

# International VIEWPOINT

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## International VIEWPOINT

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# Millions of flowers bloom in Beijing spring

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE was written on May 5, 1989. Since then the events have developed with lightning speed. The mass mobilization of students has been joined by millions of workers throughout the country. The power of this mass mobilization has upset everybody's plans and predictions, starting with those of the top leaders of the party and the army high command.

As long as Mikhail Gorbachev stayed in China, the Deng faction did not dare to resort to confrontation, but as soon as he left (rather precipitously, not very happy with what he calls the Chinese "hotheads"), a violent debate broke out in the top leadership, very reminiscent of the one that occurred in Hungary in October 1956. A majority of the Standing Committee opted for the hard line. This was a double misjudgment.

It completely underestimated the determination of the students and of the popular masses supporting them. But it was also a serious misjudgment of the mood of the army. Soldiers, misinformed by the government about what was really happening in Peking, wavered. Until now, no repression has occurred. In desperation, Li Peng issued an ultimatum to the students. They had to leave Tiananmen Square by midnight, May 21. Nothing happened.

At the time of writing (May 22), the situation is in the melting pot. The army itself seems to be deeply divided. These events have already had a major impact in the USSR, where a rally of 100,000 people in Moscow heard calls for solidarity with the Chinese masses and for transforming the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies into a constituent assembly.

ERNEST MANDEL

THE MASSIVE student demonstrations that have shaken Beijing — and to a lesser extent Shanghai, Tianjin, Changsha, Wuhan, Xian and other provincial cities — represent another important change in the international situation.

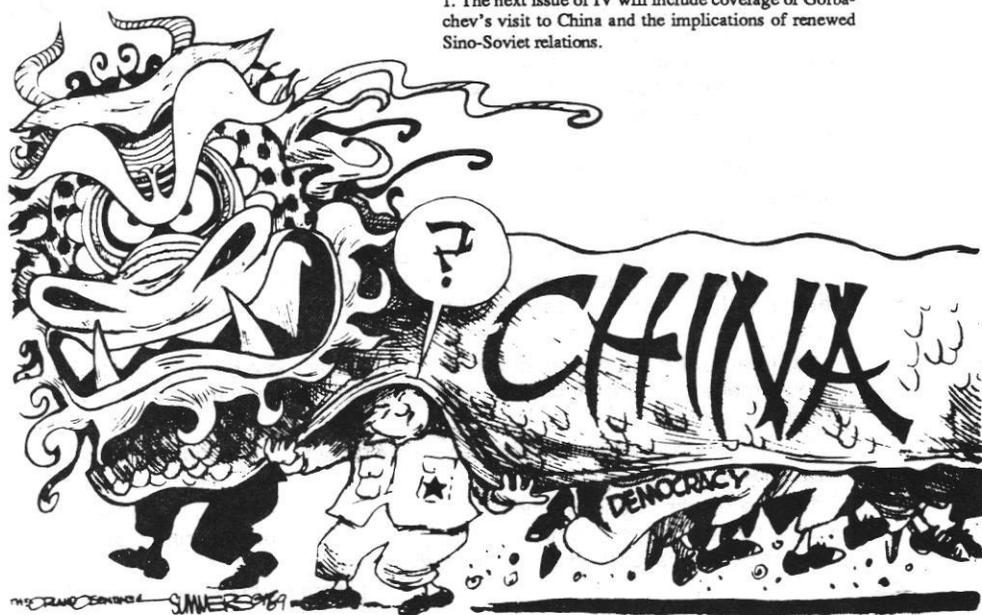
The international dimension of this awakening is not obvious simply from the fact that the Beijing students explicitly refer to *glasnost*, with Gorbachev's visit on May 15.<sup>1</sup> It becomes doubly clear when we remember that the May 4 demonstration coincided with another notable "first": the participation of a Taiwan banker (a partisan of Chiang Kai-shek and overtly counter-revolutionary) in an Asian Development Bank conference in Beijing.

At the beginning, the mass demonstrations were made up primarily of students. They came in the wake of student agitation that had lasted for several weeks. Since the giant demonstration on April 27, which saw around 300,000 people on the streets, the inhabitants of Beijing (small traders, unemployed, workers in the "informal" sector and workers passing by) expressed their sympathy for the demonstrators. Building workers on sites along the route of the cortege shouted at the top of their voices: "Long live the students!" (*Die Zeit*, May 5, 1989.)

But on May 4 — the 70th anniversary of the 1919 student demonstration that "launched" mass action for the national-democratic revolution — the movement took a new turn. According to the *International Herald Tribune* on May 5, a large contingent of young workers joined the demonstration with their own demands. On the same date, *The Times* of London noted that in the large industrial centre of Changsha, 1,000 workers joined 6,000 students. This is what the leadership of the Chinese *nomenklatura* were afraid of. And this is what they could not prevent.

During the 15 days from April 19 to May

1. The next issue of IV will include coverage of Gorbachev's visit to China and the implications of renewed Sino-Soviet relations.



## 12 demands for a dialogue

Beijing students, who have formed an autonomous union, handed in a petition containing their 12 demands for talks on May 2 to the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the State Council and the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party. The government has rejected as "unreasonable" the preconditions set out in the petition, in particular the demand for the talks to be broadcast live.

FOR A substantive dialogue to take place as early as possible, we, as the selected representatives, here on behalf of the masses of students of the institutions of higher learning in Beijing, want to raise the following demands vis-à-vis the dialogue with the government and the Party Central Committee:

1. In the dialogue, the two parties should be completely equal in position and should sincerely work to solve the problems. Equal opportunities for speeches and questions should be guaranteed for both parties.

2. Student representatives participating in the dialogue should be acknowledged and selected by the majority of the students (especially by the students who took part in the patriotic and democratic movement). Meanwhile, we maintain that since the [official] student associations and graduate students' associations of the various Beijing universities and colleges failed to play any role in correctly guiding and helpfully organizing the movement, we absolutely refuse to let such associations designate student representatives. We also refuse to recognize the representativeness of those who were unilaterally and secretly invited by the government to be student representatives without the permission of the masses of students.

3. We demand that student representatives be created in the following ways: Since the self-governing union of students of the institutions of higher learning in Beijing, the organization that students spontaneously formed, has been playing the role of leader and organizer of this movement, and has won recognition from the masses of students, it is the self-governing union that should contact students and organize the selection of representatives. Each university or college should choose a few representatives, in accordance with the proportion of its students in the total number of Beijing students, to form a student delegation. Upon full discussion and consultation among the delegates, a number of students can be selected to act as the general spokesmen for the student side, while the rest can attend the dialogue meeting as observers. The observers can meet to discuss and supplement the speeches of the student spokesmen. They also have the right to question the government spokesmen.

4. Government participants to attend the dialogue meeting should be familiar with state affairs and have decision-making power....

5. It must be allowed that both sides invite representatives from the people or social groups to monitor the dialogue. Neither side should be permitted to refuse or to prevent their participation under any circumstances....

6. Spokesmen from each side must be given equal opportunities to speak, and the time for each speech should be limited....

7. In the course of a dialogue, both Chinese and foreign reporters should be allowed to do on-the-spot coverage of the event. The Central TV Station and the Central People's Broadcasting Station should broadcast the whole dialogue live. Both sides have the right to videotape, record and write down the events on the spot, and no organizations or individuals are permitted to interfere with or to stop this.

8. Dialogues should be held in turn in the places the government and student representatives propose respectively, and the time for the dialogue is to be decided upon by the two sides in consultation.

9. The government participants in the course of the dialogue should try their best to answer the questions that can be answered. And after the dialogue meeting, they should try their best to solve the raised problems that can be solved....

10. In order for the results of a dialogue to have legal binding, the two sides should make joint statements on them, with signatures by the two on the document.

11. The physical and political safety of the participants on both sides must be guaranteed.

12. The results of each round of dialogue, after it has ended, must be truthfully reported by major national newspapers and the radio stations together with the arrangements for the next round of dialogue. ★

[From *China Daily*, May 5, 1989.]

4, the students centred their demands around three things: democratic freedom in general; their right to have a democratic organization that they controlled themselves; and denouncing the bureaucracy's privileges.

Aside from these demands, which seemed to be unanimously supported, there were debates and differences on a number of questions: exact relations with the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), or, more exactly, with the present leadership team; and the attitude to the Maoist heritage and past. There is not enough information at present to pinpoint existing tendencies. But the very fact of these debates, which in some ways resemble those that took place in France and Europe in May '68, are themselves witness to the political awakening taking place.

## Differences between China and Eastern bloc

The scope of the demonstrations has visibly surprised and disconcerted the bureaucratic authorities, whose first response was repression. They then threatened to act even more harshly. Before the April 27 demonstration, they drew back in favour of dialogue with the "official" student organization. Finally, the threats of repression in relation to those who were supposed to have "broken the law" re-emerged. Everything was to depend on the development of the balance of forces in the days and weeks that followed. A hardening up of repression could hardly be ruled out. However, this would only have been stepped up in a situation where there was a serious ebb in the mass mobilizations.

While the mammoth demonstrations in Beijing came in the wake of events in the USSR and many countries of Eastern Europe, there were noticeable differences between the beginning of the political activity of the broad masses in the Soviet Union and in China that deserve to be highlighted.

First of all, the USSR is only at the beginning of *perestroika*, of the "free-market" economic reforms whose effects (including negative effects for the workers) for the time being remain limited. This is something that the working class fears rather than suffers from already. In the People's Republic of China, the awakening of the masses occurs after ten years of reforms, whose effects — first positive and then negative — on living standards are extensive and visible to the naked eye.

Next, in the USSR, political reforms in the sense of limited but real democratization have gone alongside the beginnings of economic reforms almost from the start. In China, aside from some timid openings towards intellectuals in Prime Minister Hu Yaobang's time, political democratization has not begun.

In addition, the social make-up of the demonstrators and oppositionists is very

different in the two countries. While Beijing workers demonstrated their support for the oppositionists, they remain minority participants in the movement for the time being (something that could change, obviously). As for the peasantry, in contrast to the USSR, they continue to represent the big majority of the active population in China. While they have launched a number of local strike movements, they still do not participate in political activity.

Finally, there is a qualitative difference in terms of the attitude of the bureaucratic leaders to the mass movement. In the Soviet Union, Gorbachev is undoubtedly endeavouring to channel the discontent in a way favourable to his overall orientation. He manoeuvres to keep control over the masses. But his attitude is still perceived by the masses as encouraging their autonomous participation in political life. The limited repression in Armenia and Georgia has not erased this impression, except in the regions concerned.

In China, on the other hand, the ruling group is seen as a team of autocrats who are not prepared to tolerate the least autonomy of the mass movement. This makes it the target of all mass mobilizations, which is not the case at present for the Gorbachev leadership in the USSR.

The origins and meaning of these differences are clearly revealed by the dynamic and consequences of the "free-market" economic reforms in the People's Republic.

China is still essentially an agricultural country. The *de facto* suppression of "people's cooperatives" and the collective exploitation of land (measures whose unpopularity was underestimated in the rest of the world) allowed an initial rapid development of productive forces in the countryside. Supplies improved in the villages and towns. The real income of the masses increased practically everywhere.<sup>2</sup>

## Contradictions of the market reforms

As in Russia at the time of the New Economic Policy (NEP), but on a much vaster scale, small and medium private industry developed in conjunction with an agriculture that was practically reprivatized, boosting the development of a layer of enriched and well-off peasant/entrepreneurs, and non-agricultural activities expanded rapidly in the countryside.

But, little by little, the contradictions of the "market" reforms began to rear their heads and, starting from 1987, they became increasingly explosive. Growing inequalities were bitterly resented by the mass of poor peasants.

In addition, the expansion of big industry, indubitably stimulated initially by the financial autonomy of firms and administrative decentralization, opened up a veritable overheating of the economy: an excess of investments, growing disproportions between sectors, and a lack of certain raw

materials.

The top layers of the bureaucracy, frightened by this evolution, tried to put the brakes on the "liberalization" process in September 1988. What they put on the agenda was in no way the restoration of capitalism. It was to send out tens of thousands of functionaries to "restore" order in the firms, the provinces and the villages by typical bureaucratic means. This increasingly explosive economic dynamic is unfolding in the background to what is the most serious long-term social problem facing China as well as for all the underdeveloped countries: unemployment and under-employment.

## Unemployment and under-employment

In the framework of high-technology industry, China does not have the necessary resources to create 200-250 million jobs. Mao tried to resolve this by massive deportations of young people from the towns to the countryside and by mobilizing excess labour in the villages for non-agricultural activities. This excess labour was integrated into the collective sector, with minimal output and a miserable standard of living. The result was an economic and social disaster.

The reforms undertaken by Deng Xiaoping from 1979 on implied the return of the young urbanites to the cities, and the freedom for them to set themselves up as self-employed in small trades. In the countryside, the excess labour was reabsorbed by private non-agricultural activities, including the growth of medium-sized firms. This labour therefore served to enlarge the private sector, which became preponderant in the villages with 80 million wage-earners in 1987. The result was firstly growth in productivity and higher living standards, and then the series of tensions and crises already mentioned. In this sense, the student explosion, like the Red Guard movement in the 1960s, also reflects the problem of the lack of possibilities for satisfactory jobs, which is a worrying problem of existence for millions of young people.

To the absence of a possibility of future employment as a motive for student discontent should be added their miserable living conditions. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* of May 11, 1989, stated that seven students are packed into dormitories of 15 square metres. Most of them can only eat bad quality rice with a little sauce and vegetables. Insomnia and illnesses caused by vitamin deficiency are widespread. On May 4, the *China Daily* admitted that the situation among young university teachers was scarcely better. They leave the universities en masse. At Beijing University, 70% of them cannot find lodgings where they can live with their spouse. The assistants earn 70 yuans a month [about \$19], less than half a workers' wages and clearly less than a living wage.

For the time being, this or that measure indispensable to the satisfaction of the legitimate material demands of the masses can come to the fore. This seems to be the case with the anti-inflation struggle in China from the workers' point of view, because it implies a monthly index-linked sliding scale of wages. (*IHT*, May 5, 1989.) But all these measures, as urgent as they are, can only really be implemented in an effective and lasting way if the monopoly of power in the hands of the bureaucracy is broken. The students are therefore quite correct to prioritize democratic demands.

With a remarkable political instinct, the Chinese students have linked a harsh denunciation of the bureaucracy's material privileges to their central democratic demands. The leading bureaucratic circles do not cling on to their monopoly of power essentially because of ideological dogmatism or political fanaticism. They cling on to it so as to defend and extend these privileges.

To justify its obstinate refusal to give in to the democratic demands of the students and their intellectual supporters, the *nom-enklatura* puts forward two sorts of argument.

First, the "conspiracy" fomented by the students to "undermine the social stability" that China so desperately needs. This argument is as old as every massive protest movement in history. It is the first reaction of every regime with its back to the wall.

## Fighting for pluralist democracy

The second argument is that the merits of the Chinese CP justify its monopoly of political power. The party's general secretary, Zhao Ziyang, explains that the CCP could only commit "errors" that are quickly put right, as can be read in his speech published in *China Daily* on May 4. But if the Chinese CP has the historic merit of having led the revolution to victory in 1949, this was not followed by simple "errors" but by disasters whose victims can be counted in millions. One can only think that these disasters could have been avoided, or rapidly curtailed at less cost, if the Chinese masses had been able to choose between various political alternatives. That is the meaning of pluralist democracy.

In fighting for this type of democracy, the Chinese students are fighting for the workers and poor peasants and for renewed progress in the direction of socialism, whatever their ideological confusions, which are inevitable after decades of the dictatorship. In this sense they must be given total support by all proletarian revolutionaries.

At the end of the Beijing demonstration on May 4, one of the student leaders, Wu Kai, announced the ending of the action on

2. For a more detailed analysis of the reform, see "Zhao Ziyang's new clothes" by A. Maraver, *IV* 150 & 151, October 31 & November 14, 1988.

May 5, while other student leaders do not seem to have said the same thing. Will this represent a retreat of the mass movement and a victory for the *nomenklatura*? That is not certain because it was the repression itself which, with the savage beating-up of some of the 5,000 or so demonstrators on April 19, played a detonator role for the massive demonstrations that followed. (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, May 4.)

In addition, the remarkable structures of self-organization — involving hundreds of thousands of Beijing students and something that has not been seen since 1927 — are continuing to function and to demand recognition by the authorities, and are becoming increasingly immutable.

### Bureaucracy divided over reactions to movement

It seems clear that before the explosion of discontent, the top echelons of the Chinese *nomenklatura* were divided. On one side was Deng Xiaoping, whose support for a hard-line reaction to the students puts him close to those elements of the bureaucracy that are wholly conservative and hostile to reform.

Moreover, a member of the political committee, Hu Quili, openly stated that the recognition of the unofficial students' association should be avoided at any cost because its leaders could become "Chinese Lech Walesas".

On the other side was Zhao Ziyang who, after some hesitation, has become a supporter of a much more measured reaction to the students, alongside which he gives a nod and a wink towards a real opening in the direction of significant reforms.

The massive reaction of journalists and party members in support of the students has visibly disconcerted the apparatchiks. The *Peasants' Daily*, with the fifth largest circulation in the country, has openly defended the students. Three other papers have done the same. One of them, the *World Economic Herald*, is published in Shanghai. After five hours of negotiations and pressure, its editor-in-chief refused to give in and published an article favorable to the students.

The mayor of Shanghai ordered the seizure of 300,000 copies that had already been printed. The editor-in-chief, Qin Benli, has been sacked. But during the May 4 demonstration, the slogan "Reinstate Qin Benli!" was chanted by tens of thousands of demonstrators. It was started up by journalists in the march, who also cried, "Don't force us to lie any more!"

At the end of the day, the big unknown factor is the degree of support for the students, if not the mobilization of workers themselves in the weeks to come. This will have a big influence on the evolution of the balance of forces.

And it will be this development that will determine if the student mobilizations will decline or not. ★



## Thatcher faces summer of discontent

**THERE IS a change taking place in the political situation in Britain that could point towards the end of the Thatcher years. A new wave of industrial militancy has emerged, which has even caused the British media to talk about a possible "summer of discontent".**

**At the same time, the County Council<sup>1</sup> elections on May 4 (the tenth anniversary of Thatcher's rule) resulted not only in the collapse of the centre parties, but in a significant swing to Labour. On the same day, Labour won the parliamentary by-election in the Vale of Glamorgan — a Tory seat for 38 years — with a 12% swing in their favour.**

### ALAN THORNETT

**B**UT THE key developments are on the industrial front. At the time of writing, over one-and-a-half million workers are either involved in strikes, strike decisions or strike ballots across ten industries. Where balloting is completed, in every case there are big majorities for industrial action.

- 10,000 dockers have just voted by 3-1 (with a 90% turnout) for an all-out strike in defence of the National Dock Labour Scheme, which is being abolished by the government (see below). Shop stewards, in defiance of the union leadership, have threatened strike action regardless of the outcome of a court ruling on its legality, which is due to be announced on May 24.

- 18,000 BBC staff have rejected a 7% pay offer, and are conducting a series of one- and two-day strikes in pursuit of a 16% wage claim. The unions are consider-

ing a fresh ballot for all-out action.

- There are two disputes on London Underground. An unofficial movement of drivers is conducting a series of one-day strikes that completely disrupt the capital. They are demanding a £64 a week pay increase [around \$105] and £23,000 [\$37,700] back pay. At the same time, the main rail union, the NUR, is balloting its 10,000 members on the underground for all-out strike action in opposition to new working conditions being imposed by management. There was an 8-1 majority for strike action, but the strike was constrained by a High Court injunction that the NUR complied with.

- 12,500 London bus drivers are being

1. County Councils are local governments in England and Wales, not including city administrations whose elections take place at a different time.

balloted for a series of one-day strikes after rejecting a 7.1% pay offer. The first of these strikes took place on May 15, coinciding with the third 24-hour strike by tube workers and an overtime ban by rail workers, effectively bringing London's public transport to a halt.

## Rail unions balloting for strike action

- The rail unions, NUR and ASLEF, are balloting their 100,000 members on British Rail for some form of action after the imposition of a 7% pay increase and management's attempt to challenge the existing national bargaining agreements. Already, train crews on the Southern Region (which includes an important chunk of London's commuter network) are banning overtime unofficially, seriously disrupting services.

- 70,000 power station workers have voted overwhelmingly for industrial action in the power stations and by a majority of 3-2 for a second preference of all-out strike action in pursuit of a 7% wage claim. Management say that even an overtime ban would bring power cuts, and have now made a new offer to try to avoid a strike.

- 800,000 engineering workers, covering 5,000 manufacturing companies, are being balloted for a series of all-out strikes in selected industries in pursuit of a claim for a 35-hour week and an increase in minimum rates.

- Firefighters are expected to ballot for strike action in opposition to the ending of national bargaining arrangements by the management.

- The local government workers' union, NALGO, is considering a strike ballot over pay.

- The Union of Communication Workers is considering a strike ballot of 80,000 postal workers after the breakdown of wage negotiations.

- University lecturers are continuing a long-running pay dispute.

Not all these ballots will result in strike action. Indeed, many of them face major problems in the courts and may never get off the ground. But they do show a profound change in the mood of the working class, which is the pressure behind all of them. They also demonstrate once again that the working class in Britain is alive and well and that the Tories had written them off too soon. Despite all the setbacks, they have not suffered a defeat capable of taking away their ability to struggle.

Most of these disputes are a direct response to the rate of inflation, officially given as 7.6% but clearly much higher — 19% for mortgage-holders, for example. The fact is that the Thatcher project is now faltering on the economic front, seen by many as her greatest strength.

At the beginning of their first term in office, from 1979-81, the Tories crashed the economy and created the deepest recession ever seen in Britain in order to create

mass unemployment and take on the trade unions. The resulting decline in living standards, for big sections of the population, kept the inflation rate down and strengthened the employers, who used their advantage to rationalize working conditions and increase productivity.

After a series of victories over sections of the working class who, apart from the miners, were betrayed by their leaders, the Tories embarked on huge social changes: the ending of the post-war consensus of the welfare state and the mixed economy, and the global restructuring of the labour market to the employers' advantage through the introduction of extensive anti-union laws.

It was the 1987 stock market crash that began to unravel all this. The Tories responded to the crash with a consumer-led boom, which led to rising inflation, high interest rates and a balance of trade crisis. Now it is clear that Britain's position in relation to the rest of the world has not fundamentally changed. Levels of investment have remained poor, and the growth rate of the economy remains at an average of around 2%.

## Tories' losing popularity over NHS attacks

There is also hostility to aspects of the Tory project that is giving people the confidence to fight back. In the Vale of Glamorgan by-election, eight out of ten people who switched their votes from Tory to Labour said it was because of the attacks on the National Health Service (NHS).<sup>2</sup> In addition, measures like the poll tax<sup>3</sup> and water privatization are extremely unpopular, and the Tories are increasingly being blamed for the lack of investment and run-down of the economy's infrastructure, which is expressing itself in disasters on the railways and elsewhere.

It is from this weak economic position that Britain faces the single European market in 1992. This means new attacks on the working class to attempt to prepare British capitalism to meet the challenge. In fact, preparation for 1992 is behind the Tories' dramatic move to abolish the National Dock Labour Scheme and risk a national dock strike.

The Scheme was a major gain of the trade-union movement in Britain. It was established by a Labour government in 1947, and defended by mass struggle a number of times since then. After the betrayal of a national strike in 1972, the docks industry was split down the middle by an expansion of unregistered ports. Today, the Scheme only covers half the industry (46 ports), but they are still an effective force, handling 75% of the cargo moving in and out of the country.

The Scheme provides an individual guarantee of jobs for dockers — "jobs for life" as they became known — and working conditions second-to-none among blue-

collar workers. It also provides for a degree of workers' control in the ports, since the unions comprise 50% of the committees that run the Scheme. So it is not surprising that dockers are keen to defend the Scheme. A strike could become the central focus of an industrial fightback against the Tories.

The docks ballot resulted in an overwhelming vote for strike action. But that does not resolve the problems that will immediately face the strike.

Despite the rise in struggle that is taking place, "new realism" continues to dominate both the trade-union and Labour Party leaderships. Even while this industrial situation has been developing, Labour leader Neil Kinnock has been busy ramming through his "policy review", which drops unilateral nuclear disarmament, embraces "market forces", and openly argues that the job of the Party is to organize capitalism better than the Tories. And the trade-union leaders are just as determined to avoid confrontation with either the employers, the government or the courts.

The most serious issue facing the trade-union movement in Britain today is the Tory anti-union laws and the way they are being used by the courts. These laws, which enforce ballots before strikes, outlaw solidarity action and actions deemed by the courts to be of a "political" nature, are framed in such a way as to give wide powers of interpretation to the judges. This has now reached the stage where the right to strike itself has been seriously undermined.

It is here that the new realists have done their greatest damage. They are responsible for the present situation — their policy of complying with the law has been a disaster. For several years, each time they have complied with court decisions the judges have been encouraged to go a step further. Now, as this strike wave gets underway, they still refuse to confront even the most outrageous decisions of the courts.

## Anti-union laws outlaw effective strike action

In the case of the dockers, the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) leadership, which is regarded as being on the left of the trade-union movement, said on the very day that the government announced the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme, that any response by the dockers would have to be within the law. They even preempted the courts by assuming that any strike against the Scheme's abolition would be illegal if it was oppos-

2. The Tories' recent proposals to introduce wholesale "free-market" mechanisms into the NHS have met with massive opposition from healthworkers (including doctors and consultants) and the public at large.

3. A new *per capita* local taxation system, due to replace the present system of property tax. On the fight against the poll tax in Scotland, where it is being implemented first, see *IV* 152, November 28, 1988.

ing a decision of parliament! Such a thing has not been tested in the courts, and it would be a huge escalation of the use of the law if it went that way since it would outlaw most strikes in the public sector — they would be against the government and therefore “political”. The TGWU leaders have tried to avoid this by arguing that the strike is really against the employers.

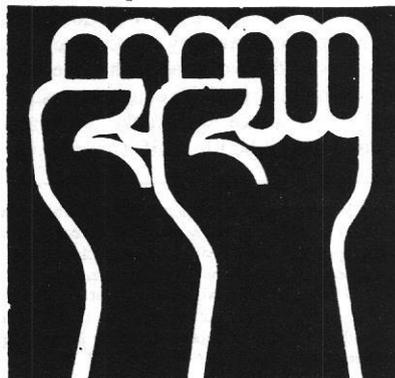
In addition, TGWU officials are telling dockers that if the strike is legal on that count, they must not break the law in any other way. There must be no solidarity action from non-Scheme ports, and they must not attempt to prevent scab cargo being diverted through non-Scheme ports, since this would constitute illegal secondary action.

### Growth in unofficial action and self-organization

On the London Underground things are no better. The National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) — another union regarded as being on the left — immediately complied with a High Court ruling and called off an all-out strike due to start on Monday, May 8. This was another ruling that broke new legal ground, in that the ballot paper itself had been illegal because it was too detailed and therefore confusing! The battle for the strike is now in the courts.

Previous Tory anti-union laws, in the early 1970s, were defeated because they were massively defied and discredited. There is no alternative to such action now. Those responsible for weakening the movement argue that it is now too weak to take on the government or the courts. But there are still 8,500,000 workers affiliated to the single national union federation, the TUC, despite an overall decline in union membership. Although a lot of damage has been done to shop-floor organizations, it is absurd to argue that a trade-union movement with eight-and-a-half million members does not have the power to take on the courts.

If mass struggles emerge out of the present situation, however, there will be the bases to confront the new realists in both the unions and the Labour Party. Workers are increasingly turning to unofficial action and self-organization to defend their interests, but ultimately these problems will have to be tackled at the level of the leaderships as well. ★



# Increased health charges provoke general strike in Italy

**THE GENERAL STRIKE** in Italy on May 10 once again confirmed the readiness of broad layers of the working class to fight. At the same time, it confirmed that mobilizations from below can force the trade-union bureaucrats to take a bit more notice of the wishes of activists.

LIVIO MAITAN

**T**HE NEW wave of strikes and demonstrations leading up to the May 10 strike was sparked off by decisions adopted on March 23 by the five-party government of Christian Democrat Ciriaco De Mita.

In an attempt to reduce an ever-increasing budgetary deficit, the government took a series of measures of which the most spectacular and most unpopular was the imposition of appreciably higher patient contributions for analyses, x-rays, specialist consultations, hospitalization and even medicines.

### Workers occupied trade-union offices

On April 1, when these measures came into effect, there were incidents in the hospitals with patients and visitors noisily voicing their discontent. But even on the eve of the announcement of the government's measures, strikes and marches were organized independently of the trade-union leaderships.

The most significant episode was the spontaneous three-hour strike by metalworkers at Ansaldo and Breda Fucine in Seso S. Giovanni, a well-known workers' stronghold in the suburbs of Milan. The town's streets were filled with 1,500 workers, and 300 of them “occupied” the local offices of three trade-union federations to demand mobilizations against the increased health charges.

Similar demonstrations took place in other factories in Lombardia, Emilia, Genoa and Ancona, among others. Demonstrations continued in the days that followed, with work-stoppages in some factories. Some of the smaller union and sector leaderships also began to move.

April 10 saw a two-hour strike by metal and textile workers. In the same period there were around 50 local strikes and hundreds of workers' assemblies. Even at Fiat in Turin, where the situation is still difficult, a strike was called and massively supported. The same day, demonstrations against the charges linked up with pensioners' demonstrations.

According to the Communist Party (PCI) daily, around 300 demonstrations were held involving a million people: 30,000 in Mestre, near Venice; 15,000 in Brescia and Genoa; 20,000 in Bologna; 10,000 in Trieste and Bari.

In Milan, 100,000 paraded through the streets on April 12, and 80,000 marched in Florence on April 18.

The workers' response provoked waverings and differences inside the government (with some ministers leaping to criticize the measures that they themselves had voted for!) Subsequently, it was decided to reduce the increased charges and a new scale was fixed. But this was only a “relaxation”, to use the word employed by the biggest bourgeois newspaper.

The mobilizations continued and the union leaderships stood firm on their call for a general strike, announced on April 21. This was in spite of heavy pressure from the government and explicit opposition to the strike call by the secretary of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) and ex-prime minister, Bettino Craxi.

### Civil servants and railworkers join the action

In addition, on April 5 there was a strike by 250,000 state employees, and on April 28 a 24-hour strike completely paralyzed the railways.

The tactical twists and turns carried out by the three trade-union federations (CGIL, CISL and UIL) are worth commenting on.

When the government's measures were announced, they were not in favour of mass mobilizations, and totally opposed to a general strike. As late as March 29, the general secretary of the CGIL, Bruno Trentin — whose international reputation as a left-winger is more undeserved than ever — declared to *Corriere della sera* that: "The epoch of protest strikes is past. We cannot limit ourselves to rallying discontent, we have to show that alternative lines exist. This is necessary for understanding that we must have proposals to mobilize around. Today, we haven't lost a single minute before discussing a general strike."

### Symbolic general strike not enough to win

In fact, on April 18, the three union federations presented a sort of "counter-plan", mainly involving a reform of the public administration, restructuring property tax, fiscal autonomy for the regions, a capital gains tax and so on. They also proposed to the government that they lodge long- and medium-term securities on the international market, prolong the time-span of debts, and limit the scale of public spending in relation to the Gross National Product. To say the least, these rationalization measures were hardly designed to create enthusiasm among workers!

Finally, the bureaucrats realized that they could not go against the manifest wishes of the workers and, on April 21, they decided to call for a general strike. (Of course, they claimed that pressure from the base had nothing to do with this decision and tried hard to make people forget their initial statements.)

At the same time, they hastened to explain that they did not have the least intention of bringing down the government — they only wanted to change the March 23 decisions. As is their tradition, they limited the scope of the strike to four hours in industry, offices and banks, and to two hours on the railways and on urban transport.

The strike was supported massively in every sector and in the whole country (according to the unions, there was a 90% participation in industry and 70% in the public and service sectors). The demonstrations brought together bigger numbers than in the previous general strike on November 27, 1987 — a total of a million people according to the unions, with 120,000 marching in Florence and 100,000 in Rome.

Workers have shown that they want to fight. But a symbolic general strike is not enough to force the bosses and their government to abandon their policies of austerity and restructuring. ★

# Crisis in Democrazia Proletaria

**THE PRESENTATION of the slates for the European elections has sparked the explosion of a grave crisis in Democrazia Proletaria (DP). Two of its deputies are running not on DP's slates but on the so-called Rainbow slates, which also include members of the Radical Party.**

**On the other hand, the best known leader of the Radical Party, Marco Pannella, has just sealed a "secularist" alliance with two bourgeois government parties, the Republicans and the Liberals<sup>1</sup>, as well as with environmentalists who have broken with the Greens, who participated in the 1987 legislative elections and will also be running in the June 18 EEC elections.**

**T**HIS CRISIS had already begun to take shape a few months after DP's May 1988 congress (see IV 163).

Those who defended minority positions in the congress published a document signed by 22 activists which in effect resumed the debate. More specifically, for the European elections they proposed "a common grouping that would develop rapidly and with sufficient homogeneity to make it possible to present slates backed by DP, the Greens and the Radical Party."

Among the signatories were the former national secretary of DP, Mario Capanna; Lombardy regional councillor Emilio Molinari; and Senator Guido Pollice. And two other quite well-known leaders, Stefano Semenzato and Franco Russo, while they did not sign the document, were quite positive about the initiative.

At the end of October and the beginning of November, the National Delegate Assembly met. This body includes the National Leadership, plus members elected by the federations. There was a very sharp confrontation, despite the attempts at conciliation by the center, in particular by the national secretary, Giovanni Russo Spena. Finally, the idea of an alliance with the Greens and the Radicals was rejected, and it was decided to present DP slates in the European elections (by 129 votes to 60).

However, that was not the end of it. As the elections drew nearer, the proposal for an electoral bloc with the Greens and the Radicals was revived, especially following on an initiative by a group of intellectuals, of whom the best known was Leonardo Sciascia. And he proposed precisely the formation of Rainbow slates including Greens, Radicals and DP members prepared to accept such a move. But, since both the Greens and the Radicals rejected this proposal, the initiative was doomed to

failure. In any case, a new DP Delegate Assembly at the end of March confirmed the decision to present DP slates.

### An open break with congress decisions

However, despite appearances, the matter was not yet settled. Conflicts broke out among the Greens. And the availability of some Radicals, including one of their leaders, Francesco Rutelli, revived the project of Rainbow slates distinct from the "traditional" Green slates. This time around, Rainbow slates were finally set up. Edo Ronchi and Gianni Tamino, as well as the former chief of the organization's international department, Luciano Neri, were included on them.

This was an open break. DP's National Secretariat met on May 8, that is, two days before the deadline for registering slates, and declared that all those included on slates other than those of the organization "would place themselves *de facto* outside DP's debate and collective life." The right-wing was not slow in responding. Ronchi and Pollice challenged this decision, declaring that they were not accepting "bureaucratic reprisals," and that the debate in DP would continue after the elections. They were obviously relying on the fact that, according to the statutes, the Secretariat does not have the right to expel members, and that no meeting of the National Leadership nor of the Delegate Assembly is expected before June 18. ★

1. The Radicals are present not only on the "secularist" bloc and Rainbow slates but also on the slates of the social-democratic party. Moreover, the Radicals are included in the so-called anti-prohibitionist slates, which are for liberalizing the drug trade.

## DP reneges on accord with LCR

**THE CRISIS in Democrazia Proletaria has had negative repercussions on the organization's relations with the Lega Comunista Rivoluzionaria (LCR), the Italian section of the Fourth International, concerning the presentation of slates for the European elections.**

**T**HE CONVERGENCE of the LCR with DP was supposed to be achieved before June 18 (see *IV* 163). That was the LCR's proposal, and it was accepted by a majority of the DP Delegate Assembly at the end of March. However, subsequently, the DP Secretariat informed the LCR Secretariat that no meeting of the National Leadership was scheduled before the elections, and that the convergence would have to be postponed to a later date (immediately after the elections, if possible).

In these conditions, the two organizations began discussions about the inclusion of LCR members in DP's slates. (It should be remembered that the LCR and DP have conducted joint election campaigns on several occasions already, whose results were considered quite satisfactory by both

sides). An initial accord was reached calling for the inclusion of LCR members in four out of five constituencies, with two, Livio Maitan and Antonio Moscato, heading slates.

Moreover, since Italian law makes it possible to include citizens of other EEC countries, the accord also involved running Alain Krivine, a leader of the French LCR, in Milan. Subsequently, DP asked the LCR to shift Alain Krivine to Rome. It agreed to this without objections. But at the last minute, when all the administrative procedures had been completed, DP informed the LCR that Krivine would not be a candidate, nor Livio Maitan either. (In the 1987 legislative elections, Maitan had been the head of a slate in Rome.) Moreover, Silvia Zappi, a member of Pierre Juquin's organization, the New Left, was included on slates in both Rome and Milan.

The LCR Secretariat issued a statement that criticized DP's decision in very sharp terms. It said, among other things:

"The exclusion of Alain Krivine's candidacy is a symptom of a choice to play down the presence of the LCR on the DP slates, and it reflects the method used to draw up these slates, a method that once again follows the road of conciliation with a 'Rainbow' project.

"This scheme represents a negation of the characterization of DP put forward on many occasions by the majority of the leading group as a party seeking a way in the framework of an anti-capitalist and class-struggle perspective.

"The decision to postpone our convergence, as well as the failure to respect the electoral accords, reflects a desire to belittle and minimize the importance that the unification between DP and the LCR could have in the eyes of people we are both talking to, who in the context of the crisis of the left are looking for answers and reference points as a positive signal of a coming together on the left of class-struggle forces."

Nonetheless, the LCR has confirmed its support for the DP slates. It will have two candidates in the Milan-Turin district (Rocco Papandrea, a worker at FIAT; and Edgardo Pellegrini, a journalist), and one in the eastern district (Emanuele Battain, a lawyer), as well as two in the south (Antonio Moscato, who heads a slate; and Angela Mignogna, a teacher). ★

## An earthquake shaking Israeli society

**EIGHTEEN MONTHS of the Intifada [uprising] of the Palestinian population of Gaza and the West Bank against the Israeli occupation have had an increasingly profound effect on Israeli society. This new "earthquake" is a lot more serious than the last one, the war of 1973, when the Zionist army came within a hair's breadth of disaster. The Jewish population in the Israeli state is polarized as never before, while the Arab minority has also experienced a political upheaval.**

The recent municipal elections on February 28 registered the changes that are underway. Below we publish an interview with our comrade Michel Warschawsky in which he deals both with the elections and with the positions and activity of his organization, the Revolutionary Communist League, the Israeli state section of the Fourth International.

Michel is still awaiting trial on charges brought against him by the Israeli authorities in the hope of preventing his continuing solidarity work with the Palestinian people. The international defence campaign for Michel must continue until the charges against him are dropped. The interview was conducted by Salah Jaber on May 3, 1989.



## HOW DO you explain the Labour Party's defeat in the recent municipal elections?

The electoral defeat of the Labour Party is another indication of the decline of the organization that has been the unchallenged leader of the Zionist movement and then the Israeli state itself for half a century. But in the elections to the Knesset [the Israeli parliament] in November 1988 the votes were lost by Labour to political alternatives. The municipal elections, on the other hand, revealed the decline of the bureaucratic and clientelistic grip of the Labour Party on a growing proportion of the population.

As I explained after the legislative elections (see IV 152), the Labour Party's base has polarized. Between 5 to 7% of the Party's support has passed to the Zionist right, while 12-15% has gone over to the Zionist left. The municipal poll has put an end to the image of Labour as the natural party of government and manager of the everyday running of the country. The gains made by the Likud are not so much a sign of an ideological shift to the right by the population as the recognition of this party as the leading force at the national level, at the expense of Labour.

### ■ The most striking aspect of the November elections was the breakthrough of the religious parties. Why were they marginalized in the municipal elections?

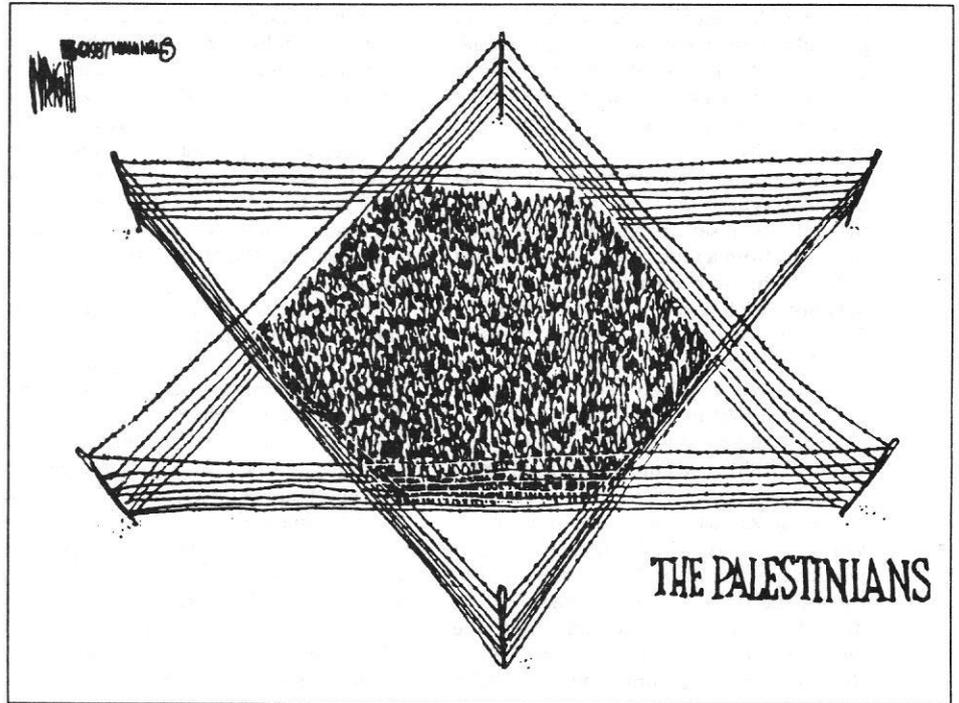
The issue in the municipal elections was the running of the local administrations, so that the campaign centred on locally established parties and personalities rather than political ideology. Overall, the religious parties maintained their far from negligible strength in the municipal councils.

### ■ The breakthrough of the Islamic fundamentalists in the Arab areas on the other hand has a quite different significance...

Yes, and this was certainly the most dramatic aspect of these elections. While it would be an exaggeration to talk about a tidal wave, nonetheless it would be justified to talk about the appearance of a new force at the institutional level.

The victory of the Islamic Movement in the most important localities of the Arab triangle and its substantial gains in Nazareth, Kafr Kanna and other places in Galilee, represents a change in the public stance of an important minority of the Palestinian population in Israel. It is first of all an expression of their dissatisfaction with the present nationalist leadership, and particularly with the Israeli Communist Party, which has been the dominant force amongst the Palestinian population since 1976.

Firstly, at the municipal level. The municipal councils led by the Democratic Front (controlled by the CP) are still the same as they were at the time of the "red wave" of 1976: the same problems, the



same misery and often the same corruption as before. It is true that the problems of the Arab municipalities are due above all to the refusal of the authorities to give them the same subsidies as those dispensed to Jewish municipalities. Even so, the Islamic Movement has demonstrated in a practical fashion, by means of popular mobilization and the organization of the inhabitants, that it is possible to partially alleviate the miserable conditions of the population. They have opened creches, nurseries and clinics, dug drains, laid roads and so on. Meanwhile, the CP municipalities have made do with their empty coffers without any attempt to mobilize the local population.

Dissatisfaction with the nationalist leadership does not only exist at the municipal level. By voting for the Islamic Movement, thousands of Palestinians wanted to assert an identity that the Communist Party has not been able to offer them, with its insistence on the "Israeli" and "(Israeli) patriotic" character of its programme. The Islamic Movement has succeeded in presenting an alternative to the Israeli patriotism promoted by the Israeli Communist Party.

### ■ *Abna el Balad*<sup>1</sup> has also criticized the "Israeli" line of the CP for a long time, from a left-wing and secular standpoint. Why did they also lose out to the Islamic Movement, rather than make gains at the expense of the CP?

Except for Um el Fahem, where the Islamic Movement benefited from a real tidal wave at the expense of all the secular and nationalist currents, *Abna el Balad* kept its positions and even won some seats in two new municipalities.

Nevertheless it is true that *Abna el Balad* has not been able to establish itself as a real mass alternative to the CP and the tradi-

tional leaderships at a national level, despite having a real audience among the population for more than a decade. The main reason for this is that this left-nationalist movement has been unable to mark itself off from the CP around a concrete programme of popular mobilization. Nor has it been able to integrate the Israeli-Palestinian dimension into its perspectives, although this is essential for any broad political action in Israel. To win the confidence and sustained support of the broad masses it is not enough simply to assert Palestinian identity and reject all compromises. It is also necessary to say what must be done and what can be done, here and now.

### ■ Let us move on to the overall political situation. What will happen in Israel if an international compromise develops that puts the evacuation by Israel of the occupied territories on the agenda? Might there be a risk of civil war, started by the colonists' movement, *Gush Emunim*?

First of all, I want to insist on the fact that an Israeli troop withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967 is not on the agenda in the immediate future. There is still a long and bitter struggle ahead. The colonists are a more serious danger right now than they would be in the event of an Israeli withdrawal. They are doing everything in their power to provoke an escalation of the confrontation between the army and the Palestinian population, hoping in this way to see the whole of the occupied territories under bloody military rule. On the other hand by brandishing the threat of

1. *Abna el Balad* (Sons of the Country) is a left-nationalist movement amongst the Arab population in the Israeli state with positions close to those of George Habash's PFLP.

civil war, they provide the Labour Party in particular with an alibi for its inactivity and absolute refusal to contemplate dramatic decisions such as the dismantling of the colonies, or a withdrawal, even partial, of military units.

In my opinion, an armed revolt by the colonists against the state is unlikely. For the majority of settlers and right-wing people, apart from a minority of fanatics, such as those who were organized in the terrorist network which was broken up in 1983, the Jewish state counts for more than "Greater Israel". They would, furthermore, be against a war between Jews. Nor would this be the first time that settlements had been dismantled. It happened in 1948, and again in 1982 with the withdrawal from Sinai.

It is the Zionist state itself, and not the settlers, that has to be defeated in order to win independence for the occupied territories. If the Israeli state is forced to withdraw from the occupied territories, the worst that could be expected from the settlers is something similar to the OAS<sup>2</sup>, mounting a rearguard action.

**■ You have said that a protracted struggle is necessary to get a withdrawal from the occupied territories. What objectives do you think the Unified Leadership of the *Intifada* should adopt in the current situation?**

A year ago, the Unified Leadership put forward a programme of immediate demands that seems to me to meet the needs of the present situation and of the possible relationship of forces in the coming period. The central demands are the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Palestinian areas, the release of all those imprisoned and detained during the *intifada*, an end to deportations and the return of those deported, no new settlements and so on.

If these demands were met, then genuine elections free from the interference of the army and the *Shin Bet* [Israeli secret police] could take place. The real leaders could stand as candidates so that the Palestinian population would be able to freely choose their representatives. While it is necessary to reject the Shamir plan, which offers Palestinians the right to choose from a list approved by the *Shin Bet* and under the control of the army, the idea of elections has been raised and will spread.

Alongside these demands, the Unified Leadership must constantly strive to reinforce and enlarge the Peoples' Committees, and organize them into organs of local power throughout the occupied territories.

**■ What are the political preconditions for real independence for the Palestinian people, in a part or in the whole of Palestine?**

Given the present balance of forces, the Palestinian population of the occupied territories and the Palestinian national movement — the PLO — could win an Israeli

withdrawal and wider national autonomy. The condition for this is obviously that the struggle continues, since even these very limited objectives will not be achieved tomorrow. A really independent Palestinian state, sovereign and able to move forward towards the full implementation of the right to self-determination for the Palestinian people, would need a different relationship of forces at both the national and international levels. It would require a different policy by the Soviet leadership, which is currently putting a lot of pressure on the PLO, while paying court to Israel. It would also mean a qualitative development of the popular movement in Jordan and/or Egypt, a radical nationalist regime in Syria, as was the case before 1967, and so on.

To put it another way, only a substantial strengthening of the anti-imperialist movement in the region would make it possible for the question of Palestine to be fully confronted free from the limits imposed by American imperialism, which excludes any solution that might challenge the fundamental interests of the Zionist state.

**■ What do you think of the idea of a Palestinian-Israeli or Palestinian-Israeli-Jordanian "common market" floated by Yasser Arafat or by Faisal Husseini?**

If Arafat and Husseini are putting forward this idea with the aim of convincing Israeli and international public opinion that the Palestinian national movement aspires to coexistence between peoples and a peace based on cooperation and not on separatist isolation, then this is a good reason. If, on the other hand, it is a basic part of the negotiated solution that the PLO leadership is trying to manoeuvre towards, then it is lunacy. It would put Palestinian independence under the supervision of others, an idea which every progressive must reject.

**■ To come back to Israeli society, how does the new generation, that born after 1967, feel about the *intifada*?**

The generation born after 1967 has never known the "green line". It sees little difference between Nazareth and Ramallah or between Kfar Saba and the new town of Ariel in the occupied territories. The end of the *status quo* calls into question not only the occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, but the very character of the State of Israel.

For this reason the general polarization of Israeli society is much more intense among young people. On the one hand you have supporters of the "final solution" — expulsion and total war against the Palestinians. On the other, you have those who are questioning the basic ideology and institutions of the Zionist state. Thousands of young Israelis are asking if a Jewish state is compatible with a democratic state, and wondering whether permanent war might not be one of the basic features of Zionist policy, and whether it might not be

better to struggle for coexistence between the two peoples, rather than defending separation at all costs and so on.

**■ Which opens up new perspectives for the Revolutionary Communist League...**

Some young people are already open to revolutionary answers and a radical questioning of Zionism. This has led us to step up our work among young people. A year ago we set up an organization of revolutionary youth, with some dozens of militants. The RCL itself has recruited some young people this year, which has considerably improved our ability to intervene politically.

**■ Apart from youth work, what is the main political activity of the RCL?**

We are very active in the movement for solidarity with the *intifada*, in particular in the Movement of (Israeli) Women in Solidarity with Women Political Prisoners and in the "End the Occupation" movement. Another priority is work in *Yesh Gvul*, the movement of army reservists against the occupation.

**■ How do you work in the pacifist movement?**

We do whatever we can to enlarge the movement on the basis of broad unity around total and unconditional opposition to the occupation. As the RCL we insist on the need for active solidarity with the *intifada* and the victims of the occupation, putting emphasis on coordinated action with the Palestinians and support for the immediate demands of the Unified Leadership of the uprising.

In our general propaganda we stress that an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and the formation of an independent Palestinian state would only be one step towards an Israeli-Palestinian peace. This could only be assured on the basis of a just solution to the issue of the refugees, of the Palestinian minority in Israel, of the question of sovereignty over Palestine and so on. In other words, the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian question cannot be limited to drawing a frontier between the two peoples. It requires the recognition of all the national rights of the Palestinian people, and thus the principle of coexistence of the two peoples, whatever the concrete forms that may take. ★



2. Secret Army Organization. Clandestine movement of supporters of "French Algeria", opposed to De Gaulle's granting of independence.

# Colonialism breeds violence

ON MAY 5, thousands of anti-colonialist militants marched through Paris to commemorate the massacre of 19 Kanak independence fighters by French troops a year earlier on the New Caledonian island of Ouvéa. The day before the demonstration a new tragedy struck the Kanak independence movement: two leaders of the FLNKS [Kanak Socialist National Liberation Front] were assassinated in Ouvéa by another member of the Front.

Last August, the FLNKS signed agreements with the French government on New Caledonia's development and future status, known as the Matignon Accords [see box]. The assassin, Djubelly Wea, was a well-known opponent of the accords. Even so, the reasons behind the attack remain unclear.

CLAUDE GABRIEL

**T**HE DEATH of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwéné Yeiwéné is the most serious test that the Kanak independence movement has ever faced. The liberation struggle has lost many fine militants, but the shooting of the two main leaders of the Union Calédonienne (UC) by Djubelly Wea — himself a member of the FLNKS — during a Kanak remembrance ceremony at Gossanah, dealt a different sort of blow.

It is difficult today to say what the reasons for this act of vengeance were. According to some reports, it was Yeiwéné Yeiwéné alone who was the intended target of the attack. The press has also claimed that when Djubelly Wea came out of prison he asked — in vain — to participate in the negotiations in Paris on behalf of the tribe that had been most directly affected by the massacre in the cave.

There has also been talk of a possible disagreement with "Yéyé" about the seizure of hostages at Fayaoué police station on the island of Ouvéa in 1988. This action was a part of an overall strategy promoted above all by the UC. With a few exceptions, Ouvéa remained isolated. We can imagine what resentment this caused people such as Djubelly to feel towards the leadership of the UC.

Opposition to the Matignon Accords exists in the FLNKS. But there is no organized, let alone united, current. There are people critical of what happened a year ago in all the parties in the Front....Some tribes are also more critical than others. The FULK [Kanak United Liberation Front, of which Djubelly Wea was a member] denounced the negotiations from the beginning and has continued to state its opposition to the accords. But the organization has offered no clear explanation of the basis of this opposition, nor a strategic alternative, so that the reasons for its position are not

clearly understood by other Kanak militants. The FLNKS has been severely shaken by the agreements reached last summer, but there is no evidence that a real political alternative to the line of the majority of the FLNKS was developing.

## Amnesty for those who perpetrated the massacre

Rocard [the French prime minister] has been giving the impression that he shares the sorrow of the Kanaks. However, some recent events should not be forgotten. For example, when Jean-Marie Tjibaou was having difficulty in getting the government proposals accepted by the FLNKS and his own organization [the UC], French minister Le Pensec impatiently and tactlessly proclaimed that "there can be no question of any renegotiation".

And then there was the "grand pardon" proposed by the same Le Pensec to the imprisoned Kanak militants — a miserable attempt by the Socialist minister to blackmail a people in struggle — which also involved a total amnesty for the troops responsible for executing the 19 Kanaks murdered in Ouvéa last year.

The Rocard government got its plan through by applying pressure. It was not concerned with formalities and has exploited all the difficulties of the FLNKS leadership. The goal was simply to get signatures on the document. The whole business opened wounds and left scars. The attempts to sow division in the Front made the drama at Gossanah possible.

In addition, the "accompanying" measures that were supposed to remedy the socio-economic inequalities that exist in New Caledonia were constantly delayed. But it was these very promises that had finally persuaded some of the more reluc-

## The Matignon Accords

**THE MATIGNON ACCORDS** were agreed in June 1988 under the auspices of newly-elected Socialist Prime Minister Michel Rocard. They called for the division of New Caledonia into three regions, direct rule from France for 12 months, a programme of economic aid and a decisive referendum in the colony on independence in 10 years time. The accords themselves were passed by an 80% majority in a referendum in France on November 6, 1988, with a turnout of 60%. ★

tant components of the Front to accept the compromise put forward by Tjibaou.

However, worried by the derisory results of its media-circus referendum and by the "No" vote from the French settlers, the government hesitated to make even the smallest reforms. This reached the point where Tjibaou felt compelled to tell an Australian magazine: "We've been conned; we're going round in circles".

It appeared on the surface as if the government's policy had resulted in a compromise. But in the heart of the Kanak regions things were getting worse. Although Rocard's project did not split the FLNKS, the structure of the independence movement was not what it was. A number of the FLNKS' local fightback committees stopped functioning, discontent began to spread, and each party [in the Front] increasingly pursued its own line.

In the recent municipal elections, the Front was disunited. In some places, such as Ouvéa, there were two competing slates, one from the UC, the other a unity slate. Rocard was jubilant. The time had come for financial aid, loans and "development" projects to deepen the centrifugal forces.

## Militants wanted to preserve political unity

The "Rocard method" turned out to be all too expeditious. The Matignon Accords were signed because at that time the FLNKS was a unitary force among the Kanaks, despite internal differences. Behind the personality of Jean-Marie Tjibaou and despite doubts and fears, the majority of militants wanted to preserve political unity — which was also their people's unity. The cavalier way in which the accords were worked out, and then their implementation in practice, has turned this situation inside out.

At Gossanah, some militants of the FLNKS imagined that they could turn the situation round by killing Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Yeiwéné Yeiwéné. All they have done is to deepen the divisions. ★

[Abridged from an article in the May 11 issue of *Rouge*, newspaper of the LCR, French section of the Fourth International.]

**N**EW POLITICAL and strategic challenges have appeared, and the mass movement has found itself without a political perspective. Major bourgeois liberal sectors have shown that their search for a soft way out of apartheid fitted in quite well with the new, more repressive labor laws that the government adopted at the start of 1989. The perspective of a large-scale crisis of the system, helped along by a rise of the liberal opposition and stronger international pressures, has gradually faded.

To the contrary, despite the international crisis rocking the National Party over who is to succeed the president, Pieter Botha's government regained the political initiative and repressed the mass movement, while at the same time proposing structural reforms. The uneasy liberal voters looking for a moderate solution increasingly cast their ballots for Botha's party, while a section of Afrikaner voters slid towards the extreme right.

The mass movement did not approach this situation in the best of shape. Notably, it failed to achieve unity in the stormy years from 1984 to 1986. The trade-union movement, represented mainly by the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), showed a certain capacity to centralize struggles and resist the repression. But the community movement, represented mainly by the United Democratic Front (UDF), experienced growing difficulties.

The UDF's weakening is undoubtedly a result of the repression. The regime went after the UDF in the conviction that it was the ANC's main instrument in the country. But other elements also contributed to this movement's difficulties. First of all, the UDF proved to be a vague project, combining the features of a rank-and-file mass movement with a tendency for the leading personalities to become independent.

### Making the country "ungovernable"

Over the entire period of 1985-86, there was a very strong radicalization in the townships, especially among the youth. This movement took its inspiration largely from the ANC's slogans, and gradually became imbued with the idea of a victory in the short-term. The central slogan was to make the country "ungovernable." But very quickly some claimed that this was already the case, and the ANC's propaganda then focused on the emergence of "dual power."

The first signs of uneasiness appeared when a way had to be found to end the schools boycott. In the ranks of the UDF itself, and certainly among the parents, the need began to be felt to bring to a close a movement whose objectives seemed unobtainable.<sup>1</sup> Then, it became clear little by little that despite the fantastic breadth of the popular mobilizations, the real relation-

ship of forces did not make it possible to pose the question of power. The means available at the time were insufficient to resolve the new strategic problems posed — workers' control in the factories, the question of revolutionary mass violence, the monolithism of the repressive apparatus and so on.

With hindsight, it is easier to understand what the ANC's strategy was. The Congress had a combined project — to push the mass movement as far as possible and link it up with a growing pressure from the liberal opposition. It was expected that the result of this would be a crisis of the regime, which would facilitate a reorganization of the entire system, with the help of various sorts of foreign intervention. So, the leading lights of the UDF were used mainly to build a bridge to liberal and Western circles. This strategy did not work, inasmuch as the center of white liberalism in South Africa is not made up of petty-bourgeois democrats but of real capitalists. Moreover, the mass movement appeared so powerful that these circles feared an uncontrollable social dynamic.

### Question of unity and tactical alliances

The second problem that arose was unity. Two questions were posed simultaneously in the country. The first was unity of the working class and the disinherited masses. The second was tactical alliances with Black or white bourgeois and petty-bourgeois sectors. But the policy followed by the UDF, and therefore by the ANC, was not that. In reality, the Freedom Charter [ANC's political program] was used as a rallying symbol by the ANC for a very specific sort of "unity" policy. Its purpose was not to assemble the bulk of the working class and, alongside this, to pose the question of alliances with other social sectors. It was rather to cut off a section of the proletariat vertically in order to include it in a broader Chartist front.

Such a tactic did not contribute to unity of the trade-union movement. To the contrary, as more sections of the workers' movement formally adopted the Charter, the more it became divided. The ANC's objective was mainly to hitch the union movement to its strategy. So the debate over the content of the Charter itself could not be conducted calmly. For the ANC, the important question was rallying forces around this reference point. The symbolic function of the document took precedence over its precise content. On the other hand, other sections of the trade-union movement wanted to discuss the bases of this program, which was drawn up more than 30 years before the emergence of the present South African workers' movement.

In 1985, when COSATU was founded, a section of the trade-union movement coming from the Black Consciousness current remained outside the unification process,

# Apartheid, and the mass

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PETER BLUM

and later formed the National Congress of Trade Unions (NACTU). At the time, COSATU was the product of a very unusual *de facto* united front between the Chartist current and the trade-union left coming out of the Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU) in particular.

The trade-union left justified this unity for a number of reasons. The first was a recognition of the strength and impact of the ANC in the Black townships, where the union left itself had little or no organization. The second was the prognosis that in time the other political and trade-union currents besides the Chartists and the union left were going to gradually disappear. It was therefore necessary to focus on practical, immediate unity with the only "real" force.<sup>2</sup>

For the ANC current, this unity represented an important change in direction. After several years of denouncing the trade-union left, it decided for uneasy coexistence with it inside COSATU. This special "united



# Perestroika and movement

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& TONY ROUX



front" subsequently led to the trade-union left adopting the Freedom Charter for tactical purposes, as a program of basic demands, and accepting a UDF-COSATU axis for the big mass campaigns.

What happened next, however, was unforeseen. First of all, there

were quite sharp conflicts among the allies, especially over questions involving internal democracy. Secondly, the trade-union left, focusing on its relations with the Chartist current, made no attempt to discuss with, or offer proposals to, all the other forces, notably the small organizations of the political left and the minority trade-union currents grouped in NACTU. At the end of the day, the "united front" achieved in the top echelons of COSATU appeared outside the confederation to be sectarian.<sup>3</sup>

In this way, a space was left for all those who did not accept the rules of this game. Thus, NACTU grew in some industries and, far from disappearing, the political left continued to exist and to intervene. The UDF-COSATU axis did not manage to

unite the entire mass movement under its banner. And, above all, it did not succeed in bringing together the whole of the vanguard.

But this political choice by the trade-union left was made in the name of a non-sectarian project. In any case, it had to address itself to the major sector of the liberation movement and find a *modus vivendi* with the ANC. But from this priority, it sometimes derived a rather one-sided view of the tasks of the moment.

## International context has changed

In particular, if such unity was possible<sup>4</sup>, it was because of a specific situation — not only because of the breadth and militancy of the mass movement, but also the trade-union left's lack of a base in the townships at a time when the Chartist current was still weak in the big battalions of the trade-union movement. This period was marked by a rise of class conflicts. The stakes were considerable and forced the two major components of the mass movement to adopt a certain *realpolitik*.

Today, however, it is clear that this whole state of affairs has gone seriously out of kilter. Not only has there been an ebb in the mass movement and a deterioration of the relationship of forces, but the international context has also changed. *Perestroika*, the pressures for negotiation and the debates inside the ANC itself are going to substantially change the conditions that governed this special sort of "united front." In this less favorable context, when the trade-union movement is standing out as the hard core of Black resistance, the pressure from the union ranks is for greater working-class unity. The ANC and the South African CP themselves say that the Freedom Charter is no longer a decisive criterion for trade-union unity. In their recent writings, they have opened up to the perspective of discussions with NACTU.

A "workers' summit" proposed by a section of COSATU a few months ago was held in March this year. Originally called to draw up a trade-union strategy against the new labor legislation and begin building a foundation for unity between COSATU and NACTU, the "summit" brought together 700 workers' delegates representing 40 unions with a total of more than a million members.

The meeting was conceived as a conference of rank-and-file leaders, without officials. It testified to a profound desire for working-class unity, but also for unity of the workers' vanguard, and it initiated a discussion on the question of a political program for the working class. But it was not all clear sailing, either in the preparation of the "summit" or in the meeting itself. The stakes were considerable and represented a test for all the currents working in the trade-union movement.

While the NACTU leadership was very

much on the offensive early on in the preparations for the meeting, it later committed a series of errors that illustrated the problems it has in handling all the complexities of a united-front policy. Ultimately, NACTU as such did not participate in the "summit," although eleven of its most representative industrial unions did.<sup>5</sup>

Despite these vicissitudes, the "summit" was a positive test. A plan of action against the legal rules restricting the right to strike was adopted, with a possibility for a broad national action in the second half of the year. But the "summit" also revealed a considerable lag in the process of unifying the workers. The intervening period of a special "united front" at the top of COSATU has deepened resentments and distrust. Far from clarifying the political lay of the land, it has made it more confused.

As for the ANC, the strategic problems mentioned above have now led to a public debate. Over and above the obvious question of *perestroika*, undoing the falsifications of history and the growing pressure from Moscow for a negotiated compromise, the Congress is today in the throes of a public debate over an assessment of the "armed struggle" and even over its strategic objectives. Carried along by the momentum of the illusions created in 1985 and 1986, some cadres of the movement seem to be making a theory out of a more or less "insurrectionist" orientation and criticizing the armed struggle for having been no more than armed propaganda.

## Overemphasis of the military factor

One prominent person supporting this position is none other than Ronnie Kasrils (often designated by the initials MK), a leader of *Umkhonto we Sizwe*, the armed wing of the ANC, and a member of the ANC leadership. In an article in the ANC journal *Sechaba*, Kasrils stresses the need for really making the seizure of power the objective of the armed struggle, and for reinforcing the movement's underground work in order to form a "revolutionary army." On the other hand, some participants in the debate reproach him — not without some justification, it seems — for neglecting the concrete forms of expression of the mass movement and over-emphasizing the military factor.

However, the counter positions go to the opposite extreme, strongly playing up the

1. The popular slogan among the high school students was "no education before liberation."

2. These debates led, however, to a split in one of COSATU's biggest unions, the retail workers' organization CCAWUSA (see IV 141, May 16, 1988).

3. There is always the problem of who does and who does not get invitations to participate in "unity" initiatives. The most recent one was the anti-apartheid conference scheduled for October 1988, finally banned by the government.

4. The ANC and the Communist Party continued to denounce all the "workerists" who they claimed had a perspective of an immediate socialist revolution.

5. Sixteen independent unions were also there.

possibility or the need for reaching a compromise on "post-apartheid" institutions in view of the present impasse and the deterioration in the relationship of forces. The article that goes furthest in this direction is the one published in the January 1989 issue of *Sechaba* under the pseudonym "Theresa." Here, for the first time, the question is taken up of what such a compromise might involve. The author explains that it may be necessary to accept an intermediate stage of continuing the struggle peacefully. Negotiations are presented as a way of broadening out the democratic possibilities.

### Complex nature of the national question

The article concludes as follows: "A decentralized approach would also...reflect more adequately the complex nature of the national question in South Africa. Such a conception propagated by the national liberation movement headed by the ANC, would serve to isolate the most reactionary sections among the White population, as well as the most corrupt elements in the Black communities. A compromise along these lines would represent a kind of transitional phase in the framework of the national liberation struggle. It would lay a favourable basis for further progress along peaceful lines."<sup>6</sup>

For his part, Joe Slovo, general secretary of the Communist Party, has produced a long article on the South African revolution that has been widely translated and distributed around the world. In this document, he openly criticizes the positions taken in 1986 by some Africa specialists at the Soviet Academy of Sciences that oriented toward a compromise acceptable to the white regime. Notably, they envisaged the possibility of offering the whites guarantees of a role in the government and a right of veto on the basis of race.

Joe Slovo, on the other hand, put forward an orientation halfway between the classical schema of revolution in stages and proletarian revolution. This gave the appearance of a renewal of the CP's traditional theses without putting into question its choice of alliances and immediate strategy.

So it seems that several cross debates are going on at the moment within the ANC-CP current. Undoubtedly the Soviet position poses a problem and is disorienting some of the cadres.

All these discussions are going on against the background of the Soviet regime's evolution. The era of *perestroika* has altered the USSR's orientation in the region in two areas — its relations with its friends in the "progressive" African camp (Ethiopia, Angola and so on) and its attitude toward Pretoria. Seeing some of its African allies mired in costly wars, the USSR is looking for a negotiated solution to these conflicts in order to reduce its own

burdens. It is also doing this partly in the name of new international relations with the United States and the Western world.

In the medium-term, the USSR is trying to modify its relations with South Africa. Already high-level secret contacts have been made between representatives of both countries, although diplomatic relations have been broken off since 1956. The tripartite agreement on Namibia has to be seen as a testing ground for Gorbachevite diplomacy in the region, a first stage in settling the South Africa conflict itself.<sup>7</sup>

It is not sufficiently stressed in general that peace in Namibia and the perspective of independence for this territory (legitimate but difficult objectives) have been placed in a regional and international context unfavorable to the South African Blacks. The first indication of this was the obligation on the ANC to remove its military bases from Angola. But, over a longer term, the accord reflects the beginning of a big "deal" for all of southern Africa, in which the South African Black movement can quickly become the loser.

There is no doubt that the Soviets are now putting considerable pressure on the ANC and on its internal discussions. But pressure is also coming from all the social-democratic and religious components of the movement.

Pretoria is obviously taking full advantage of this new cutting of the cards. "International detente" is much talked about when it comes to putting the heat on the ANC, to calling for it to end the "armed struggle." The episode of the "Mandela Football Club," set up by Winnie Mandela (see IV 159), was an opportunity for the government to play up what it portrays as a contrast between the violence of ANC "terrorists" and the new international climate. The press itself recognizes the new terms of the problem. For example, *The Argus*, a Johannesburg daily, ran the following headline on February 8, 1989: "SA's relations with Soviets begin to thaw."

### Moscow does not have a free hand

Moscow, however, does not have a free hand. The Soviet policy has its own objective. But it also needs the means for putting pressure on the imperialists. Gorbachev will get nothing in southern Africa if the ANC abruptly splits and becomes marginalized. Thus, in *Les Nouvelles de Moscow* of April 16, 1989, a page was devoted to the question of diplomatic relations with Pretoria. There you can find, among other things, the following paradox:

"The South African political experts who are discussing the prospects for establishing diplomatic relations between the USSR and the Republic of South Africa before considerable changes have occurred in that country fail to see that this would distinctly compromise our country in the eyes of the majority of their Black compatriots." It

went on to declare that such relations "could be considered a move leading toward a recognition of the apartheid system, as a betrayal." Moscow is walking on eggshells!

In March, ANC leader Oliver Tambo visited Moscow. When he mentioned the need for stepping up the armed struggle, he was directly contradicted by Yuri Yukalov, head of the South African department of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "We would prefer a political settlement and want apartheid to be dealt with by political means. Any solution through military means will be short-lived. We do not want to emphasize the need to enlarge the armed struggle. South Africa should not be destroyed."

In this context, the South African regime has been able for some time to couple a change in the forms of repression with reform initiatives. In particular, the amendments to the Labour Law restricting the right to strike are a serious obstacle to the activity of the union leaders. They are combined with a vast economic plan of privatization and of eliminating apartheid's formal rules that has charmed liberal business circles.

### Divisions in regime over extent of reforms

The present crisis of the regime, prompted by President P.W. Botha's illness and the opening of the race to succeed him, reflects a debate over the scope and the speed of the reforms. It is symptomatic that in the internal elections for the chair of the National Party, from which Pieter Botha resigned, the camp of the military "securocrats" was, to all intents and purposes, out of the picture.

The new National Party leader, Frederick Willem De Klerk, got himself elected by adopting the image of a man of the "center," and then by opting to satisfy the expectations of the most pro-reform wing of the party. A representative of that wing, Finance Minister Barend Du Plessis, came second in the vote. Over and above the question of personalities, the conflict between F.W. De Klerk and President Botha testifies to the sharpness of the debates over the extent of the proposed reforms.

Weakened by illness, Botha can no longer hope to direct South African policy. After being forced to give up the leadership

6. A meeting was held, for example, in Bermuda. Another meeting was held in London between the Soviets and South Africans, presided over by John Killick, former British representative in Moscow. The Soviet deputy minister of foreign affairs, Anatoli Adamishin, went secretly to South Africa at the end of March.

7. It was interesting that on the way back from his trip to Cuba, Gorbachev stopped off to meet Thatcher. She is now playing a key role in the negotiations concerning southern Africa. This has led her to make a trip to Namibia and to "abstain" from going to South Africa!

of the National Party, he is going to have to yield the presidency in the next elections, which are expected in September. De Klerk's line will undoubtedly be to continue, or even speed up, the reform program and in particular to exploit the new international conditions that now affect the South African situation.

Has the country changed? It is unquestionable that the pressure of the South African capitalists has brought about substantial changes. An elimination of formal segregation rules is now well underway, but at every step this process produces new contradictions and risks for the ruling class: What to do with Bantustans? How to resolve the problem of the education system? How to liberalize the housing segregation rules? and so on. A correspondent for the London *Guardian* recognized the problem in his own way:

"South Africa has had a kind of revolution. Historians may well record that the black uprising of 1984-86 finally destroyed all the white community's options except the one of reform. One by one South Africa's problems are being deracialized. Increasingly, the nature of the problem is being changed from race to class. This of course does not make the problems any more tractable. But at least the problem will have been modernized."<sup>8</sup>

Despite this journalist's optimism, South Africa remains a country of racial segregation. A study by the Johannesburg *Star* published on February 13 showed that in a certain number of Transvaal municipalities run by the National Party, desegregation of public places was hardly more advanced than in those controlled by the extreme rightist Conservative Party. Racial segregation and class exploitation tend to overlap.

## Reforms sabotaged by extreme right

For a Black family, living in a slum may no longer be the result of an explicitly racist law, but they will still live there because they are Black. The reformers, moreover, are not yet in the clear. No sooner did they try to legalize "grey zones," multi-racial residential areas, than the extreme right groups went on the rampage and mounted a campaign of intimidation to force non-white families to move out. This happened notably in Mayfair, a Johannesburg neighborhood where Indian families live.

The political limits of the government's project were explained quite clearly in the January 30 *Newsweek* by the minister of foreign affairs, Pik Botha. With regard to the US administration, he said: "They have been pressuring us all along. It doesn't matter what goes wrong here, your ambassador is at my door and your Congress is up in arms. If I should have done all the things in the space of time demanded of me, this

government would not be in power, it would be [Conservative Party leader Andries] Treurnicht." In order to carry out reforms, you have to maintain power, and apparently the government itself has no hope of converting a section of its voters.

In the meantime, the whole parliamentary game is being used to advance the reform. The system of housing segregation — even recently portrayed by Botha as one of the untouchable pillars of "separate development" — has now been partially called into question for certain urban zones. In order to make this change the government will have to revise the definition of racial groups. This will no longer be a rule applied to everyone on the basis of the color of their skin but, in the government's words, an individual choice: "Groups must be formed voluntarily. Thereafter it is indeed the state's responsibility to protect groups."<sup>9</sup>

In other words, those who would like to live alongside whites will have to define themselves as such and demand assignment to a residential area on that basis. This new, totally scandalous notion for a society where it is the whites who oppress the others shows quite well how the regime is trying to get around the more racist elements in the name of "freedom of choice." On this question, it is worth quoting De Klerk himself at some length:

"I want to state unequivocally that the National Party is against domination of any one group by another. White domination, in so far as it still exists, must go.... In the same breath, the National Party rejects domination in any other form. Domination by a majority is as unacceptable as domination by a minority....The NP is not ideologically obsessed with the group concept as has been suggested by many critics. Our strong emphasis on group rights, alongside individual rights, is based on the reality of South Africa and not on ideological obsession or racial prejudice....However, my party strives for a non-racialistic country, a country free of racialism, racial hatred and negative discrimination on the basis of race."<sup>10</sup>

The *Guardian* journalist quoted previously was wrong to attribute all the trans-

formations underway to the social mobilizations of recent years. The pressure of the mass movement was essential, if only to convince sections of the bourgeoisie that without reforms the country would head for revolution. But it should be clearly understood how completely obsolete the apartheid system now is for the new profit needs of capital in this country. That is why the social evolution is not so simple or one-sided as the press suggests.

It is true that a layer of black yuppies is now appearing, a sort of new layer of white-collar workers and a symbol of the definitive desegregation of some service jobs. But at the other end of the line, poverty is growing among the proletarian and semi-proletarian masses, who are Black!

## A crucial time for the political movement

All this is not coming to pass without posing new problems for the political and trade-union forces. Some sections of workers have had wage increases in recent years that put them well ahead of others. On average, the independent unions negotiated raises in the order of 20% during the first half of 1988. This is higher than increases in 1987, and in particular above the official inflation rate of 13%. The stronger and better organized the unions are, the more they will be called on to offer services to their members.

The question of "cooperatives" is raising new problems. In particular, in some enterprises, the bosses' offer of incentives to the workers or to give them stocks in the company is involving the union leaderships in new contradictions.<sup>11</sup>

The extent to which four years of intense struggles have changed the socio-political, national and international conditions affecting South Africa is evident. It is also useful to point out that there is no indication of the country getting out of its economic difficulties. The gold market remains marked by a tendency to overproduction, and the competitors of the South African mines are becoming more aggressive. Gold does not seem to be able to break out of its swing between \$360 and \$450 an ounce, and all the South African companies have just announced sharp drops in their quarterly profits.

The political movement is therefore going through a crucial time. Everyone is turning to the recent past and trying to assess these experiences in order to understand what was lacking. This is a time of readjustments and recomposition. It is another watershed. ★

8. Stanley Uys in *The Guardian Weekly*, March 26, 1989.

9. Chris Heunis, minister of constitutional development and planning. *The Natal Mercury*, February 10, 1989.

10. *Cape Times*, February 9, 1989.

11. Employee Share Ownership Plans (ESOPs).

# Referendum vote lets military and police thugs off the hook

**THE REFERENDUM** on the so-called "Statute of Limitations" has been won by those who want to retain it. Despite an important popular mobilization, the military and the government have succeeded in keeping this law, which grants immunity from prosecution to those responsible for crimes committed under the dictatorship.

This is a serious defeat for a movement that was capable of gathering the number of signatures needed to call the referendum, as well as mounting a vigorous campaign to win the vote.

Thousands of brigades went out over the whole country to confront the blackmail and intimidation of the government and the armed forces.

The article published below gives an account of the referendum campaign. It was first published in *Combate*, paper of the Liga comunista revolucionario, section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state.

**LUIS ALFONSO**

**T**HE REFERENDUM on the law that allows police and military personnel to escape trial and punishment for crimes committed during the 12 years of the military dictatorship took place on April 16. Some 770,000 voters (43%) chose the green slips indicating their support for the repeal of the law,

while over a million (57%) voted with the yellow slips to keep it. [The population of Uruguay is 3 million] So those who tortured, confiscated and murdered will remain unpunished. The government and the military have won their position.

The dictatorship was imposed in February 1973 after the terrible repression of

1972. In 1980, facing growing popular hostility, it embarked on a transition policy by presenting a proposal for a constitution that would legalize the interference of the armed forces in Uruguayan political life. Despite the weight of the repressive apparatus, this project was rejected in a referendum by 57.8% of the voters.

The road to the elections at the end of 1984, which brought to power the current president, Sanguinetti of the Colorado Party, was marked out by popular struggles, strikes and mobilizations.

## Amnesty for political prisoners

Popular pressure for the release of political prisoners achieved its objective, and an amnesty law was adopted in 1985. At the same time, the campaign for bringing to trial all those police and military personnel guilty of more than 350 crimes of repression snowballed. There were 33 disappearances in Uruguay, 5 children kidnapped and never seen again, 78 deaths in prison and 53 deaths in the course of operations by the forces of repression, apart from innumerable cases of torture. Furthermore the dictatorship in neighbouring Argentina was responsible for the disappearance of a further 118 Uruguayans.

The government turned a deaf ear however, and in 1986 it approved the Statute of Limitations. A big mobilization began for the repeal of this law, but, according to the constitution 500,000 signatures had to be collected for a referendum to be held.

In fact, 600,000 signatures were gathered. A number of attempts were made to invalidate some of them, but in the end the necessary number was obtained and the government was obliged to organize the referendum.

The campaign was led by the whole of the left, as well as by minority currents in the Colorado and Blanco parties. This unity was maintained in the call for a green vote, but there was no agreement on what to do in the case of victory or on the type of campaign to conduct.

The official campaign for a yellow vote was conducted through all the means at the disposal of the state, and above all the television. This has a big influence in the interior of the country which it is difficult for militants from the popular movement to reach. The spokesperson of the campaign was the vice-president of the republic with the support of all the state institutions, including the armed forces.

The minister of defence made it clear that he would not respect the verdict of the ballot box if it was contrary to his military oath. He stated that "nobody can legally oblige military personnel to present themselves before a civilian court." Two days before the vote General Paulos, ex-chief of the information services, added: "The enemy of yesterday wants to weaken the armed forces today in order to come to power by a





final assault". A flood of rumours formed the backdrop to these statements. In the capital, Montevideo, there was talk of possible actions by the Tupamaros and it seems that some provocations were stirred up. The president of the republic asserted on the eve of the referendum that if the Statute of Limitations was removed, this would mean "a step backwards in the process of pacification and the construction of institutions in the country."

### A desire to avoid even worse evils

To put it another way, threats of a return to dictatorship, of insubordination by the military and possible attacks on public order by the usual "subversives" were brandished in order to intimidate the population. The example of neighbouring Argentina, rocked by a series of attempted military coups, was kept constantly in view. The green vote prevailed in Montevideo, and it rivaled the yellow vote in the interior of the country.

The military and the government won thanks to the votes of the most isolated and backward parts of the country, where people were terrified by the government's systematic propaganda. This was not a display of whole-hearted support for the military by broad layers of the population, but represented their desire to avoid even worse evils.

The mobilization in favour of the green vote was not enough to overcome all the obstacles, but the value of the 43% gained under such difficult conditions should not be under-estimated. The result has inevitably discouraged the most active sectors and has touched a very broad layer of the population that is profoundly affected by this defeat. But the size of the support, nearly 800,000 votes, offers the hope that the role of the military will not be forgotten, and that the Uruguayan people will be able to overcome this partial defeat in the struggles yet to come. ★

## A unified and militant campaign

**COMBATE** phoned a leader of the Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores [PST — Socialist Workers' Party], Uruguayan section of the Fourth International, to ask for his assessment of the events:

ALTHOUGH the green vote prevailed in Montevideo and the yellow vote in the interior of the country, the worst results were in Montevideo. Here a massive green vote was expected, but in fact it only prevailed by about 100,000 votes. If we refer back to the number of signatures obtained during the referendum campaign, we find that in Montevideo there were about 1.15 votes for each signature, but in the interior there were 1.5 votes per signature. The green vote would have won if the ratio of votes to signatures had been the same in Montevideo as it was in the interior.

The result confirms the type of transition which is underway and will reinforce the traditional two-party system, especially if we take account of the split in the Frente Amplio.<sup>1</sup>

There were big hopes for a victory for the green vote, and its defeat is obviously discouraging. There is some demoralization, particularly among the independent forces which were heavily involved in the campaign.

The campaign for the green vote was unified, militant and involved a lot of people, despite the fact that, in our opinion, there were some political problems. There was, for example, an attempt to avoid drawing out the political content of a green vote as an anti-government vote. Instead all the stress was put on the immorality of the Statute of Limitations and on the ethical reasons in favour of its abolition. Above all, the opposition did not succeed in explaining to the public what would happen if they won. The government launched a very powerful campaign with the aim both of frightening people with the possibility of a military coup and of underlining the futility of a green vote, given that the military would refuse to appear before civilian courts. Meanwhile, some opposition spokespersons were ambivalent, for example arguing that it was necessary to try the military before pardoning them. But these mistakes were not responsible for the defeat.

Government blackmail and the fear of what might follow a green vote without doubt played an important role in the victory of the yellow vote. But in our view the majority of those who cast a yellow vote were voting in favour of the stability of the existing system, which, despite everything, is perceived as being "democratic".

In the conditions in which the referendum took place, it is necessary to give the more than 800,000 green votes the weight that they deserve, even if they were not sufficient for victory. Nonetheless the immediate future will be very difficult and the outlook for the forthcoming elections in November is negative. ★

1. Frente Amplio (Broad Front), a united left-wing electoral front formed in 1971 as an attempt to break-out of the bourgeois two-party system of the Blancos and Colorados.

**R**AUL SENDIC had a background as a trade union leader and long experience of peasant struggles. His first experiences of union work in the countryside dated from the 1950s, before the victory of the Cuban revolution. In 1954 he took part in land occupations, in 1955 he was involved with a march by rice-workers, in 1957 he organized beet producers, and in 1958 he threw himself into mobilizing sugarcane cutters and founded the UTAA, a militant class-struggle union in the heart of the big sugarcane estates, which opposed the company unions and initiated the first hunger march, which took place in Montevideo in 1962. He took up the fight to make the big landowners respect the eight-hour day and labour legislation for agricultural labourers. From then on the sugar workers' hunger marches resounded to the cry of "For the land, with Sendic".

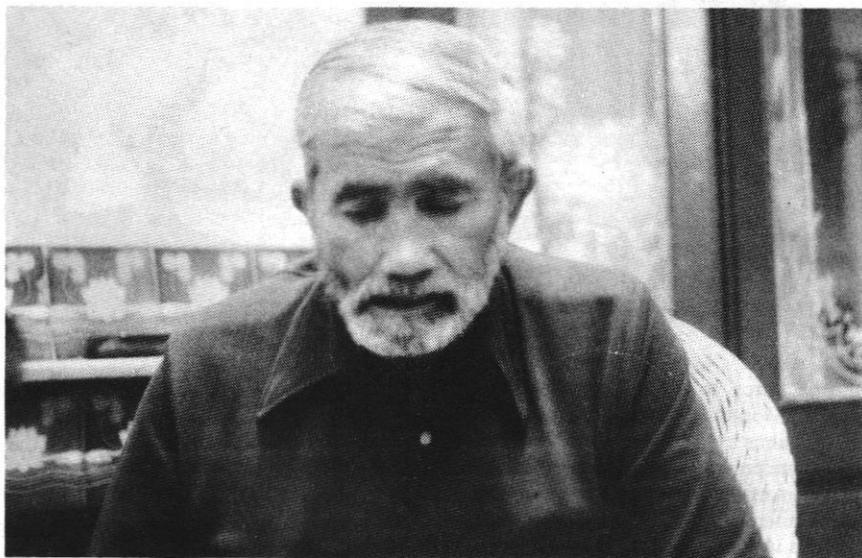
### Founding of the Tupamaros

It was this tradition of mass working class-style union struggles amongst the peasants that produced Sendic. He started out as a member of the Uruguayan Socialist Party, but, along with other militants from Communist, anarchist or Christian backgrounds, the reformist ossification of the traditional organizations convinced him that a new revolutionary organization was needed. The result was the MLN-Tupamaros, the "Tupas". The Cuban revolution was a decisive influence in this process, while the Vietnam war and the Sino-Soviet polemics also affected the Tupamaros' thinking.

Sendic's long-time companion, Eleuterio Huidobro, has described the hesitations, disappointments and weariness that the divisions in the traditional organizations created in many young people, and their final break. A photo of Che in the Sierra Maestra was torn off the wall of a local office with the cry "We are leaving with you!" The Tupamaros always retained a large measure of independence from the official Communist movement, even from Castroism, to which they never subordinated themselves. Their armed propaganda actions and exemplary actions in the towns were aimed mainly at urban workers, in contradiction with the dominant credo of the time of rural guerrilla warfare. Founded in 1962, the MLN-Tupamaros was for ten years, until its defeat in 1972, one of the most prestigious and experienced urban guerrilla movements in Latin America, confronting an army with a growing input of hardware and advice from the American secret services, the CIA.

Although they were able to mount spectacular actions, and regardless of the sympathy they won from the workers, the form of struggle that they had adopted did not allow for the integration or independent organization of the masses in the struggle.

# Homage to Raul Sendic



**THE URUGUAYAN** revolutionary leader, Raul Sendic, founder of the National Liberation Movement-Tupamaros (MLN-T), and a legendary figure on the far left in Latin America, died in Paris on April 28 1989. More than 50,000 people took part in his funeral procession in Montevideo on May 6. The Fourth International, through its Uruguayan section, the Socialist Workers' Party (PST), its sections in Latin America and the United Secretariat, added their voices to the homage to comrade Sendic. Soon after this massive demonstration, the government decided to recognize the MLN-T as a legal party and permit it to take part in the forthcoming elections.

**JEANETTE HABEL & MICHAEL LEWY**

The masses looked on from the sidelines at the war between the army and an audacious but isolated vanguard. The Uruguayan working class put up a heroic resistance to the military coup with a general strike that lasted for two weeks. They showed that they were prepared to fight, but were defeated. The military dictatorship lasted for more than a decade.

Arrested for the first time in 1970, Sendic made a spectacular escape a year later with a hundred of his comrades. But he was hunted down by the army and seriously wounded in the course of his re-arrest. He was kept in prison for 13 years, for 12 without trial. He was horribly tortured and kept in solitary confinement throughout. He was finally brought to trial in 1984 and sen-

tenced to 45 years in prison, before being released in 1985 in the general amnesty that was proclaimed when the dictatorship fell.

The military did not mince their words — "Since we could not kill them all when we arrested them, we had to drive them mad". The years of torture of Sendic and his comrades have been described by Huidobro in *Memorias del calabozo* ("Memories from the Dungeon"). Sendic was almost unrecognizable when he came out: "His nose was broken, his hair was white, he was covered in scars." His voice was hardly audible, but his revolutionary will was unbroken.

Despite all their efforts, the Uruguayan military could not break Sendic. When the popular movement got him released, he at once returned to his post at the head of the

MLN-T. He had forgotten nothing, but had also drawn the lessons of the past, and he recognized the mistakes in the conception of the armed struggle and its relation to the masses. While retaining his revolutionary objective, he looked for new paths towards the liberation of the exploited and oppressed of his country. In a period when so many of the rebels of the 1960s, especially in Europe, but also in Latin America, who had "loved the revolution so much" went over to a thoroughgoing reformism, Raul Sendic preserved an exemplary consistency and fidelity — to his past, to his companions who died in the struggle, but also, and above all, to the socialist future of his people.

If the movement against an amnesty for the military assassins and torturers, which he did much to create and inspire, was finally defeated, nonetheless almost half of the electors gave their support, despite the blackmail of the military, who threatened to restore their dictatorship if there was any attempt to bring the brass-hat criminals to trial.

In October 1987 Raul Sendic took part in a meeting organized by the LCR (French section of the Fourth International) in Paris to commemorate the 20th anniversary of Che Guevara's death. In his tribute to Guevara, he explained that he was searching "the horizon which is not as clear as it was twenty years ago" for ways to continue the struggle. We met him the following day for a friendly exchange of views. We were struck by two things about him — one was his modesty, and the absence of any claim to possess the absolute truth, his tenacious desire to learn, study and to familiarize himself with new economic and social realities. The other was his internationalism. He was genuinely interested in the experiences of struggle in all countries, not only in Latin America, but in the whole world.

## The last of a line of legendary figures

With his death, we have lost the last of those legendary figures who raised the banner of armed rebellion in Latin America in the 1960s and 1970s against the ruling classes and imperialism, figures such as Che Guevara, Carlos Marighella, Inti Peredo, Yon Sosa, Miguel Enriquez, Roberto Santucho, Camilo Torres and Carlos Fonseca. Although, unlike them, he was not assassinated, it was an illness resulting from his long years of prison and torture that finally killed him.

Raul Sendic, your struggle continues. Like Tupac-Amaru<sup>1</sup> you have sown the seeds of rebellion, and sooner or later these seeds will bear fruit in the consciousness of workers and peasants, young people and women, Indians and Blacks of Uruguay and in the whole of Latin America. ★

1. Tupac-Amaru was an Inca chief who led resistance to the Spanish conquest.

# Raul Sendic's last article

**UNTIL HIS DEATH Raul Sendic continued to work, notably on the question of Latin America's external debt, sending his contributions to *Mate Amargo*, the weekly paper of his organization. We publish below the last article he wrote. It appeared on April 20 1989, a week before his death.**

## RAUL SENDIC

**“**IF YOU do not pay, they will reduce the debt by 95%, if you pay, by 30 percent.” This idea was put forward a long time ago, but it has received a new impetus from the recent events in Venezuela.

It was the French President Mitterrand who first proposed the abolition of a part of the debt for the countries most affected by this curse. Then Brady proposed a plan — quite a surprise coming from a government which, a bit earlier in Reagan's time, had proclaimed that it was out of the question to renounce even a single cent of the debt. Now a meeting of the so-called Group of Seven (United States, Japan, West Germany, Great Britain, France, Italy and Canada) has proposed that the debt should be reduced for those countries "that are ready to make substantial economic reforms".

What this means becomes clear when we find that the implementation of the reform is to be overseen by the International Monetary Fund. In return the IMF will guarantee the payment of the interest due to the banks accepting a reduction from the countries that submit to its instructions.

But a part of the Brady plan deals with another way of reducing the debt, which exposes the fictional nature of this "generous" reduction (which the banks say could reach 30% of the nominal debt) that is being dangled by the governments and the banks.

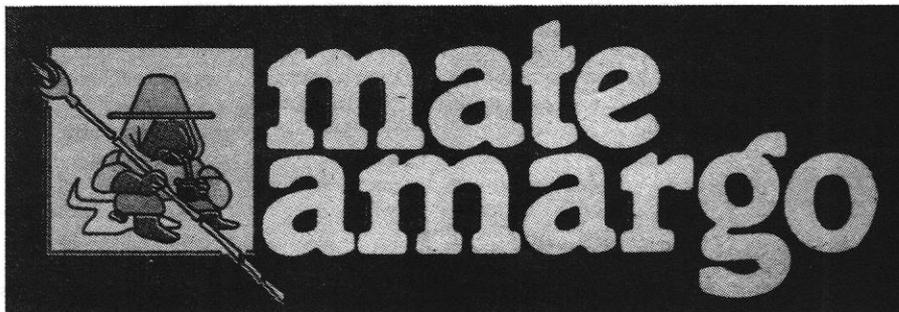
This second big reduction allows debtor countries to buy each other's debts on the parallel market, where those who have the most to pay, such as Chile or Uruguay, have already obtained a larger reduction than is now being promised — 40% in the case of these two countries.

Other Latin American countries, that do not have such servile presidents as Pinochet and Sanguinetti have a lot less to pay. Some of them will be able to get rid of their debt by paying less than 10% of its nominal value.

Until now only private businesses could repurchase paper debt, and it could not be sold back directly to the debtor government. Furthermore, other creditor banks had to agree to the operation. (Why are the creditor banks allowed to get together, but not the debtor countries?)

The proposal in the Brady plan is to get rid of these preliminary requirements and allow sale direct to the governments without consulting the other banks. This will allow countries who have shown some dignity in the face of this vast swindle to repurchase their debts not with a reduction of 30%, but possibly with a reduction of 90% in some cases. Countries such as Uruguay and Chile on the other hand, because of their good record with the IMF, may get a reduction of 30%, while still having to pay the interest on the rest for ever.

All that remains is to lament the role of the opposition in Uruguay in this approach to the external debt. It has failed to lead a united campaign against the payment of the debt of the sort that has been seen in almost all the other countries of Latin America. ★



**Interview with Guillermo Ungo, CD**

## An ambiguous election

THE ELECTIONS in El Salvador on March 19 had a special importance for two reasons. They marked the end of the reform experiment presided over by the Christian Democrats. The ultra-right regained total control of the government. Secondly, they were the focus of a new political/tactical line of the radical mass movement led by the FMLN/FDR [Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front/Revolutionary Democratic Front], and some differences appeared between these two allied organizations.

In the following interview, abridged from the April issue of *Alai*, published in Ecuador, Guillermo Ungo, former presidential candidate of *Convergencia Democrática* (CD) and chair of the FDR, gives his assessment of the election results and the differences between the FDR and the FMLN. The CD is a legal party organization supported by the FDR and the FMLN.

### **W**HAT IS YOUR assessment of the electoral process?

It was ambiguous. For a decade, elections have been a major political component of a whole counter-insurgency strategy. They helped to institutionalize the counter-insurgency system, but they have also lost some of their effectiveness. The elections in 1988 and this year had a negative effect, in the sense that the US government was the biggest loser. In a way, the victories for ARENA [National Republic Alliance, an extreme-right party] were stumbling blocks to the US's plans.

### ■ How do you interpret the election results and especially those for *Convergencia Democrática*?

There was no big surprise in the results. Everyone recognized that ARENA was the leading political force, and that it had a considerable lead over the Christian Democrats. The surprise was that it won in the first round. But this was expected more and more as the date of the elections approached, with the problem of the transport boycott. Three or four days before the election, there was almost a consensus — ARENA could win finally with a vote of less than a million.

As regards *Convergencia*, we had a number of modest but important objec-

tives. The election result and the date of the vote were not the essential thing. The bulk of our objectives were in the election campaign itself. In the first place, our aim was to build a base as a people's and peace alternative at the national level. Secondly, we wanted to play an educational role. We think we achieved that, even though there were still weaknesses. We wanted to establish ourselves as an important force nationally. We think we achieved that in political terms.

Our presence changed the political agenda from that of the previous elections. We also sought to create the conditions for a political solution. We think that we achieved that. Even without the FMLN's proposal [see following article], we had managed to get various formations to take up the theme of peace and a political solution. The FMLN's proposal meant that we had elections with dialogue, discussion, negotiation, elections that began to be posed in terms of a political solution and not as a counter-insurgency schema.

We think we contributed to this, because the FMLN's proposal itself would not have had any meaning without *Convergencia*, because it is an electoral proposal that involves *Convergencia*. And the precondition for this was CD's existing presence and national potential.

We also sought to organize ourselves and mobilize the country better. There, we

succeeded more modestly, with major inadequacies because of the context of repression and fear. We succeeded in overcoming the fear, but not completely. Perhaps our major failure was in realizing our organizational potential nationally. But we managed to gain a capacity for mobilization that, while still insufficient, was considerable in places where the people had not been mobilized, and we were able to take our own national initiatives.

We were able to develop our common positions with the FMLN. For better or worse, we continue to be identified with the FMLN. But we asserted our own identity, thanks to a process of differentiation among certain sectors of our own supporters. All this was insufficient, but it had not been possible for many years.

Finally, we did not get the number of votes we hoped for. In this anti-democratic, repressive situation marked by fear, our influence cannot be measured by votes, nor even perhaps by mobilization. We won thousands of votes, and thousands of others were stolen from us.

But even so the percentage remains low. According to our calculations we got 6% to 7%, and not 3.8% [given as the official figure].

### ■ Do you think that CD was affected by the military actions that the FMLN carried out during the electoral period?

Obviously it was, when you consider the transport strikes, the boycott, the stepping up of military activity aimed at getting a big percentage of abstentions. The FMLN succeeded in that. It managed to show that it is a national political force, both military and political, but more a military force than anything.

We think that this was a tactical mistake. We also disagree with them over the way that they recognized the importance of the elections and that there would be a high level of participation, while saying that people should not vote. This helped to achieve some correct objectives, but also objectives that were not ours, such as the strong victory for ARENA.

We think that the FMLN acted in a negative way and caused us to lose votes.

### ■ To what extent has this affected the relations between the FMLN and the FDR?

In the first place, we accepted the elections on the basis of an assessment different from the FMLN's. There are differences here. In the second place, even if votes don't mean a lot to us, they still count more for us than for the FMLN. That is another difference. This was also a conjunctural situation, and conjunctures count less for the FMLN than for us. That is also a difference. Getting a cease-fire declared was more important for us than for the FMLN.

These are differences, but they are conjunctural and temporary. Basically, we

have to look at something else — how far our convergences and our differences go. I don't think that we can yet define them clearly.

■ **What are Convergencia's perspectives. Is it possible, for example, to envisage new alliances?**

I think that there are possibilities for creating a whole national consensus. To be sure, I am not optimistic about certain kinds of alliances. But in a tactical and temporary form they should not be excluded.

We are in a sense like an iceberg. We thought that a larger part of the iceberg would emerge, and that did not happen. But you have to take into account what is under the water. All you need to do is create the conditions for it to emerge.

In this sense, Convergencia is trying to transform itself — alone if necessary, but with other forces if possible — into a popular alternative with which many sectors would converge. ★



**Interview with Joaquín Villalobos, FMLN**

## The FMLN's positions on the elections

THE INSURGENT front in El Salvador, the FMLN, made a proposal to the government on February 28 that included an offer to respect the results of elections if certain minimum conditions it considered essential for a fair contest were met. These included postponing the vote until June 30.<sup>1</sup> The government rejected this proposal and went ahead with elections on March 19, which were won by the ultra-right ARENA.

The FMLN's approach is explained in detail in the following abridged interview that Joaquín Villalobos, one of the five commanders of the FMLN, gave on February 25 to Marta Harnecker, a Chilean journalist living in Cuba.

**I**N THE FMLN's recent public statement, we noted a clear shift in focus on the elections. It seemed to us that for the first time, the guerrilla movement was going on the offensive in this area.

What led you to make this unexpected turn, when you have always tried to unmask the role that elections played in the imperialists' new counter-insurgency strategy? Does Convergencia Democrática's electoral experiment of the last few

months have anything to do with this?

In the first place, the conjuncture in which the FMLN launched this proposal should be explained. In September, a military offensive started that was intended to make a greater impact on the political camp, taking into consideration that this is the fundamental arena of the struggle. In order to change the relationship of forces, the FMLN began to make its weight felt in the cities with operations that tried to take more account of the political situation.

Our approach is based on two principles — carrying out a number of actions at the same time and trying to involve new forces. All these elements have led the FMLN to engage in the process of creating a situation in which the war makes more political impact. The aim of this whole strategy has been to show the situation in El Salvador as one that has not been resolved by the Reagan administration's policy. We consider that we have achieved this objective.

The FMLN has decided to go on a counter-offensive, considering that a new period was opening up as a result of several factors. There was the change of administration in the States; the elections in El Salvador; the clear failure of the reformist policy, which prevented the Christian Democrats from acquiring a social base and offering any perspective to the masses; and a grave worsening of the objective conditions of poverty in the country. The military plan was drawn up on the basis of this situation and regards the political field as the fundamental arena of the struggle.

■ **What do you mean by the political field?**

A more specific arena than that of the war properly speaking, constituted by the struggle of the masses and pacts or alliances that can emerge from the breakup of the ruling bloc.

On the one hand, a political corps of the mass movement has been being built up which encompasses a variety of sectors. But it is necessary that this force be further broadened and made more comprehensive. And this involves carrying out actions in the political field. It involves programmatic proposals that embrace the interests of all

1. For the text of the FMLN's proposal for dialogue, see *IV* 160, April 3, 1989.

the popular sectors.

On the other hand, the breakdown of the bloc in power has been accelerating for the following reasons: Failure to resolve the war and the economic and social problems of the masses. The change of administration in the United States, which involves a more pragmatic sector having access to the government, which might create new conditions after eight years of the previous administration's failure in its policy toward El Salvador. The Defeat of the Nicaraguan contras. The Esquipulas II accord, which offers us a framework in which it is more difficult for the US administration to pursue its policy in the region. The existence in the region of a certain weariness with the Reagan administration's interference in its affairs.

In this context, we think that it is necessary not just to take military actions but to take initiatives in the political arena.

Since we don't want to get into a confrontation with a superpower like the United States, it is obviously necessary to fight to try to weaken US support for the government of El Salvador and all its counter-insurgency projects by pointing up the failure of the model that they have sought to establish. Along with this conjunctural basis, there is an underlying strategic basis — the FMLN believes that it is changing the relationship of forces, and that this will enable it to act already in the other arena.

■ In what respect, has it changed the relationship of forces?

The whole US strategy was built up on one assumption — that there was a democratic process in El Salvador and that this is what they have been defending with their counterinsurgency model. What our proposal does is lay down a challenge to this concept. Moreover, this problem is now graver than when the US took it on, because within El Salvador itself, the right, which was supposed to have been neutralized through the rules of the game proposed by the Americans, have recouped their position. They hold the legislative branch and a good part of the judiciary. They have maintained their economic power, and have managed, from these commanding heights, to challenge the process of reforms and to undertake to reverse them.

The Christian Democrats themselves have accepted this reversal, although the reforms were supposed to be a fundamental part of their strategy of low-intensity warfare. The privatization of banking is being proposed, along with that of a good part of the agrarian-reform sector, and application of the free-enterprise policy that is so much in fashion nowadays. Both ARENA and the Christian Democrats

have very similar proposals now in the economic field; they have right-wing programs.

The reforms were not implemented thoroughly; they failed to create a social base that would enable them to defeat the FMLN. It has to be said clearly that if the reforms had worked, the base of support for the FMLN would have been weakened and we would have lost the war. If there had been a real agrarian reform, the FMLN would not have been able to sustain a war whose theater of operations is



fundamentally the countryside. So, what is the present situation?

On the one hand, the right has regained its economic power. The legislative branch is already in its hands. It holds the judiciary, and it is on the point of capturing the executive. Besides this, it has also recouped its situation inside the armed forces, who are tired of the Christian Democrats and are looking for new alternatives and a certain autonomy for a policy to the right of the United States and the more or less center-reformist intervention that the Christian Democrats tried. So, unity is beginning to be rebuilt between the old oligarchic power and the army. The components of the classical dictatorship in El Salvador are thus beginning to develop a process of fusion under new conditions.

■ On what assumptions was this counter-insurgency strategy based?

On the one hand, on the belief that they had broken up, isolated and virtually annihilated what was supposed to be the political body of the left, leaving the FMLN reduced to a military apparatus without possibilities for political action in the country's vital centers. On the other, it

was based on the conviction that they had managed to neutralize the right's potential for plotting in the army by taking direct control of the armed forces, and at the same time on their certainty that they could build a political center under the leadership of the Christian Democrats. They believed that the new rules of the game that they had established would make it possible gradually to push back the forces to the right of the government in the electoral field and relegate the right, essentially, to the economic field, and that in new conditions after the reform process.

In such a relationship of forces, in which they had managed to isolate and largely annihilate the left — you have to remember that 60,000 Salvadorans were killed and a half million driven into exile — they started to formulate the concept of a democratic process and proposed to recoup the situation. They put forward Duarte as an alternative, maintaining that he was not responsible for these crimes, and that he represented a possibility for establishing a democratic regime in El Salvador. They claimed that a reform process was being carried out that would provide a social base for the project. The basis for the democratization process was the fact that they were going to hold a series of technically better organized elections with the participation of the right that would make possible a transition to civilian governments. Moreover, they proposed to professionalize the army.

It has to be recognized that for a whole period this scheme produced confusion, even in the FMLN itself, which, although it had managed to create dual power was not clear about what it was up against, who its enemy was. The US intervention was not direct. The dictatorship was not a classical one. We have spoken about a dictatorship of a new type. Nonetheless, we have to recognize that the counter-insurgency project managed to gain a certain legitimacy for a time in the eyes of international public opinion and some sectors of domestic public opinion. During the period in which they managed to neutralize the right and isolate the left through genocide, this project had a certain force.

However, eight years have gone by, and in these years the relationship of forces has changed. The situation today is totally different. This policy is being questioned in El Salvador and the region, and its strategic content is beginning to be questioned.

■ You talk about honesty in the elections. Election frauds are an old story, not only in El Salvador but in many countries in Latin America. What conditions are there today for confronting a situation of this sort?

In the first place, it should be noted that we are putting forward our proposal without disarming. And since the Salvadoran

masses have already rebelled at previous election frauds, there is no doubt that today they would rise up in much greater force with the benefit of our powerful military backing. A fraud would be pure suicide. With our proposal, we are throwing down a challenge to them, since they have been claiming that the FMLN is a minority.

**■ Are you absolutely sure that the masses — who have had a constant ideological bombardment from the ruling classes and imperialists in recent years aimed at misinforming them about the FMLN, and portraying you as terrorists, militarists and so on — will be able to recognize who really represents their interests?**

I think that in this respect, the work that they have been able to do has been upset by the relationship of forces produced by the war. You also have to take into account that we are saying that we are the majority eight years after proving resoundingly that the revolutionary left was the majority force in El Salvador. It has to be remembered that in 1980 the biggest organized and coherent political body that has ever existed in El Salvador showed its strength.

What for all these years has kept the immense mass support for the revolutionary movement from expressing itself is in fact the terror created by the genocide. We have no doubt that under other conditions this support would express itself overwhelmingly. And, when we put the armed means in a context of opening up the political camp, what we want to do is open the door for the masses so that they can express themselves. This is one of the key elements in this initiative — to open up a larger space for the masses so that they show their capacity and their presence.

In this respect, we think that the ideological battle in El Salvador has been won. There is still some negative baggage. But if it were really true that their ideological campaigns had had a significant impact, we would have suffered a serious weakening in the war. To the contrary, our social base has been growing. We have rebuilt it. We have come through the difficult post-1980 situation, when repression was on the rampage, by building mass popular support.

**■ So, you think that you can successfully counter the ideological campaigns against the FMLN?**

Of course. Imagine the impact that accounts of the horrible things that the armed forces have done in this country would have in the media, the impact of putting people in front of the cameras who have lived through the massacres of many hundreds of people, including children.

**■ Why do you call for postponing the elections?**

We need time to increase the number of

registered voters. Only a third of those qualified to vote are registered, and not all those vote. The proposal would not have been serious if the time proposed had been shorter.

**■ Another argument against the proposal is that you can't believe in a project that calls for legitimizing election results, and at the same time proposes a two-day truce before and a two-day truce afterward, implying that the war will continue regardless of what happens or of who wins. What is the meaning of this?**

Those who argue that way reduce the proposal to a tactical proposition, seeing it only in the context of political confrontation. The truth is that the central element in the proposal the FMLN is making is recognizing the legitimacy of the election results. The thing about two days before and two days afterward is entirely secondary in the proposal. The central thing is that the proposal for legitimizing the elections is a blow to the idea of a military solution on either side.

Therefore, if the results are genuine, there will be no alternative but to recognize them. What would that mean for the armed forces, ARENA and all of them? They would have to accept a Convergencia government and the application of its program; and we support all the points in Convergencia's platform.

**■ Are you, then, ready to give your allegiance to Convergencia's program?**

We were familiar with this program, and we agreed with it. It is a way of advancing toward a negotiated solution. It talks about that.

**■ And if ARENA wins the elections?**

In that event — which we are sure is not going to happen — it would be a very complicated business to be able to remain on a war footing. I say that because I don't think this is a question of what anybody wants but of objective conditions. Whoever breaks the rules of the game or fails to accept the results and tries to continue the war will be at a disadvantage.

You can only understand the FMLN's proposal correctly if you see that the central thing in it is the point that says that the FMLN will accept the election results if all the conditions of the plan are respected. The problem of the truce is entirely incidental. If it was put there, it was as a sign of the FMLN's goodwill, in the anticipation that this would generate a debate and demands for more clarity about what accepting the legitimacy of the elections results meant and around the problem of the duration of the cease-fire.

So, what we are doing is taking it a step at a time in order to test the intentions of the other side and to help to generate a political debate that will give life to the

proposal, and clarify what is happening. After we offered five days, one of the parties called for sixty, and we granted that. Later they asked for more clarifications, and we told them that we were ready to accept a truce lasting for the whole time leading up to the elections. We are clear that, from the moment the proposal begins to be implemented, the political arena will be activated. Military considerations will therefore have to take a back seat.

This is the logic implicit in the proposal. What we are doing is waiting for a moment of greater receptivity in order to put this forward, and also to give it more of the nature of an agreement, which is something fundamental, because on this level the idea of a unilateral truce doesn't work. It necessarily has to involve agreement with the army.

If we had put agreement with the army up front, that would have meant killing the proposal, because the armed forces would have said "no." If we managed to give it a certain political life, that would enable us to build strength, if not for today then for the future. In generating a climate in which, for the first time, an end to the conflict seems near, the proposal opens up great expectations, and various questions begin to arise about the legitimacy of the election results. What does this mean in terms of recognizing the government? Does it mean that the FMLN will lay down its arms regardless of the result?

Some of the most right-wing sectors have gone so far as to pose laying down arms as a condition for accepting the proposal. That would be impossible. In that case, as I said, there would be no need to have the elections.

In connection with this question, we are also spacing out our propositions in order to create a more and more positive atmosphere for our proposal. At this point, we are already explaining under what conditions the FMLN would be ready to stop the armed struggle, join in political life and recognize the existence of a single army, which would totally change the FMLN's previous political strategy of a negotiated settlement involving shared power. In the first version of the proposal, we said that we were not demanding political power. We were demanding a space for implementing this proposal, which turns around clean elections.

Later, we made it clear that we were not demanding military power but a recomposition, an arrangement, a restructuring of the present military power in order to provide guarantees for a real process of democratization. To that end, we proposed three points. In the first place, trying all those guilty of crimes, which is a demand raised by the US Congress itself, by the State Department, as a necessary element in order for there to be a democratic process, even one carried out only halfway, demagogically.

In this respect, they have gotten absolutely nothing in El Salvador, not one army

officer has been tried for the crimes that have been committed, and more than 70,000 people have been murdered. So, let us take up a demand that is legitimate in both the domestic and international context. It is necessary to stop the army from operating with impunity by means of the death squadrons, through uniformed agents, by any means.

Secondly, we said that it was necessary to cut back the army, and therefore to reduce its specific weight, its political weight in society. An over-militarized society conflicts with a democratic process. The specific weight of the military has to be such as to allow the political authority to develop fully. So, cutting back the military is a legitimate proposal, and we proposed reducing it to the numbers that it had in 1978, which would also have positive effects from the economic point of view — less spending and so on — and would also have geopolitical implications regarding the problem of the militarization of the region; it would relieve the Honduran army's fears of finding itself, whatever the situation, confronting another army, an army like the Salvadoran one, with which it has conflicts.

In the third place, we said that it was necessary to reorganize the security bodies, dissolving the present ones and building a single security force linked to the civilian state apparatus. They tried to do this, applying some ideas from the Venezuelans and from the Americans themselves, and establishing a sub-ministry of public security. But they never managed to put the country's armed apparatus under control of the civilian apparatus. The paramilitary groups did not give an inch, nor did the territorial service or the security bodies.

What we are proposing gives form to the feelings of the masses and of the middle layers who think that there should be democracy in El Salvador. We are taking this up, and saying, OK, if these conditions are met, we consider that there would be no reason for the armed struggle; we would be ready to stop the war and recognize this army.

And I want to make it clear that this cannot be interpreted as a surrender. It is not at all that. The point is that the armed struggle would make no sense in these new conditions since a political struggle could be waged and so on.

Obviously having achieved that through all these years of armed struggle would not have been in vain. It would be an achievement that would completely change the situation of the country. We would have accomplished our objective, because our objective here is winning not a voluntarist demand but the demand most deeply felt by the population.

With its proposal, the FMLN is taking up and adopting as its own a general program, a general demand. It is not clinging to the idea that it has to be the government. Whether it forms the government or

does not is something that the masses and the situation will decide. At this point, what it is doing is taking up the banner of peace and democracy and putting its armed force and its political force in the service of winning this.

If these objectives are achieved, that will be a revolutionary change of great scope, and it will create the conditions for ending the armed struggle and for our integration into political life, in order to continue our fight on that footing. Life will show whether or not it is possible to go down this road. Life will also tell whether we have to become the government in order to be able to do this, or whether that is not going to be necessary and if we are going to be able to accomplish our objective through a national accord.

To sum up, if the parties to an armed confrontation decide to play the game in the political arena, the one who loses in that field also risks losing the war decisively and rapidly. Today, if the election results are in favor of *Convergencia*, the FMLN will not claim all the power or anything like that. But such a victory would open up a process of peaceful transition to structural changes that would solve the problems of peace, democracy and the chance for large-scale social and economic transformations.

*Convergencia* got to the point of uniting the revolutionary, progressive and democratic movement in a single great political body, and that is what led us to the idea of challenging, by our initiative, the democratic process that the Yankees established.

If the proposal is implemented, both *Convergencia* and the FMLN will have a single field of action. If the proposal is rejected, *Convergencia* will have its own field of action, because of the nature of its forces and of its objectives. Since it is clear that in the present electoral conditions, *Convergencia* is not going to win, it cannot expect to get a large number of votes. Its interest fundamentally is to build its organization and reinforce its communication with the masses.

### ■ Looking back, do you think that a proposal of this sort could have borne fruit in previous electoral periods?

No, then an adequate relationship of forces for making a proposal like this did not exist. Let's skip over the last election of deputies in 1988 and look at the previous elections, the presidential elections in 1984, the ones in 1982. Then, the other side said that it would in no way accept a left force, even with the deck stacked against it. I think that at that time they were still in the last stage of sorting out problems among themselves. And even if there had been a political space, we would not have had the military strength to guarantee a stable political presence. We would have run the risk of seeing the left political cadres assassinated one by one, as

is happening in Colombia.

Now that we have a broader body [of activists] that embraces everything from armed struggle to elections, including trade-union struggle, a political body that is uniting the revolutionary movement around it, and at the same time we have a powerful guerrilla army, the objective conditions exist to make our proposal viable.

### ■ And what do you tell your troops? Because you were preparing an insurrection. You had announced that, and then suddenly this proposal appeared. What is happening with those people who were preparing themselves for the insurrection? How can you get the fighters to understand this proposal?

In launching the proposal, we were obviously dealing with a totally new political schema, which represented a change from what we had been saying in previous offers of negotiations, in which the FMLN demanded its own areas of power. Now, what the FMLN is doing is fighting for a more general demand, a demand more deeply felt by all the forces — peace and democracy — and this is also leading to a change in the concept of how to sustain the fighting morale of our forces and our people. In what we might call our previous instrument for political struggle, what sustained us was more a principled definition, the proposal for negotiation on the basis of our own position. The FMLN demanded territory, military power, a share in political power, and so on. This was a strategy of a negotiated settlement. All these elements were linked to a situation of dual power. The firmness with which this was defended was a factor strengthening the morale of our fighters. Now, the FMLN is proposing a new strategy in which it is trying to construct a program with which the entire people will identify.

The fact that today it is the FMLN that is most forcefully defending the banner of peace and that, at the same time, it is seen as the guarantee that this can be implemented, means that when its fighters come in contact with the masses, they feel that they have much more popular support. And that gives them the morale to stay in the fight, to continue fighting for these propositions.

Today, insurrection remains a second alternative. The first document that we presented with the proposal said this clearly. We are making our last efforts to prevent a social explosion. And that is clear for our fighters. That is, we are still fighting a war, with the plans that we drew up. But we are looking for a way out, an alternative. If that is rejected, then our war will be more legitimate. If it is put into practice, we are the guarantee that this process will be carried out honestly. So, there is no reason for this to hit at the morale of our people. To the contrary, the FMLN has acquired an unprecedented political role, and our people continue preparing them-

selves, they continue with their plans, and therefore the slogan of preparing for an insurrection continues to be valid.

■ **Is your proposal aimed at changing the rules of the [electoral] game?**

The existence of a new relationship of forces makes it possible to change the nature of the playing field and the rules of the game. What the FMLN is after are conditions of equality and honesty that are precisely the problems in elections in the bourgeois democratic framework. We are proposing elections without repression. For that reason, we insist that the army should return to barracks. We think that the rules of the electoral game should be set by a consensus, that there should be guarantees of full access to the means of communication, since with the financial means we have we could carry out a large-scale campaign; that a committee should be set up to monitor the elections from which the government and parties involved in it should be excluded; and, finally and most important, we have an armed force able to defend the election results against any attempt at fraud.

Obviously, we could not join in the five previous electoral processes. How could you enter an electoral process when only a year before a dreadful genocide had been perpetrated in the country! When the first election process was conducted in 1982, headless bodies were still showing up in the streets. There was a terrible fear in people. There was so much skepticism that, in an agreement with the US embassy, they had to increase the number of voters.

Then the most minimal conditions did not exist for taking part in elections. Besides, in those conditions, the electoral process served to make the US intervention less embarrassing, so that it could increase its aid, so that it could give form to its counterinsurgency project.

Today, the fundamental thing is the relationship of forces in which the electoral contest is being fought. There is an armed FMLN with eight years experience of war, which it has proved impossible to defeat. To the contrary, it has become a real factor of power in Salvadoran society. The political corps of the revolutionary democratic left has been recomposed. It comprises a spectrum running from guerrilla forces to the people's front and to the electoral front.

This is the broad policy of alliances that will widen much more in the conditions of the search for an electoral solution. We are able to count on a great financial capacity that will enable us to put forward propaganda that can meet the enemy propaganda.

If Convergencia's election victory is respected, that would be a very great improvement for the people, and if it is not

respected they will be playing with fire.

■ **You say that the country is on the brink of an insurrection. What are the objective bases for this conclusion?**

I ask you this because there are people who consider that it is difficult for those involved in the guerrilla war to have an objective view of what is happening in the country, and that there is a natural tendency to extend to the entire country the perception of the relationship of forces that exists in the guerrilla-controlled zones, where there is a very high level of militancy.

I think that it is wrong to see the FMLN



as guerrillas in the mountains. The first thing that should be clear is that the FMLN is not an isolated body. Our guerrillas are on the slopes of the San Salvador volcano, on the outskirts of the capital, and we have urban guerrillas in every city in the country. The army itself defines the confrontation as a total one, in every sector of society. Besides, the FMLN is active in both the political and military fields, although it applies different methods and uses different organizational instruments in both.

For this reason, the FMLN leadership has the widest information about, and the best perception of, the mood of the masses. I think that it is necessary to distinguish between a serious, scientific prediction of how the mood of the masses is going to develop and their present mood.

■ **Would that prediction take account of the trend in the mood of the masses?**

Yes. The FMLN is not saying that the masses are on the brink of insurrection and ready to storm the government. What it is doing is predicting what is going to happen, based on an analysis of the objective and subjective conditions that exist now. We are now in the worst crisis in the country's history. It is much more explosive than the one that touched off the war with Honduras. It is this situation that led us to adopt the insurrection thesis.

We would be making a grave error if we based our strategy on an analysis of the present mood of the masses, because what would happen then is that we would become mere spectators, we could not intervene in the political conjuncture. If we had not predicted that Reagan's policy was going to falter, as a result of the world and regional context, we could not have had any viable strategy, we could not have put forward the idea of a war of attrition, reinsertion in the cities and building the people's movement.

■ **How do you see the situation of those on top?**

In the case of El Salvador, this depends on an external factor — the American presence. There is unquestionably a new situation, which of course does not mean that the Americans are going to leave overnight and abandon the government and the army. But they cannot continue a policy that involves spending huge sums of money and participation in a war, if the war goes on like this and they cannot win it.

■ **Who is the main enemy now in your opinion?**

With the weakening of the US administration's policy for El Salvador, the oligarchy and the army are beginning to appear as the immediate enemies. And for that reason, when we make our proposal we say: What is being tested is whether there has been a process of democratization and professionalization of the army. If there has not, what conclusion do we come to? It is in this stage that the confrontation is going to be with those sectors.

And probably in the United States there are going to be changes. We do not say that they are going to cut off their aid overnight, but there are going to be changes, and we are going to have to readjust our political strategy.

We cannot talk about imperialism in an absolute sense; we have to take into account that there are different currents there, in the Senate, in Congress, in the State Department.

We are going to have to recognize the importance of the fact that the policy of the hawks has been weakened, and we are going to try to take advantage of that. We cannot function only on the basis of ideological questions. ★

# US still held at bay in Panama

**T**HE DECLARED aim of the opposition was to "paralyze the entire country" and thereby force the departure of General Manuel Antonio Noriega in the wake of the street clashes that led to the invalidation of the May 7 presidential election. The opposition candidate, Guillermo Endara, backed up by the US, claimed to be the winner. ADOC's call was followed only by shops in the capital's fanciest neighborhoods. Most of the anti-Noriega traders thought that it would be "suicide" to close down. The strike came precisely on payday for public employees.

The meager result of the "strike" had immediate repercussions in Washington, where on the same day the Organization of American States (OAS) was unable to adopt the sort of resolution that the US representative, Jim Baker, was pushing. The hard-line text that Washington was demanding was supposed to include a paragraph demanding Noriega's immediate departure. It was not approved. After three hours of intense debate, the most explicit formula about the Panamanian president, accepted by 20 out of the 32 members of the OAS, was nothing more than the mention of "the grave abuses of General Noriega." The resolution finally adopted was supported by the Panamanian delegate as well. It called for sending a mission to Panama to guarantee "a transfer of power that will respect the will of the people."

What is more, the Panamanian delegation, headed by Chancellor Jorge Ritter, got a phrase included in the resolution expressing the OAS' opposition to any foreign intervention in the country's affairs, and reminding the US of its promise to return the Panama Canal to Panama in 1990.

These relative successes for the Noriega gang were partly the result of the distrust aroused in Latin America by the imperialist campaign against the general's regime. They contrasted with the diplomatic reverses suffered by "Panama's strong man" a few days earlier, when most countries on the continent expressed their "profound consternation" at the overturning of the elections and the attacks on leaders of the opposition.

In reality, from the outset the May 7 elections were the focus of provocations by the United States. Sending a group of observers — against the will of the Panamanian government — with the objective of supplying the news agencies with stories about election fraud, and issuing a premature announcement of the right-wing's victory, created an atmosphere of confronta-

**THE MANEUVERS of the US administration against Panama failed again on May 17. The "general strike" called by the Democratic Alliance of the Civic Opposition (ADOC) did not achieve its objective.**

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tation.

The signal for the start of disturbances — which, if they degenerated, could have been the pretext for armed intervention by the Pentagon — was given by the statements of the US observers (including former president Jimmy Carter), about irregularities in the elections. What followed was a chain reaction of actions aimed at destabilizing the Panamanian regime.

● Three days after the vote, Endara and his friends Guillermo Ford and Arias Calderón claimed victory. The demonstration they called to celebrate ended in clashes with the police. The repressive forces used water cannons and teargas against the demonstrators. Endara and Ford were injured by club-wielding youths from the "Dignity Battalion," formed by the regime in 1988

in a period when insistent rumors were circulating about a direct attack by US troops against Noriega.

● On May 10, the White House put the responsibility for the violence on Noriega and leaked to the news agencies that it would send additional troops to the Canal Zone. That night, the chair of the Panamanian Electoral Tribunal, Yolanda Pulido, declared the elections null and void because of "many irregularities by the opposition."

The following day, Washington consulted with the Latin American governments. The real content of these discussions has not yet come to light. Nonetheless, on May 12 these governments obediently issued condemnations of the incidents. But they did not demand Noriega's resignation. A few hours later, the White House announced that fresh troops were being sent to the Canal Zone to protect US citizens. And it staged an intimidating display of power in front of the TV cameras. As if following a movie script, President George Bush issued a public invitation on May 13 for a military coup in Panama. He called on the Defense Forces to rebel against General Noriega: "I would like them to oust him."

The stage had been set for new incidents — perhaps even more serious — in the May 17 general strike. What finally happened? All the signs are that the imperialist diktat was not followed by the people or the Panamanian army. Although some members of the opposition expressed their hope that the United States "would get Noriega off our backs," ADOC's representatives did not go so far. To the contrary, they noted that they were not putting their hopes "on a US intervention."

So the situation is now similar to that of a few months ago. For the moment, Washington's assault on the Carter-Torrijos treaties — the essential motivation for the campaign of accusations against Noriega — has not achieved its objectives. Nonetheless, the imperialist project is still to eliminate Noriega, demobilize the military, crush the nationalist movement and install in power the pro-US faction — ADOC — which is prepared to renegotiate the treaties.

Time is against Washington. In recent years, eight military installations have been handed over, and in the coming months other installations are supposed to be dismantled by virtue of the treaties. In view of the resistance of the population, the US faces the problem that the ready solution of the past, armed aggression, would be politically and militarily very costly. ★

