus", it is a bit thin.¹

Edgar Morin talked about the "eruption of the youth" on the scene; Gérard Mendel, about "the Oedipus complex." This has had its day! For Touraine, May 1968 was a "social movement of a new kind"! Engineers, technicians and media people were at its center. Millions of striking workers supposedly were overshadowed by them.

Nonetheless, over and above the real complexity and myriad facets of such an explosion, some powerful tendencies cannot be conjured away. May 1968 was the intersection, not the fusion, of a mass student movement and a gigantic working-class mobilization. In the beginning, the

student movement combined very immediate demands with a maximalist radicalization of perspectives. It was a sort of "juvenile constituent assembly," as Lucio Magri nicely puts it.²

BIGGEST GENERAL STRIKE IN THE HISTORY OF FRANCE

But he continues "everyone recognizes that the entry of the working class into the struggle was the most important event in May." That is obvious. It was the biggest and broadest general strike in the history of France. A strike that shook up society and the government more than the electoral shock-waves of 1981 and 1988.

The figures show that, "The number of strikers grew continually. On May 24, it was not far off 9 million. In 1936, the June strikes involved 3 million people. The record, therefore, was shattered. No industry was spared. Even agricultural workers were caught up in the wave."³ Estimates differ on the number of strikers, from 5.8 to 9 million. The comparison says a lot. According to Pietro Kemeny, who systematically takes the lowest estimates, the figures were 2.45 million strikers in 1936, 2.9 million in 1947 (the big struggles at Renault and other plants at the start of the cold war) and 5.7 in 1968.

Kemeny concludes: "Almost ten days lost per person employed is atypical, even with respect to the other exceptional years; this meant that more days were lost than the total since the war." That amounted to nearly 150 million days lost through strikes. If you try to establish a rate of participation relative to the working population, the indices are the same. For every 100,000 economically active people, 34,233 participated in the 1968 strike. In

1936, it was 21,234, and in 1947, it was 17,311.⁴

These figures explain the momentary fright and disarray of more than one "top leader" of the Gaullist state. Is this simplistic? Look at the memoirs and biographies.⁵ These prefects, ministers or top servants of the state have a sense of the relationship of forces and power. In any case, they have more than those recycled "leftists" who have said a retroactive "farewell to the proletariat." This view represents nothing more than an abdication and throws absolutely no light on how society today (and in 1968) resembles or differs that of the inter-war period.

STRIKE WAVE SPREAD SPONTANEOUSLY

The strike wave spread spontaneously. A snowball grew into an avalanche. After May 10, the movement ceased to be solely students. On May 11, the trade-union confederations (the CGT and the CFDT), as well as the National Teachers' Federation (FEN) and the Students Union of France (UNEF) issued a call for a 24-hour general strike and for "powerful demonstrations" on May 13. The sweep of solidarity was to extend far beyond that.

With a hesitant spontaneity, the workers took advantage of a political situation that seemed to open the way for a more effective struggle for their wage and conditions demands than partial strikes or the "24-hour national days of action" that had dominated trade-union life since March 1966. The thirty-four decrees issued by de Gaulle, Pompidou and Debré over the summer of 1967 had exacerbated discontent and politicized demands. These measures involved jobs (assuring the "mobility" of the workforce); social security; linking wages to productivity; freeing businesses from taxes; and concentration of land ownership.

On May 14, a strike broke out at Sud-Aviation-Bougenais in the outskirts of Nantes. On May 15, the working class fortress of Renault-Cléon went on strike. On Friday, May 17, Paris subway, railway and postal workers came out. "C'est la chienlit," "It's a mess," de Gaulle said. On May 20, everything stopped!

The peak of the May crisis took form. It came between May 22 and 30. In this period, there was a subtle interaction of the strengths and weaknesses of the strike, the inertia of the past and the possibilities rush-

1. Maurice Grimaud, *En mai, fait ce qu'il te plaît*, Stock, 1977, p.279.

2. Lucio Magri, *Temps modernes*, August-September 1969, p.19.

3. Michel Winock, *La fièvre hexagonale. Les grandes crises politiques 1871-1968*, Calman-Lévy, 1986, p.328.

4. Pietro Kemeny "Il movimento degli scioperi nel XX secolo," *Il Mulino*, 1979.

5. G. Pompidou, *Pour rétablir la vérité*, Flammarion, 1982; Yves Guéna, *Le temps des certitudes*, Flammarion, 1982; Jacques Massu, *Baden 63*, Plon, 1983; Jean Lacouture, *De Gaulle, le souverain*, Seuil, 1986.



Mass meetings of students and workers (DR)

ing into a breach that had been partially opened, choices and abstentions whose result was recalculated at every moment....

Supposedly, May 1968 played the role of forceps assisting the birth of a modern France that was fathered by de Gaulle in 1958 but had a difficult gestation. Once again, this leaves very little room for choices by the social and political actors in a field of possibilities — these were limited, but not to one possibility standing splendidly alone.

The strike was based on the industries that had been reinforced by years of growth and on the public services. But it spread beyond that, not just to the students, but to unusual areas — to radio and TV, in which prolonged strikes took off, to the Ministry of Equipment, to insurance and banking. It lasted. More than four million wage earners struck for more than three weeks.

Regime on the ropes by May 14

The giant demonstrations were a characteristic of May. They were the meeting place of new generation of students and young workers.⁶ They were also the expression of the idea that "maybe politics is in the streets." But there was a serious lack of a project, and during what exaggeratedly came to be known as the "government's vacation," it fell into the abyss between the all or nothing of a radical but inexperienced youth, as did the far left organizations that had developed within this stratum (and hardly at all in the ranks of wage earners).

The entry of one new layer after another into the strike paralleled the deterioration in the regime's position. But there was no clear consciousness of this interaction. And why should this have been automatic?

By May 14, the regime was on the ropes. The economics minister in the recently ousted Chirac government, Edouard Balladur, wrote: "The government no longer existed as an organ of deliberation and decision making; it was no more than a coterie, a cabal."⁷ Maurice Grimaud, who was in a strategic position in the police appara-

tus, specifies: "We sensed better than others the fragility of the leading circles."⁸

It is undeniable that the question of the government was posed, if not that of power in the full sense. Obviously, the concentration of power inherent in the Gaullist system made it easier to shake a pyramid that had suddenly been thrown on its head by this unexpected crisis. We should not forget that in April the polls indicated that 61% of the population were "satisfied" with de Gaulle.⁹

On May 24, the general launched his proposal for a constitutional referendum on participation. It was a flop, a fiasco. The demonstrations responded, "He is the mess." (*C'est lui, la chienlit!*) The strike grew stronger.

In his monumental biography, Lacouture reports that de Gaulle "could only tell his crest-fallen entourage: 'I missed the target.' Then he went away repeating that word, coupled with a formula that everyone of his intimates would hear endlessly in these twilight hours — 'unmanageable, the situation is unmanageable'."¹⁰

"The CP only jumped on the train to pull the brake"

The "great visionary" was blinded by what is a feature of very acute political and social crisis: the possible. Pushed down every day under the weight of the established system, it germinates beneath the real. Initially it finds its existence denied, and then it is combatted with determination, as de Gaulle began to do on May 30.

Magri — a member of the Italian Communist Party at the time, who was to become the editor of *Il Manifesto* [a magazine that represented a split from the CP] and who is now back home in the Communist

Party — said something that was justified in this context:

"It is also true that, on the basis of the existing conditions, it was possible to envisage quite a different outcome to the May crisis. And from this starting point we can legitimately talk about the subjective responsibilities of those who had the power to accomplish these decisive options."¹¹

This brings us to the policy of the General Confederation of Workers (CGT), led by Georges Séguy of the French Communist Party, with the duo Waldeck-Rochet/Georges Marchais, and François Mitter-



rand/Pierre Mendès-France. On May 25, 1968, *The Economist* wrote:

"A revolution requires the coming together of a revolutionary situation and a party or an organization ready to take power. Since France has been virtually brought to a standstill, the situation might appear revolutionary. But the party that has always claimed the revolutionary role shows no sign of wanting to fill it. The Communists have jumped on the train, but only to pull the brake."

One might smile in reading this simplistic interpretation coming from a head under a bowler hat, plagiarized from text-book "Leninism," about the seizure of power by a party in a developed capitalist society. However, it correctly illustrates the two facets of the crisis between May 24 and May 30. On the one hand de Gaulle and the Gaullist regime, which had been strong, were notably weakened, fragile. The problem of another government was vital in those days.

On the other hand, the CGT, the Communist Party and François Mitterrand — who headed a loose constellation of forces, the Federation of the Democratic and Socialist Left (FGDS) — each in their own way did their best not to develop the potentialities of

6. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, Editions de Minuit, 1984, p.217.

7. Edouard Balladur, *L'arbre de mai*, Atelier M. Julian, 1979, p.249.

8. Grimaud, op. cit., p.289.

9. Winock, op. cit., p.332.

10. Lacouture, op. cit., p.686.

11. L. Magri, *Temps modernes*, October 1969.

this general strike that was demoting a general.

Caught off balance by the cumulative momentum of the strike, the CGT could only ride with it. It favored slogans for specific categories of workers, for specific enterprises, ignoring general slogans. In short, it did everything to assure that a factory occupation remained only an occupation and did not become a starting point for altering the political relationship of forces, for mustering both defence and counter-attack by wage earners.

"We could have gone a lot further"

Nonetheless, there was a sentiment that "the state had to change." As the general secretary of the CGT in Renault, Aimé Halbeher, acknowledged: "I know that among a good part of the workers, the most conscious ones, there was the idea that we could have gone a lot further. They were very confident about what could come out of the crisis and, on the basis of that, in the installation of a people's government."¹²

Logically, the CGT, which dominated the trade-union movement, neglected any initiative that could give the general strike a different tenor, one that would have assured that the tremor provoked by society developed into the beginnings of a challenge to it. It could have done this in practice by offering other forms for

democratic leadership of the movement and putting forward demands pointing toward a different organization of "wage relations."

With contempt, the CGT rejected the proposals for self-management made by a radicalizing CFDT. So, there was no attempt to promote the emergence of a democratic central organization that would be representative, even if at the beginning it did not lead the bulk of the strikers. Such organization was seen on a smaller scale in the 1986 student mobilizations or in the strikes of railway workers and teachers at the end of 1986 and the beginning of 1987 [see IV 111 & 112]. This is what we called the possible; it was pushed back under the ruptured bark of the real.

The start of the Grenelle negotiations on May 25 (in the Ministry of Social Affairs in the Rue de Grenelle) echoed the proposal for a referendum on participation launched by de Gaulle. Séguy and Pompidou came to an agreement. The millions of strikers made the cabal difficult. Higher wages were made the central demand. The negotiations dragged on. The strike continued, and the discord also.

"No one seemed think that a solution was near at hand. Then suddenly, at 2.30am, Chirac and Séguy put their heads together. Between the CGT and the regime, a deal was concluded in two hours. It was offered unchanged to the other parties (the bosses and the other union confederations), with the important reservation that the workers

had to accept it," explained Jean Poperen, future secretary of Mitterrand's Socialist Party.¹³

The government made concessions on wages (a 35% increase in the minimum wage, from 2.22 francs an hour to 3) on the working week (two hours less for those working more than 48 hours a week and one hour less for those working 45-48 hours). No concession was made on the demand for a sliding scale of wages, and none on the 1967 decrees.

The editor in chief of *Le Monde*, Pierre Viansson-Ponté, who had chewed over the theme of "France is boring" during March, wrote on May 28: "If the conclusion of the Grenelle negotiations does not manage to resolve the social conflict, and is not accepted by the 'base,' then France may go from a grave national crisis to a revolutionary situation in a climate of violence and confusion."

"Suddenly the stakes have multiplied"

Jean Poperen asked the question: "Logically, the Grenelle accords are supposed to stop it [the movement] cold. Why should we deprive ourselves of this formidable means of action? What is the reason for putting on the brake when the incapacity of student vanguardism is leaving the Communists in command of the terrain, at a time when the regime is accepting them as its



sole interlocutors, at a time when the question of power [that is, of the regime] is posed?

"The reason precisely is that this question is posed. Suddenly, the stakes have multiplied, and with them the risks. One more step, and a crisis of the system will open up. The Communists no doubt have the means to open up such a crisis. They are not doing it....The truth is rather that the Communists are concerned about stabilizing the situation and do not consider it imperative to modify the relationship of forces."¹⁴

On May 22, Lacouture recounts: "The confusion of Vendroux [de Gaulle's brother-in-law] was all the greater because in the midst of all this Waldeck-Rochet, the general secretary of the French Communist Party, told him loudly enough to be heard by everyone: Above all, insist that they hold firm, 'he' [de Gaulle] must not leave."¹⁵

The eruption of May 1968 upset the habits and plans of the CP leadership. What kind of storm could fail to upset the routine of a long distance run toward toward the 1972 presidential elections. In fact, that was what the CP leadership had its sights set on. The reference point was an anti-monopoly coalition. Its weapons were the monopoly control its apparatus held over the working class. Without this background, it would be incomprehensible why the theme of provocation ran like a red thread through the official speeches. The student movement and then the spontaneous strike were infractions of the code that was supposed to regulate this long march.

Furthermore, from the CP's standpoint, de Gaulle had the merit of taking France out of NATO and even of building up the French independent nuclear deterrent, the "force de frappe." In this respect, he was more useful to the "socialist camp" than the likes of Guy Mollet, Mendès-France or Mitterrand, who were devoted to NATO. This clarifies Waldeck-Rochet's statement to Vendroux.

Workers reject Grenelle "accords"

Finally, the CP was not ready to smooth the path for those — from the PSU (a left centrist group) to the SFIO (the SP) and the Conventions de Institutions Républicaines (Mitterrand) — who were trying to put together a left force to rival it. The Mitterrand experience in the 1970s shows that this fear was well founded. The result was that the CP channelled the movement, while trying to capitalize on it. It did not orient the movement toward achieving its potentialities. In this sense, it blocked it.

This is why the effects were less cataclysmic than predicted by the editor of *Le Monde* when the workers rejected the Grenelle "accords", first at Renault and then elsewhere. To prevent a blow up, they were not to be called "accords." What was the

reason for this rejection? The gap was too great between what seemed possible and what had been obtained. But the gap was just as large between this rejection and its translation on the political level into a governmental alternative.

No governmental perspective

The Charléty rally on May 27 was a crossroads of the political projects represented by Mendès-France, by the emergence of a revolutionary and self-management current and by the maximalist illusion expressed in the cry, "power is in the streets." This was not the case. But it is true that the crisis of the regime had reached its climax.

Mitterrand, a parliamentary politician and constitutionalist who learned later to bide his time, made a sudden move. "I am a candidate" [for the presidency], he declared on May 28. In a press conference, he announced the FGDS's rejection of the referendum. He saw de Gaulle's defeat as leading to the dissolution of the Assembly.

De Gaulle, on the other hand, had gauged things well. Hesitant at his low point, this manic depressive — as Lacouture describes him — went to visit his loyal soldiers (Massu in Baden-Baden) in order to psyche himself up. Then he came back for the counterattack.

The CP organized its own demonstration on May 29, an orderly one. It proposed a "people's government," without being very specific about it. In fact, the trade-union left gave up the idea of giving the strike any centralized organized expression. With this logic, respecting the division of labor between parties and unions in order to better damp up the movement, the political left offered no governmental perspective. That is, they offered no proposal for a government whose tasks would harmonize with the more or less expressed aspirations of the movement, aspirations, moreover, that needed to be articulated more explicitly.

In order to set the tone, in his news conference Mitterrand went as far as saying: "Depending on our imagination and our will, the question posed in Prague in this spring of 1968 could find its answer in Paris."¹⁶ The grandeur and abjection of May 1968!

At that point, the government, because it was the government, took advantage of the failure — of the vacation! — of the left in the political arena. On May 30, de Gaulle announced over TV that he was postponing the referendum. He stayed, kept Pompidou as his premier, dissolved the National Assembly and organized elections. This time, he was "on target." He did not defeat his adversary; he retook the chair that it could not occupy.

In a crisis, the party on the attack loses everything if it does not know how to advance. The lack of a solution aroused uneasiness in the social layers initially

favorable to change. So, the tide turned quickly. On May 31, Séguy announced that the CGT "has no intention of disrupting the election; it intends to achieve a positive settlement of the workers' demands."

The strike wave ebbed, but unevenly, with new flare-ups. It took a week for the ranks of the strikers to break up. This was another confirmation, a negative one, of the power of the social mobilization.

The acuteness of the political crisis highlighted, in a condensed space of time, the possible alternatives, the role of the choices facing the political and trade-union forces and their decisions. It was then that the possible could have been grasped. Otherwise, it would pull back into its shell. After that point, it was pointless to drivel piously about how "everything is possible." In fact, the social and political dynamic is more complex and alive than the sociologist-photographers and the economists who look at reality through a telescope can grasp. May 1968 cannot be dissected by looking separately at the power of the strike on the one hand and the policy of the CP and the CGT on the other.

An explosion after 20 years of economic growth

May 1968 exploded after 20 years of growth. The social weight of wage earners increased. But the patterns within this category shifted, and they were linked in a different way to society as a whole. Gains were achieved. But there was still a feeling that they had not received a large enough share of the wealth around them, and that they could lose what they had achieved. This is the source of the combination of the defensive and offensive, the vagueness about the goals of the strike that made it difficult for its potentialities to emerge.

Tradition — the role of the CP and the CGT — the political culture and history also weighed in the balance. The years preceding 1968 had not made it possible for experiences to ripen and for activists to mature qualitatively and quantitatively who could have appeared capable of leading a prolonged assault. It was one thing for the strike to get underway without any central control (but given impetus on more than one occasion by activists and cadres of the CGT or the CP). A limited outflanking of the trade-union apparatuses is another, especially if you measure this by the yardstick of the breadth of the strike.

The strike committees essentially represented the grip of the apparatus on the workplaces, through its activist base. The result was contradictory. The braking role of the apparatus was far from evident. The committees were not elected. There were

12. Jean-Marie Vincent, *Temps modernes*, July 1968.
13. Jean Poperen, *L'unité de la gauche 1965-1973*, Fayard, 1975, p.132.

14. Ibid., pp.133-4.

15. Lacouture, op. cit., p.683.

16. Poperen, op. cit., p.141.



no strikes that started up the process of production again on a different basis, no active strikes, strikes that could have thrown the pendulum further to the left when it could go no further on the political level.

Thus, no experience, even partial ones, of direct democracy could take shape. That was the precondition for displacing the legitimacy of the parliamentary democratic institutions, especially since the masses' democratic feelings had been put on edge, and rightly so, by the Stalinist experience.

1968 laid the basis for other advances

Finally, the crisis of political leadership — which was real for some days, although cushioned by Pompidou's initiatives — should not be transposed onto the repressive apparatus. The prefect of police, the minister of defence, Pierre Messmer, and the chief of the general staff, General Michel Fourquet, did "deliberate" among themselves and take decisions. They did not just talk, they acted. Balladur, Grimaud and Lacouture brought up the question of using the army, which was discussed explicitly on May 29, but only discussed. In the army itself, with a few exceptions, the mood of the conscripts was to remain silent.

So, not everything was possible, far from it. But something different from the May 30 "debacle" without a fight was possible. Those who realize today, like the *rénovateurs* and Juquin, what a vacuum was left by the failure of the CP to link up with such a social struggle are expressing in their way an understanding that there was a possibility to turn the situation in a different direction. It was within reach.¹⁷ The CP and the CGT rejected it.

Obscuring the difference between the May 1968 crisis and the post-May 1968 period is a sleight of hand. It confuses the reward of success with the consolation prize of defeat. Of course, once the momentum was broken the de Gaulle, Pompidou and Giscard governments were going to make concessions. They relaunched the economic machine. Braking the momentum does not mean crushing a movement.

So, on the basis laid down by 1968 there were advances in other areas — the women's movement, democratic reforms of the education system, greater trade-union rights. But one cannot retroactively say that these gains were all that was at stake in 1968 in order to throttle a debate on strategy, which according to the conventional wisdom today no longer has any place.

An intelligent observer like Viansson-Ponté, who has been wrong less often than the scribblers in vogue today, was totally off the track in March 1968. ★

THE TET OFFENSIVE

VIETNAM, 1968. On January 31, the Tet offensive began.¹ The liberation forces almost simultaneously attacked enemy positions in all the large towns in the south of the country, in 36 of the 44 provincial capitals as well as 64 other local centres.² Lasting three weeks, there was fighting in the heart of Saigon, even in the sanctuary of the US embassy which was partially occupied by a revolutionary commando squad.

In this unprecedented offensive, auxiliaries and local armed forces were usually in the front lines. The regular forces fought the US army in a broad frontal combat around the Khe Sanh base, not far from the demarcation line between north and south. Hué, in the centre of Vietnam, was taken by the people's army. The battle of Hué lasted until February 24. The Americans only succeeded in retaking this ancient and symbolic citadel after having bombarded and destroyed 80 per cent of it.

PIERRE ROUSSET

THROUGHOUT February, battles continued across the country. In May, a second wave of battles hit 119 urban centers and military bases. In the third wave, in August-September, the liberation forces attacked American installations more systematically. But the bulk of the Tet offensive came in February.

During this watershed year, the effort made by the liberation forces was considerable. Nonetheless, in face of US firepower, the revolutionary wave ebbed. In South Vietnam, the United States held a total monopoly in the sky, as well as a considerable advantage in heavy arms, artillery and armor. Its aircraft carriers cruising offshore were out of reach of any attack. The liberation forces began to retreat. Victory was not yet at hand. It took seven more years and great losses before the revolution finally triumphed.

In the United States, the shock was terrible. Despite the information gathered before the offensive was unleashed, the US command and government were neither able to prevent it nor to foresee its scope. The South Vietnamese regime and the Saigon army cut a pathetic figure. The battles

unfolded under the TV cameras. The images of death flashed immediately into people's homes. The anti-war movement in the United States experienced a new upsurge. Anti-war feeling was really becoming a major political factor.

A technologically sophisticated, ruinous war

Worldwide, solidarity with the Vietnamese people was in the ascendant. Radicalized youth in Mexico and in Paris denounced the US intervention. The truth about imperialist domination was revealed starkly by this vast, technologically sophisticated, ruinous war against a poor people fighting for their right to self-

1. "Tet" is the Vietnamese new year, which falls at the end of January/beginning of February.

2. It should be remembered that from 1954 to 1975, Vietnam was divided in two by a "demarcation line" separating the territory to the north, controlled by the Revolutionary Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) and the area to the south controlled by the Republic of Vietnam, a neo-colonial regime. During this period, US troops succeeded French forces in the southern part of the country.



determination. The resistance was heroic. Justice was on its side.

What is more, victory now seemed possible, even if it receded in March. In many countries, Tet 1968 galvanized radicalized and oppositionist sections of youth. A spur was given to the mobilizations that prefigured May 1968 in France. Symptomatically, our demonstrations echoed to the cries of "Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh — Che, Che, Che Guevara!"

The Paris talks began between the Vietnamese and the US government. But this was only a diplomatic continuation of the battle that continued on the political and military terrain. The real negotiations got underway a few years later, leading to the 1973 accords and the withdrawal of US forces from Vietnam.

The Tet offensive was one of the biggest political and military events in recent decades, and it was also one of the more complex. For those "disillusioned" with 1968 and Vietnam, as well as for the intellectuals of the new right, what was involved was simply "revolutionary mythology," or even a media creation. If the TV had not been there, Kissinger sighed, the course of the war in Vietnam might have been changed.³

However, in this case the media did not create the event. They could not even play it up; it was intrinsically too important for that. They simply revealed it to the world and to the American people, to the great

distress of Washington — a so-called democratic government whose foreign policy depended on its ability to lie freely to the voters. The media did not invent the horror of the imperialist aggression. They probably could never have reflected all that it meant in deeper, real human terms.

If public opinion increasingly turned against the dirty war in Vietnam, this was not because of any artificial agitation kept up by the TV journalists. It was because too many American soldiers were dying. It was because the Tet offensive showed that after years of military intervention, a US victory was further away than ever. This unjust war was endless.

Far from a myth, the Vietnamese events of 1968 were an eye-opener. In their complexity, they revealed many of the essential features of the contemporary world, far more than we were able to understand 20 years ago, when we mobilized in defence of this exemplary liberation struggle.

We still probably had too superficial a perception of what the 1968 Tet offensive revealed about the limits of US power and about the extraordinary potential of popular resistance. Even in the 1950s, the Vietnamese revolution had checkmated big classical imperialist powers such as France and Great Britain. The victory of the Cuban revolution in 1959 posed a formidable challenge to the capitalist world's new policeman, the United States, which had

failed to impose its law on the Castro regime just off its coast.

In the 1960s, the Vietnamese revolution was one of the first to feel the full force of the counter-revolutionary war effort mounted by Washington in response to the Cuban challenge. Behind the French involvement, US intervention in Vietnam began quite early, well before 1954. Since 1961, US advisors had been waging their "special war."

Vietnam became a key test for US credibility

But it was in 1965 that the US military escalation really got underway, with a full commitment of air power to the Indochinese theater of war and the landing of an expeditionary force that was soon to reach 550,000 men. In the same year, the world counter-revolution scored some bloody points, from the Dominican Republic to Indonesia.

With all the means at its disposal, Washington undertook a real test of strength in Vietnam. Its aim above all was to reestablish the credibility of US power, which had been badly shaken by the ill-starred landing in the Bay of Pigs in Cuba in 1961. For years, the Vietnamese test became a kingpin in the world policy of the United States. It was a failure, foreshadowed precisely by the 1968 Tet offensive.

The failure began in Vietnam. Despite the gravity of the blows dealt to the popular forces, the US war machine did not manage to break the skeletal structure of the resistance — a Communist Party and a liberation movement rooted in the national and social fabric of the country. With the benefit of several decades of experience, the resistance demonstrated its tenacity and its mobility.

Continuing its long-drawn-out struggle, the resistance adapted to the new conditions. It held the strategic initiative and regularly retook the tactical initiative in the political, military and soon in the diplomatic arenas. For Washington, no military victory was possible in these conditions.

On the other hand, US imperialism found itself the prisoner of the very means it employed in Vietnam. It needed to protect its expeditionary force and the Saigon army, to cut politically intolerable losses, and at the same time to maintain its control of the territory at the risk of exposing itself to the enemy's blows. The counter-revolutionary army found itself in a stalemate situation.

The US government became increasingly dependent on heavy technology and its support for the corrupt regime, which remained more preoccupied with its internal factional struggles than fighting the communists. Washington sustained a more and more costly war effort and an increasingly artifi-

3. One of the main architects of US foreign policy during these war years and the chief of the US delegation in the Paris negotiations.

cial South Vietnamese economy. It was a vicious circle. In these conditions, no political victory could be won over the revolution. This was an impasse.

Its failure in Vietnam became a setback for the American government at home and abroad. With the Tet offensive, the American bourgeoisie, politicians and the military caste began to realize the limits of their power.⁴ The resources of the United States were not inexhaustible. Continuation of the war was coming into conflict with the needs of the economy, as the dollar crisis and the end of the period of expansion appeared on the horizon.

Business circles were worried. The concentration of military efforts in Vietnam was dislocating the global deployment of US forces extending from Europe to the Middle East, from the Indian Ocean to the Northern Pacific. Moreover, by straining financial resources, it was holding back the modernization of armaments. When North Korea boarded a US spy ship, Washington could not respond. The Pentagon split. The human cost —in American lives, of course — was becoming unacceptable to the population. In 1970, anti-war feeling reached its peak in the United States. The politicians panicked.

On the other hand, the policy of "Vietnamization" adopted after 1968, with the aim of substituting Vietnamese lives for American ones, required massive material investments. Once again, it was a vicious circle.

It took several more years for the realities to catch up with Washington. It had to negotiate, hoping that it could still avoid defeat, but in the knowledge now that victory was impossible. Tet 1968 began to reveal this twofold reality — the limits of the resources of the most powerful of imperialisms, and the great resources that can be commanded by a resistance that is both national and popular.

This truth had been known for a long time, of course, but it had to be updated. The Indochinese peoples were compelled to demonstrate it, and they succeeded at a

time when the White House was trying to impose a *Pax Americana* on the entire world. They paid a very high price for it.

The Tet offensive also revealed this price, and the new difficulties of the revolutionary struggle. This was something that at the time we perceived less clearly. We know that "In the hour of the furnaces, only the light can be seen." Nonetheless, it is important to reflect on the problems of revolutions today, with their obscure aspects and the contradictions that they have to confront.

Tet was to be a turning point in the war

It was in January 1968 that the Political Bureau of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) took the final decision to launch the Tet offensive. It was to be a turning point in the war, qualitatively changing its course. The party leadership prudently maintained quite a wide range of objectives. They ran from a "maximum" (opening up a "breach" that would clear the way for a rapid victory) to a "minimum" (close to what actually happened, with the onset of a political crisis in the United States, accompanied by hard military counter-offensives by Washington, which foreshadowed a combined process of fighting and negotiations).

The result of the Tet offensive was not preordained. The situation had been changing rapidly since 1965, and the real possibilities had to be tested in the fighting itself. The bulk of the regular forces had to remain mobile long enough to evaluate how the battles went. To achieve the maximum effect, uprisings had to be combined with military offensives in the strict sense, and this had to be done in particular in the cities. With this perspective, the role of the underground urban political infrastructure was crucial.⁵

In Vietnamese military thinking, great importance was accorded to insurrections and to combining all forms of struggle.

This was related to the traditions inherited from the Comintern and above all to the experience of the revolution of August 1945 and the roots that the guerrillas developed later in densely populated areas. Some of these bordered on the Saigon metropolitan area itself, such as the revolutionary bastion of Cu Chi.⁶

Problems appeared at the outset of Tet 1968. (The regular forces were not able to move as freely as had been expected in the Saigon region.) None-

theless, a number of the objectives set were achieved, with the exception of one major goal — there were no insurrectional mobilizations in Saigon. The cost of the offensive was very high. There were heavy losses. The underground political apparatus had come out into the open in order to try to organize the population.

Many surviving cadres had to leave their traditional areas of work when the military retreat started because of the threat of repression. Nonetheless, in the coming months and years, the activists were hit hard by the repression. The Saigon organization, already limited in 1968, found itself dangerously weakened. More generally, after the offensive, the revolution temporarily lost a part of the territory that it had controlled before.

In 1968, neither the revolution nor the counter-revolution were really able to take the initiative on a national scale. Both had to reorganize their forces. The final balance sheet of the Tet offensive depended therefore in large part on the way the contending parties readjusted their forces, exploiting their strong points and correcting their weak ones. At the end of 1968, the success or failure of the Tet offensive was not yet really determined. The VCP proved able to assimilate the lessons of the experience most quickly and thereby to regain the initiative. Its politico-military thinking, probably the richest in the liberation movements, continued to evolve. The 1972 and 1975 offensives testified to this.

A key victory for the future of the liberation struggle

Tet was of course a victory, and a key one for the future of the liberation struggle. But its price was really very high. The effects of this are still being felt today, in particular the weakening of the apparatus of rooted and experienced cadres. This factor clearly weighed heavily in the processes of bureaucratization that appeared in the wake of the 1975 victory.

A debate, at times a sharp one, has gone on within the VCP over whether the same results could have been achieved in 1968 at a lesser cost, for example by calling off the offensive earlier.

What were the reasons for the lack of mass mobilization in Saigon in February 1968? The first was the massive bombardment. The US forces used all their arms, without any regard for civilians. Before a military victory of the liberation forces paralyzes the enemy's firepower, how can an insurrectionary mobilization be organized?

4. Gabriel Kolko's last book offers a very rich and interesting analysis of the overall course of the Vietnam war and US policy: *Vietnam, Anatomy of a War 1940-1975*, Allen & Unwin, London/Sydney, 1986.

5. It should be noted that in the absence of sufficient documentation a part of this description remains hypothetical.

6. The Cu Chi zone became famous for its extraordinary network of tunnels, which made it possible for the resistance army to operate even behind enemy lines.



Political conditions probably played a role as well. The liberation front's organization in the capital was probably not strong enough to win by itself, when the regular forces could not break through the US defences. Finally, the country was changing socially and politically, torn apart by an increasingly terrible war, deportations of populations, counter-insurgency social measures and economic upsets.

The 1968 Tet offensive was launched at a time when South Vietnam was in the melting pot, before the VCP leadership had really grasped the depth of these changes. It seems, in fact, that it did not fully take stock of this problem until well after the 1975 victory. In a country reshaped by a modern war of unprecedented intensity and duration, the social cohesion of the masses in Saigon was being gradually undermined. This made revolutionary mass self-activity more and more problematic, as well as making organizational work more difficult.

An extraordinary lesson of revolutionary initiative

As the years went by, this problem was to grow worse. But the experience of Tet 1968 already revealed its scope. Most of us were not able to perceive this at the time. We did of course analyze the history of the Vietnamese Communist Party from an independent standpoint. But we still looked on the revolution with an inexperienced eye. We did not really feel the exhausting nature of this struggle, which had been carried on for decades with such inadequate resources. We had not yet learned sufficiently to look for lessons in the difficulties and setbacks.

With hindsight, because of the questions it raised, Tet and its aftermath emerge as an extraordinary lesson of revolutionary initiative and realism. This body of experiences deserves to be restudied in the light of the documentation available today on Vietnam and the lessons of subsequent revolutions. For many of us, it took time to understand the importance of the diplomatic moves opened up by the 1968 offensive.

We knew that US imperialism was going to take advantage of Moscow's bureaucratic flabbiness, as well as of the upsets of the Maoist cultural revolution and the Sino-Soviet conflict, to try to increase the isolation of the Indochinese revolutions. We knew how hard the VCP was striving to preserve its international freedom of action, determined not to find itself again in the subordinate position imposed on it at the time of the 1954 Geneva negotiations.⁷

We recognized the absolute right of those fighting to determine what compromises they may consider necessary. We were able to avoid two major errors. The first was the one that led several components of the solidarity movement to confuse their role with that of an intermediary.

Some personalities in the US anti-war movement stepped directly into the diplomatic arena, trying to propose compromise

formulas acceptable both to Washington and to the Vietnamese, and this was at a time when the Vietnamese did not want to commit themselves concretely, considering that the situation was not yet ripe for that.

We understood that the role of solidarity was something different — to create better conditions for the most rapid and most complete victory possible (except when it was necessary, as at the end of 1972, to respond actively to an appeal from the Vietnamese for support for a concrete diplomatic initiative).

Deciding on compromises (which is at the heart of any negotiation) is in fact the sole responsibility of those who are doing the fighting, since only they can assess the relationship of forces that determines diplomatic options.

Likewise, we did not follow the path of those who saw the Vietnamese policy of negotiations as proof of a desire to capitulate, a dangerously wrong view that was defended by a minority of our own movement, on the basis of a profoundly false analysis of the nature of the Communist Party of Vietnam. So we did not see the opening of the Paris talks in 1972-73 as a sign of a retreat, but rather as an advance.

However, we had difficulty in assessing the intrinsic constraints of diplomatic activity in a defensive period. Burned by past painful experiences of the workers' movement, we remained a little ultra-left in this area. We had only very partially studied the seminal experience of the Russian revolution. The Russo-German negotiations at Brest-Litovsk in 1917-18, a resounding negation of all secret diplomacy, blinded us to the problems posed by the Rappalo negotiations in 1922, in which secret diplomacy played a central role.

For many of us, the Vietnamese experience of 1968-1973 was an opportunity for the first time for studying the facts of a struggle in the international arena in all their complexity. This, for example, helped us to understand better the activity of the Sandinistas in this field after the victory of the Nicaraguan revolution. Nonetheless, we were never "ultra-left" in the area of active international solidarity.

Solidarity essential for victory of the revolution

International solidarity and the anti-war movement in the United States were essential to the victory of the Indochinese revolutions. Strengthening them was a duty. The struggle of the Indochinese people, on the other hand, played an exemplary role that promoted the emergence of new revolutionary generations around the world. It also opened up a breach that facilitated the liberation struggles in Nicaragua and of the former Portuguese colonies in Africa.

International solidarity was always inadequate to the needs of the situation, and it can be said that the Indochinese revolutionaries gave the world more through their

struggle than they got back in international support. Soviet and Chinese aid did, of course, play an important role. But it was never on a scale commensurate with the needs and the stakes involved. Worse still, it was accompanied by unacceptable pressures. The mobilization of the workers' movement in the imperialist countries was too slow in coming and too fragile. The fault for this lies primarily with the reformist leaderships.

Internationalism must be revived today

In France itself, the May explosion broke the continuity of the solidarity mobilizations by focusing everyone's attention on local political and social struggles. The pre-May organizations in France, such as the National Vietnam Committee (CVN), for all practical purposes ceased to exist. It was necessary to go against the current and launch a new movement, the Indochina Solidarity Front (FSI) in 1969-70. We were among the first, along with some activist intellectual figures, to provide the necessary push so that this renewal of internationalist activity could get going.

All the time lost in the field of international solidarity, all the criminal delays, all the divisions cost dearly in Indochina in more years of war, destruction and further exhaustion. Those "disillusioned" by Vietnam should not forget that!

Likewise, the Sino-Indochinese wars of 1978-79, which had disastrous effects in the region as well as internationally, should not blot out the international lesson that Indochina represented for the 1968 generation of activists.⁸ The Vietnamese needed the most dynamic and broadest sort of solidarity, one that could rise above partisan and factional infighting. They clearly let this be known.

The National Liberation Front was ready to work with anyone in this field. It needed solidarity without conditions, without strings, without reservations. For us, this was an apprenticeship in a real united-front approach to solidarity, one that went against the current of a lot of organizational sectarianism: "Everything for Vietnam, everything for Indochina."

This was a healthy experience and is still relevant for Nicaragua, El Salvador, the Philippines, South Africa and many other struggles. Over and above the cynicism or jaded weariness of many former activists of the 1968 generation, internationalism is a "mood" of the 1960s that deserves to be maintained and revived today. ★

7. In 1954, in the negotiations with France, Moscow and Peking imposed a series of grave compromises on the Vietnamese, Laotian and Cambodian revolutionary forces.

8. On the Sino-Indochinese crisis and the period prior to 1975, see "The Sino-Indochinese crisis," a resolution adopted by the XI World Congress of the Fourth International, November 1979; reprinted in a special supplement to *Intercontinental Press-Inprecor*, January 1980.

A GENERATION OF WOMEN BECAME POLITICALLY AWARE

LIDIA CIRILLO, a leader of the Italian section of the Fourth International, spoke to *Bandiera Rossa* about what it was like to be a woman in the Italian student movement and the left in 1968.

YOU WERE perhaps the only woman leader in Italy in 1968. If I'm not mistaken, your name appeared in the newspapers...

That's not quite true. In 1968 I had already graduated and left university. I had not been very active in the UGI (left students' organization). In the internal division of labour within the Communist Party (PCI) and the young communists, this was entrusted to younger comrades. Towards the end of 1967 and beginning of 1968, the centre of political activity was beginning to shift to the university, so I returned and made a few appearances there. Without trying to be big-headed, at Naples I was involved more than anyone in preparing what was to become the 1968 movement. In the first part of the year, I was centrally involved with the discussion, organization and actions of the left in Naples.

As for the press, *Espresso* once or twice mentioned the work I did in organizing dissidents within the PCI as an "entryist". In fact, I had joined the GCR, then the Fourth International's Italian section.

■ What relationship was there between what was going on in the Italian CP, in the federation of young communists and in the student movement?

There was a very direct relationship. The leaders of the student radicalization were mainly formed in the parties of the "traditional" left. At the beginning of the 1960s, there had been a big influx of younger, more educated comrades compared to the average members of the PCI. They had a definitely critical attitude, and a certain irreverence towards the leaders.

In 1968 there was a rapid radicalization from which new, young — sometimes very young — vanguards emerged, which were militant and determined. However these young people found their points of refer-

ence in existing political ideas, and therefore with the groups or leaders with a history on the left in Naples.

■ What were the criteria that these young people used in making their political choices or choosing their leaders?

Contrary to what was suggested by the media, a leader is not simply someone who speaks better than others, who has a tougher skin, or who is unafraid of the microphone and the heckling.

To even manage to get to the microphone in the big student general meetings in 1968 you needed several dozen comrades who would guarantee you access to it! In the second half of 1968 in Naples, the battle for hegemony over the radicalizing youth had been won by the Stalinists. For me, a "Trotskyist", to get to speak was an almost superhuman effort. But I did, creating chaos until I was given the speaking time. When I got to the microphone, all hell broke loose.

But that made me laugh. There were always so many students who didn't know anything about Stalinism, Trotskyism and all that. They were annoyed about the treatment reserved for me, because I was a woman and because what I said was clearer and less dogmatic.

Almost always, there were students who came to see me afterwards, curious to know what I did, what Trotskyists were and why I was greeted in this fashion. I think some people were convinced that my name was "Cuarta" [Fourth], because when it was my turn to speak the chair announced that the Fourth would speak!

When the high school student movement took shape, with young people who were a lot less politicized and completely disorganized, one had to speak briefly and make clear proposals in their meetings. Even the fierce sectarianism of the first years faded, and the "united front" began to be discovered.

■ You said "because I was a woman". But what did it mean to be a woman in 1968?

It would be better to start at the beginning and say what it meant to be a woman in the Communist Party in Southern Italy in the 1960s. The women who joined the party were the wives, girlfriends and sisters of comrades. Their presence implied an ac-

companying male presence which guaranteed their suitability. When a woman arrived alone in a branch, as I did, and said "I want to join the party" one question immediately appeared in the eyes of those present: "what does she want?" Of course, as there were women in the leadership of the PCI, the idea that women wanted to be politically active was accepted as a possibility. But it was only one of the possible hypotheses. The others were nearly all based on what you could expect to find in a predominantly masculine atmosphere...

I should add however that, after having proved myself, I was welcomed among the "men" without any other hesitation or difficulty. But they remembered a bit later that I was a woman, when I became an "extremist", a heretic. Insults and slanders were at the time a traditional method of struggle within the PCI. It was even easier against a woman.

■ On the basis of your experience, would you say that the 1968 movement was sexist?

1968 was sexist because society as a whole was, and so was the left. I use the past tense, not because I think things have changed profoundly, but because today — particularly on the left — sexism is hidden, ashamed of itself. And also because, deep down, something has really changed.

Feminism began to have its impact later, through the process of an autonomous rise of the only people who could define the problems, contradictions and needs of women: women themselves.

Those who were active in the 1970s will remember the welcome reserved for feminist questions by the left, both the old and the new left. Feminism was generally seen as a diversion from the contradiction between the workers and capitalism. A diversion that would set women against men and divide the party. It was the most politicized women who reacted with the most suspicion. But, at a certain moment, these women themselves realized that a party that could not take into account the specific needs of a factor as decisive as women had no reason to exist.

But this is only an aspect. 1968 was sexist, but it also marked the start of the feminism of the 1970s because it forced a generation of women to become politically aware. Political and social activity involved millions of women in struggle (workers, students, housewives), who came out of their shells and dealt with collective problems. I would like to say something else: without 1968, feminism would not have existed as a mass phenomenon, as a fighting movement. ★

This feature is part of a series of articles on 68-88 being published by IV this year. See also the article on Czechoslovakia already published in IV 136, March 7.

Results of our reader's survey

WE HAD a very positive response to our reader's questionnaire, with around 15 per cent of you replying and lots of useful comments and constructive suggestions for improvements to the magazine's contents and coverage.

OUR computerized analysis of the surveys showed up some interesting facts and figures regarding the more specific questions. We were pleasantly surprised that the majority of readers found *IV*'s prices reasonable: 68% in Britain, 81% in North America and 88% in Europe.

This is an interesting breakdown, as going by official exchange rates *IV* is most expensive in Europe and least expensive in Britain! No doubt due to the relative cheapness of newspapers and journals in Britain, it was here that most people (24%) said it was too expensive.

Very few people said that they disliked the design of *IV*, with 79% saying that they liked the presentation. However, a number of readers commented that sometimes the magazine looked a bit "heavy", and that they would prefer to see more photographs, graphics, cartoons and maps.

International VIEWPOINT

A number of people also mentioned here that some articles were too long and could have been sub-edited better. But 75% of you thought that the length of articles in general was "OK", with 20.5% saying they were too long and no-one that they were too short. Most people read *IV* for a variety of reasons, and not just for one sort of coverage. The reasons for reading the magazine were divided up equally between news, analysis, political and economic coverage and news from the Fourth International.

The popularity of the different types of coverage was as follows: special extended features (64%), Fourth International news (57.6%), general news articles (38%), interviews (26.9%), the Around the World pages (26%) and book reviews (15.3%) — although a number of replies mentioned that they had liked the few book reviews we have carried.

International VIEWPOINT

As for the favourite articles in the recent past, there were three clear leaders: coverage on the USSR, on the Middle East and the articles on the world economic situation. In addition, recent articles on Britain, Belgium, Central America, Czechoslovakia, Ireland, lesbian and gay rights, Philippines, Poland and South Africa were particularly mentioned, as were the special features for International Women's Day and on liberation theology.

Most people marked "none" when asked what were the least interesting articles, but all the most popular articles cited above were to be found in other people's "least interesting" lists (which just goes to prove you can't please everyone all of the time!)

Generally, articles and news on the Fourth International and its sections were voted top of the "we want more" category, along with economic coverage and Central and Latin America.

Perhaps the most interesting responses for us were the general comments and suggestions for improving our coverage. Here is a selection of the remarks:

More articles on the role of social-democratic parties, especially for English-speaking activists in places like Australia, New Zealand and Britain; More reports from workers in struggle rather than commentaries; The Fourth International's line and program on all the big questions is lacking — too much of a journalistic approach and too little political leadership; Short extracts from Trotskyist publications around the world as a regular feature... More of what the workers' organizations are debating rather than what the academics are "observing".

*A publication with lengthy articles on Belgium, West Germany and Turkey will be regarded as remote and obscure in North America...but they are quite interested in the Soviet Union and Central America; Comrades who read *IV* tend to be active militants with not a lot of time — so please cut out waffle and padding!; There are no references to youth politics — this has got to be improved!*

More analysis, less commentary...the back section should contain longer, more theoretical articles; Overall, I have not found a better source of information and solid Marxist analysis about world events; More pages, more often; Discussions on

FREE DRAW WINNER
The winner of a free one year's subscription to IV was Brian P. from London, NW10.

controversial subjects now and then would be interesting; I would like you sometimes to take a broader look at international developments and describe them from a "transnational" point of view.

More coverage of other tendencies in the workers' movement and of the so-called new social movements; More on feminism, gay politics and anti-racism; Up-to-date analysis of Central America is slipping...more nitty-gritty, street level stuff on what the left is doing — information you cannot get from the bourgeois press; When there have been international campaigns, the coverage has been good — I would like to see more of that.

Finally, many readers sent in proposals for extending *IV*'s circulation. Some of these suggestions are ideas that we have promoted in our past fund and circulation drives, but they deserve to be repeated. Others are new ideas that should be implemented. Just one comment: although we do our best to promote *IV* from Paris, there is no substitute for groups or individual readers locally taking time out to push *IV* in their countries or localities. As one reader says, "it just requires energy on a person to person basis".

International VIEWPOINT

If all of our readers won just one new subscription to the magazine, we would double our circulation overnight.

What about producing collected off-prints of articles with a thematic connection?; Give a free subscription to well-known figures and ask them to comment, then use the comments in an advertising drive; You should set up new financial drives like you did last year; Try interesting public and/or college libraries...and ask sympathetic magazines to include an advertising mailing; Try to get the magazine on the stands in "progressive" bookstores; Getting it into indexes of current periodicals should help get library subscriptions. [Great ideas, but please remember to send us bookshop and library addresses!]

*More contact with your readers... offering special advantages for regular subscribers; Posters inset in issues once in a while; Keep regular column on inside page which plugs sales; An obligation for the sections to spend a lot more effort selling *IV*...it is just as important as the national papers; Make subscriptions compulsory for [English-speaking?] members of the Fourth International. ★*

Mass raids and arrests in West Belfast

FOLLOWING the killing on March 19 of two plain-clothes soldiers who smashed into a republican funeral (see IV 138), the British forces in Ireland have launched a savage offensive against the citizens of West Belfast who took part in the defence of the funeral cortège.

The earlier massacre at Miltown cemetery by a loyalist gunman has been written out of history, in the same way as the long history of state attacks by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) and the British army.

JOHN McANULTY

IMEDIATELY after the deaths of the soldiers the RUC announced that it would be seeking to arrest up to 30 people. Within a week four men had been arrested and interrogated. Then, after a long pause, on April 22 a further 13 men were arrested in dawn raids and, after interrogations, seven were charged.

The charges, ranging from murder to grievous bodily harm, false imprisonment and withholding information, have no moral or legal basis. They are simply a device by Britain to seek revenge and create an atmosphere of mass terror in which the entire nationalist population will be on trial.

All this was accompanied by a wave of hysteria in the British press, which plumb new depths. The *Sunday Times* used photographs and information supplied by the British intelligence services to identify republican militants in the cortège and lead the slander campaign and witchhunt against them.

Two people arrested in the mass raids who were named by the *Sunday Times* were Terrance (Cleeky) Clarke, a leading republican, and Jim Neeson of the Falls Taxi Association. They were denied bail even though the charges against them (grievous bodily harm and false imprisonment) were not major ones, and even though they had refused to run away but had remained at home to face the charges. In a tragic development, the wife of Jim Neeson attempted suicide the following day. The British demonstrated



their "mercy" by allowing him four hours bail.

Media support for the witchhunt did not save them from falling victims themselves. The Prevention of Terrorism Act was used to seize film from the TV companies and executives were threatened that they would be charged with withholding information if they refused.

The most extreme step was the suspension of Belfast City Council employee Roisin McDonagh for writing an article in defence of the people of West Belfast in the *Irish Times*. She was threatened with the sack, but support from her union and from the community prevented this, and she has now returned to work with a reprimand.

Britain is to blame for the violence. The British army, the RUC and their loyalist auxiliaries have all played their part in bringing violence and death to the funerals of IRA volunteers. Now they are attempting to criminalize the people for undertaking their own defence. Solidarity in the form of international protests against the witchhunt and for the release of the prisoners is urgently needed. ★

