

# International VIEWPOINT

Issue 202

March 18, 1991

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## **Mass slaughter boosts stock markets**

### **INSIDE:**

*Special International  
Women's Day Dossier*

**WOMEN AGAINST  
WAR AND  
IMPERIALISM**



**Algeria:** "The dignity  
of women is  
inseparable from the  
dignity of peoples"

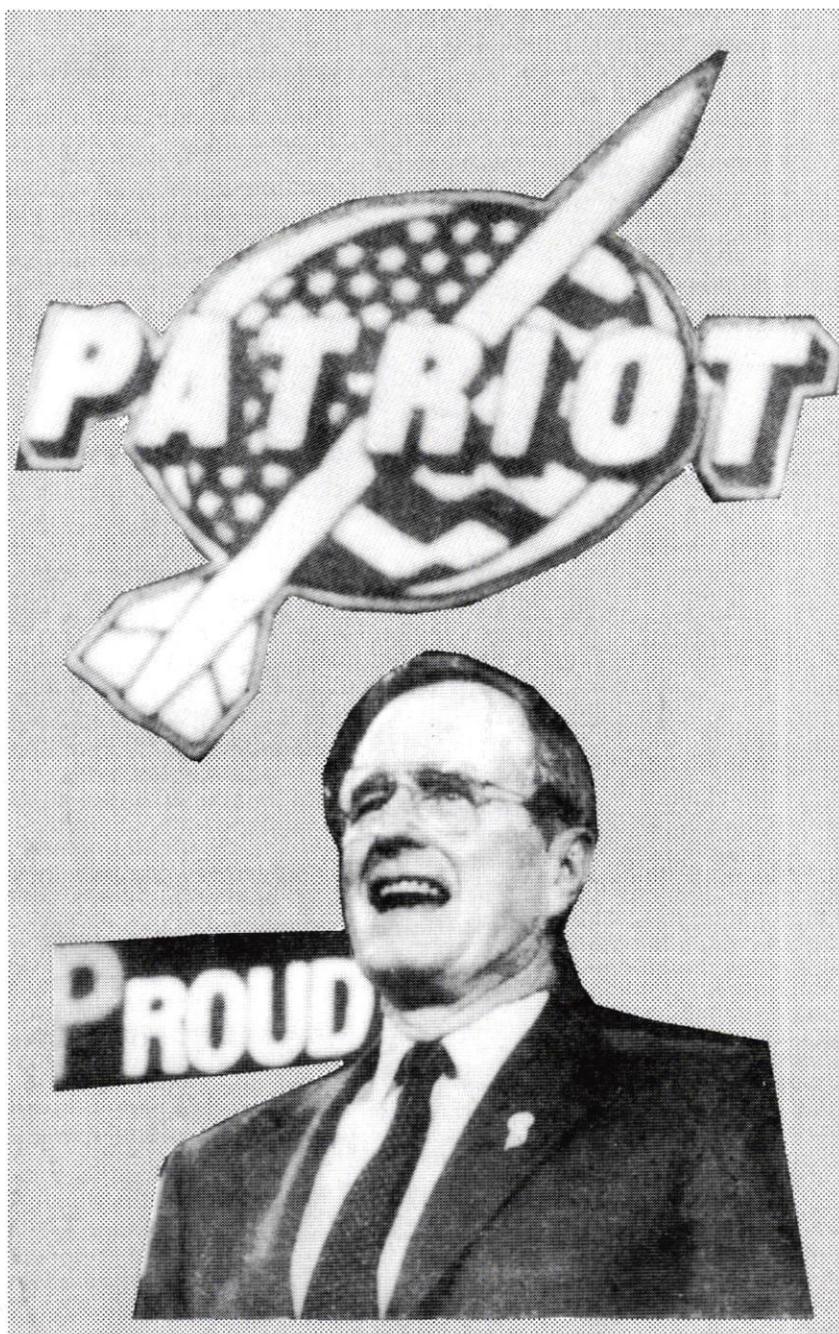
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## International VIEWPOINT

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# Women against war

**AMID the debris of this war, feminist movements and women will celebrate, almost all over the world, their international day on March 8. They have been steadfast in refusing to be "enlisted for causes that do nothing for the emancipation either of peoples or of women".**

## SOPHIE MASSOURI

**T**HE reality of the war perpetrated in the Middle East over the past few weeks is very distant from the principles in whose defence it was supposedly waged. The defence of the weak against the arbitrariness and violence of the strong, which the leaders of the "allied" coalition claim as their goal, has never been so travestied.

This barbarism has not ended with the surrender of the Iraqi dictator. The embodiment in law of the use of force and of violence, the political use of humiliation, hurt those they claim to protect. After this carnage, the "most weak" will be sensed as weak and the strong as strong as never before.

Women had every reason to oppose this war. This legitimized and institutionalized violence echoes that perpetrated, for many centuries and in all societies, against women. War concentrates all the macho behaviour of our society and the sexist stereotypes — in support of "our gallant soldiers", mothers and wives are called on to participate in the patriotic mobilization.

The aim of the Gulf war is supposedly the defence of "international law"; but such rhetoric appears hollow when the women of Saudi Arabia are subject to the most rigorous enforcement of *sharia* (Islamic law) in the Middle East.

As the Algerian womens' movement has put it "the dignity of women is inseparable from that of the peoples" (see interview p. 5), and indeed it is the dignity of the Iraqi people, and that of the Arab masses, which imperialism has sought to break in this war. The Algerian Islamic fundamentalists have moreover well understood the logic which makes of eve-



ry man, or woman, of every humiliated person, a potential enraged, and have used this logic for their own ends. The rise of fundamentalism is nourished by the war.

For women, in particular, the "new order" resembles the old, but worse. Rarely have the means employed contradicted so flagrantly the declared good intentions. This imperialist war has corrupted the very sense of law in whose interests it is supposedly waged; the women of the Middle East and of the Maghreb will be without doubt the silent victims of it, at least unless, as in Algeria, they rise up in defence of their interests.

In 1988, fifty Tel Aviv feminists, revolted by the conditions of detention of Palestinians accused of involvement with the *intifada*, created the "Womens' Organization for Political Prisoners" (WOFPP). Subject to family and social pressures — some had to leave their work — they opposed the policy of the government, the values of Israeli society, and the repression suffered by the Palestinian people in the occupied territories.

In the Israeli peace movement and inside the moderate Zionist left, it was the first example of solidarity between Palestinians and Israelis. Three years of the *intifada* have provoked some fissures in the Israeli "sacred union". Tomorrow, after the war, what will remain of this solidarity? The return of nearly all progressive forces, and above all the moderate Zionist left, to the camp of "national unity", from the first hours of the conflict, has provoked without doubt irremediable fractures inside the Israeli pacifist movement. The "peace" will not bring things back as they were before. The war in the Gulf has contaminated and destroyed for the moment this fragile solidarity.

Yet, more than ever, this solidarity is necessary and the womens' movements all have need of it. In developing such links against the "new world order" we can give a bitter taste to the imperialist victory.

Like the Japanese feminists who carried placards at Haneda airport, against "sex tourism" in solidarity with South Korean women (see article p. 10), we must denounce the injustice, the exploitation and oppression of women, put a check on the will of the strong to crush the weak, and demand all the rights which are still refused to women. ★

## FRANCE

*EXTRACTS from the first appeal of Women and Feminists against the war:*

"WE oppose any order founded on injustice, power, violence and exploitation. Whether this is in the family, at work, in the state or in international relations. Whether in daily life or in political life. In this war, we refuse to be the "comfort of the warrior", to give birth to cannon fodder, shore up the morale of the troops or take part in the killing. We refuse to be enlisted for causes that do nothing for the emancipation either of peoples or of women.

"War nourishes fundamentalists of all stripes. War is violence and injustice, legitimized, institutionalized and generalized:

■ In this country, attacks on freedom of speech, the rise of racism and economic measures that aggravate inequalities and exclusions;

■ There, destruction and innumerable victims; children, women and men; civilians and military personnel; people of all nationalities and origins along with the systematic rape of women in the "conquered" territories.

"We call on all women to get informed, to get organized to act and to speak out against this war in all its forms.

"We, who did not decide on this war, refuse to collaborate with it." ★

## SPAIN

*EXTRACTS from the platform of Women Against War in the Spanish State:*

"THE famous Gulf War has passed on from blockade to massacre. Is this really the only solution to the conflict? The truth is that we are seeing demagoguery and rhetoric to get people ready to make this war, whose consequences for humanity cannot be foreseen, "their own". According to its strategists, this war is to be short, but devastating.

"We, as women, want to associate ourselves in the denunciation of this war; in the Gulf conflict, contrary to what is being said, the United States and its allies are only defending the interests of the big oil multinationals and the arms industry who have found a new market.

"The fleets have not set sail in order to defend democratic ideals, but for the hegemony of the powerful — today for control over oil and tomorrow for any other of their interests that are threatened. The dominant countries do not only want a monopoly on riches, to be the arbiters of peace and war, but they also claim to be the sole source of culture and democracy. But we, as women, know and suffer from the values of this dominant culture." ★

## BRITAIN

WOMEN against War in the Gulf was founded in October. According to an article by Terry Conway in the British revolu-



tionary Marxist monthly, *Socialist Outlook* (February 1991):

"Socialist feminists recognized very early on the importance of the gender division within society over the question of war. Quite obviously it was correct to try and orientate the antiwar movement towards this division.

"Back in October there was a great deal of sectarianism between various different elements of the existing antiwar movement. We saw doing work on the ground as more important at this stage than allowing bickering and factionalism. So, WAWG was born....

"In wartime, the burdens on working class women increase dramatically. WAWG is in the process of establishing links with support groups — like the Gulf Mums Support Group....

"Also important is work against conscription...Conscription papers have already been printed — they will be mainly served to young working class men....

"Another important aspect of WAWG's activity is the fight against racism...WAWG is asking for this year's International Women's Day to be a day for peace and for international sisterhood". ★

### TUNISIA

A HUNDRED Tunisian women have launched an appeal to the West:

"AT the end of a century which has seen humanity change its destiny through the conquest of nature, the growth of knowledge and great aspirations for liberty, was this war needed, with its vast panoply of murderous tools, to reawaken the sense of the fragility of this edifice and of the legal and moral rules we have developed to safeguard our existence and ward off barbarism?

"It is because we remain profoundly attached to peace, justice and the use of dialogue as the sole means of resolving conflicts that we are against this war. It is because we believe that paths of peace are the only ones worth following, that we are for an immediate end to the fighting. For us, Arab women, who have chosen the construction of democracy, who are engaged in the struggle for our place as citizens, for human rights and the equality of the sexes, this war is a heavy threat and weighs heavily on our future. It sharpens hatred and feeds misunderstanding. It strengthens the voices of exclusion and racism.

"It is because we know that the sense of human solidarity exists with us, as it does with you, that we are appealing to you in the hope that together we can halt this war. It is because we believe that, like us, you think that it cannot be admitted that in the name of a routinely violated "international law" and at the behest of a body

which is too often powerless, one can allow the bombing of innocent people, destroy their socio-economic infrastructure and destroy the richest expressions of an ancient civilization.

"We continue to think that the only struggle worth leading is that which leads to the consolidation of human and national rights, to develop dialogue and exchange, the attachment to justice and respect for the other in their irreducible humanity. These values, which we want to defend and these human lives that we want to spare can only lead you to join us in calling for peace." ★

### ARGENTINA

ON September 18, 1990, the Mothers of the Plazo de Mayo issued an appeal against the involvement of the Argentine government in the Gulf war:

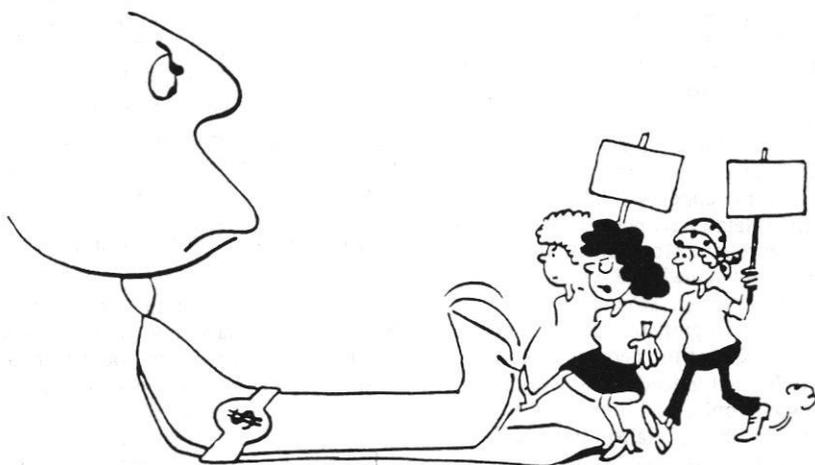
"WE, the Mothers, condemn every act of occupation of the territory of another country. Our struggle is based on the free determination of the peoples. We can only condemn the interference of countries which conceal their economic and political trickeries under pretext of defending peace.

"In consequence, we do not accept the sending of Argentine forces to the Persian Gulf:

1. Because this is an issue that should be dealt with by the Arab countries, without foreign intervention, as was the case with the US and NATO during the Malvinas War;

2. Because the only place in history reserved for the Argentine armed forces is in prison. They are not suitable as defenders of anything, because they are responsible for mass murder in Argentina;

3. Because there is hunger in our country, due to the dealings of these same armed forces and the politicians who have colluded with them." ★



# “The dignity of women is inseparable from the dignity of peoples”

Interview with Algerian feminists

ON JUNE 12, 1990, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) won a big victory in the local elections, the first pluralist elections in Algeria (see *IV* 189, July 16, 1990). At the start of the Gulf war the fundamentalists were caught off balance owing to their ties to Saudi Arabia. Subsequently, however, they have been trying to take advantage of the new opportunities created by the conflict.

Faced with this menace, Algerian women have not ceased to struggle for their rights; today, at the same time, they have been speaking out in defence of the rights of the Arab people and against the aggression against the Iraqi people, saying: “the dignity of women is inseparable from that of peoples.” We spoke to Samira Fellah and Nawal Zien, members of the Algerian Socialist Workers Party (PST) and militants of the Algerian women’s movement.

## HOW has the population reacted to the war?

**Samira Fellah:** The war has shocked Algerian society. In the days just before the ultimatum, no one could sleep. People listened to the news until four or five in the morning. The whole country was on edge. After the war began, there were spontaneous demonstrations, especially of young people — the unemployed and school students. In Constantine for example it was school students who started the first mobilization, which was joined by unemployed youth who went to the city’s French consulate and cultural centre. Subsequently, rather more organized demonstrations took place.

But almost every day marches would form spontaneously — for example at the end of the school day — in support of the Iraqi people. The youth carried portraits of Saddam Hussein as a symbol of Arab resistance to the United States.

At the start the feeling on these demonstrations was strongly anti-American and anti-Western. But the movement slowly

became politicized and more obviously anti-imperialist positions came out. The issue of oil as the instrument of Western domination in the region recurred in every conversation.

From the very first the antiwar movement was divided into two camps: that of the democratic parties on the one hand and that of the fundamentalists on the other. The former called for demonstrations early on the morning of Friday, January 18, immediately after the outbreak of the war. The fundamentalists, for their part, called a protest for that afternoon, after Friday prayers.

Until the war began, they had been very vague about Iraq, and avoided taking any position either on Saddam Hussein or on Saudi Arabia. There was a good reason — the Saudis are their main source of funds. The participation of that country in the Western camp was a big problem for them at that stage, and it was the pressure of popular feeling, above all from the youth, that compelled them to take clear positions.

Today, the FIS is publicly taking its dis-

tance from Saudi Arabia. It claims that it has never received aid from that country and has even called for the Saudi regime to be overthrown, and replaced by a real Islamic government. It wants to turn the war into a religious war, but for the time being this is only being partly successful. The fact is that on both sides there are flags bearing Islamic inscriptions.

The FIS’ main aim is to mark itself off from the other traditional parties and gain ground against the Algerian government, with an eye to the forthcoming legislative elections. They have very violently attacked the government for not siding openly with Iraq and have demanded the opening of training camps for the sending of popular militia to the Gulf. They hope by this latter proposal to latch onto the anger of the youth. We are not opposed to this idea in principle, but we are against the arming of partisan militias under the control of the FIS, which will be used against democrats and us, rather than against George Bush.

The democratic parties have, unfortunately, been pretty feeble. They announced that they would suspend all their political activities because of the war, thus effectively joining the camp of the government.

The war has thus offered the government an unexpected opportunity to create a quasi-consensus (excluding the FIS) around its economic reforms. This is in a situation of growing economic crisis, including galloping inflation. The democratic parties are totally discrediting themselves in the eyes of the population by this attitude. The fundamentalists reap the reward, appearing as the most radical opponents of the government.

## ■ Has the women’s movement adopted any position?

**Nawal Zien:** Some women have been on the big demonstrations — but they have been in the minority. At Setif, however, there was about equal participation by women on a demonstration of high school students. There are also women in the Committees in Support of the Iraqi People. This is true in Algiers. Within the women’s movement we uphold the position that women must take part in all political struggles.

**SF:** We believe that women who are fighting for their rights as citizens in Algeria are strongly implicated in a political problem of this size. We say that the dignity of women is connected to the dignity of peoples, in this case the Iraqi people. We know what happens to women in wars, what their living conditions are and what they have to do. Iraqi women today need our support as women.

But some of the movement’s militants, above all the intellectuals, were very reticent at the start, owing to the situation of women in Iraq. In particular there is the law adopted there in March 1990, which permits any man to kill a woman accused

of adultery. This issue created a backlash in the movement in support of the Iraqi people.

**NZ:** In the Association for Woman's Emancipation, there was a debate around slogans. Some women wanted only to call for peace. But for us and for others that was insufficient. It was necessary to address the issue of what kind of peace and to whose profit? we finally reached a consensus in favour of denouncing the imperialist aggression against Iraq.

In Algiers, the Mujahidates (former women fighters in the national liberation struggle) took the initiative in calling a women's march. Other women's groups supported their appeal. This demonstration, on January 24, brought out some 6,000 women. This was an important event, given that a few days before, the fundamentalist women only brought out a few hundred.

The January 24 was the first by women that won the sympathy of the youth. On previous occasions, such as March 8, we had been aware of considerable hostility towards us. However, this time there was a certain complicity.

**■ Has the antiwar mobilization led to the formation of a coordination of women's associations for common actions? What is planned for March 8 this year?**

**NZ:** There is already a national coordination. It is this that made the preparations for January 24. This year on March 8 a national women's meeting is planned for the morning, a march in the afternoon and a meeting no doubt in the evening. This will be a very important day, since the fundamentalists have called for changing the date of international women's day, and they will without doubt try to prevent our demonstrations. We are still discussing the main theme. Very probably it will be the slogan of solidarity between all Arab women against the war.

**■ Have you any information on the situation of women in other countries involved in the war — Saudi Arabia for example?**

**SF:** The only information that we have is the demonstration by Saudi women against the ban on them driving. It seems that it was the arrival of women refugees from Kuwait that provoked this reaction. These two countries are both under the *sharia* — Islamic law — and Saudi women were able for the first time to discover that this law is not everywhere the same. In Kuwait women can drive, but not in Saudi Arabia.

All of those who demonstrated are now threatened with stoning, some of them have lost their jobs, and the husband of one, who supported the women, has also lost his job. These women sent us a letter appealing desperately for our support.

**6** They want messages sent to the Saudi Arabian embassies.

**■ Do you think that the relative sympathy for the women's action against the war signals a change in the way that the women's movement is perceived?**

**SF:** There will be some impact, but I do not think that the perception of the organized movement among Algerian society will be fundamentally changed. In particular the movement's leadership is perceived as being pro-Western.

**■ How have women reacted to the rise of the FIS, and what have the Islamic municipal councillors done?**

**NZ:** After the June 12, 1990, elections, many women were gripped with fear and demoralization. Even among the activists a certain resignation was apparent. But fear also spurred some to act. A short time after, for example, our association organized a gala in Algiers, which drew about 700 women. This is less than would have turned out previously, but everyone there wanted to join up and do something.

**SF:** The middle class women, including the militants, were shattered by the FIS' victory. They talked of "Iranization". The meeting of the coordination of associations at the end of June was a real psychodrama. There was an air of generalized panic. The debate and the discussion reinstilled some calm and a more realistic appreciation of the balance of forces.

It needs to be understood that not all Algerian women have the same appreciation of the fundamentalist danger. Among the intellectuals and the middle class, who fear the threat to their right to work and study, to mix with men, to do sport, the rise of fundamentalism is experienced in a dramatic fashion.

For women in the home however, there is a much less strong perception of the danger. The fundamentalists promise housing for all, and equal sharing of water — in many towns, water distribution is quite uncertain — perhaps once every two weeks.

They also promise wages for women who stay at home. Many women see benefits in such ideas. For the first time there is a party which is showing an interest in their living conditions. Women who do not go out of the home and who are economically dependent on their husbands will respond to an organization that offers to restore their dignity in the framework of Islam. The idea of a wage for housework is a recognition of their existence.

In Algeria, where the labour saving devices and comfort of the West do not exist, domestic tasks are much more of a burden.

Of course, in the municipalities which they control, the FIS have not lived up to their promises. The problems of water, housing, youth unemployment have not even begun to be resolved, and inequalities remain untouched. Many of those who voted for the FIS are now very disappointed. But this disappointment will not necessarily come through in the voting.

**■ The fundamentalists have also to some extent benefited from the way in which the elections were conducted, which favoured electoral fraud.**

**SF:** There certainly was electoral fraud from which the FIS benefited. But it is the law devised by the ruling FLN which allowed the abuses. It gives each elector the right to vote on behalf of three other people. Besides, on the eve of the elections, the Interior Minister stated on the television that there would be no identity checks at the voting booths. Thus there were no effective controls: sometimes dead people voted, or people who no longer lived in that particular place. These frauds were denounced. But I do not believe that the results would have been any different without the fraud.

After the elections, the women's associations decided to launch a joint campaign against the electoral law and against the proxy voting. Before the local elections, it was only women who raised this problem.

After these elections many of the democratic parties expressed their support for us, thus giving our campaign a bigger resonance. The FLN announced that the electoral law would be changed. Women won the right to take part in the commission dealing with revision of the electoral law. However, since then the discussion has been constantly postponed, and the electoral law has in fact remained undiscussed.

The women's associations have drawn up a text which is to be the basis for negotiations with the government. The latter has come out in favour of the suppression of the proxy laws. The idea of allowing only one per person, and only in exceptional conditions, has been accepted. The government has accepted our slogan: "one man, one woman, one vote." Or rather: "One presence, one voting slip, one vote."

But for us there is another point in the law that needs to be debated. Today, a



husband has the right to vote on his wife's behalf simply by presenting his family record book. This is an extremely insidious law; no reference is made to "husband", only to "spouse". But in the Algerian social reality, and when voting in elections, given the single party system, has never counted for much, it is above all men who go to vote. Why should women bother?

We have two objectives. Firstly the revision of the electoral law on the basis of the amendments that we have proposed, on the other a campaign for an effective vote for women, notably during the forthcoming legislative elections (the date of which is yet to be set). It is necessary to explain to women that all the difficulties of their daily life, their health problems, the problems of their children, problems of getting necessities and so on, depend on the policies decided by the National People's Assembly. Thus it is important for them to take part in the elections themselves. We are trying to show the connection between daily lived experience and legislative elections. I believe that our campaign has had an impact and has to an extent shaken the fundamentalists.

**NZ:** We are not calling for a vote for this or that party, but we are calling on women to take responsibility, to feel themselves concerned and to use their own conscience to choose the programmes which best represent their interests. At the same time, as feminists, we fight against the fundamentalist programme, but that is another campaign.

#### ■ Have you noticed any difference in the attitude of younger women towards the elections and the FIS?

**SF:** Young women seem more interested in the elections, but it is also true that they are the ones who are being recruited by the fundamentalists.

There is a serious effort underway to build a fundamentalist women's organization. Another fundamentalist organization, directly linked to the international movement of the Muslim Brotherhood is trying to bring women together on such issues as the right to work, the right to education and the right to go out. But all this is to take place in the framework of the Sharia!

At the same time the Islamic labour union formed in July is calling on women to become unionized and struggle for the recognition of their specificity as women, always in the framework of Islamic law.

**NZ:** Fifteen years ago, any woman who wore a headscarf in the street would have been looked at askance. Today the opposite is true. In Arabic, an unveiled woman is translated as a "naked woman". Even so the vision presented by the Western media is often false. Despite the rise of fundamentalism, there are many women in the street; some are even found leading strikes. ★

## Women's oppression in Zimbabwe

IT is now 11 years since independence came to Zimbabwe following a bitter liberation struggle in which women played no small role. Besides joining the ranks of the guerillas in the latter years of the war, young women and girls also acted as *chimbwidos* (messengers and look-outs). But it was the women in the villages who played the most vital role in sustaining a protracted and very bitter conflict. It was they, the "mothers", who, at great personal risk, grew extra crops, cooked, fed, sheltered, smuggled food and guns and hid ammunition for "the boys" (as the guerillas were called, regardless of sex).

Their story is largely unsung, and today their situation, while it has improved since the dark days of colonialism, still leaves much to be desired.

SOPHIE HAWES

**A**NY analysis of the situation of women in Zimbabwe must begin with a reference back to the terrible legacy of colonialism and the penetration of capitalism. In typical deeply racist and sexist style, successive white settler regimes had treated black women as "perpetual minors". Not only did they not have the vote (along with their menfolk) but their status was further demeaned by "Customary Law" which put a woman under the jurisdiction of a man (her father, husband or son) for the whole of her life.

Thus all important social and economic relationships for women were mediated through men; marriage, divorce, custody of children, access to land, ownership of property, even place of abode. "Customary Law" was a perversion and distortion of prevailing cultural tradition and was specifically designed to facilitate the development of racial capitalism in the country. Settlers demanded cheap male labour to work in the mines and on the farms and later in the emerging manufacturing sector (poll taxes were imposed to force erstwhile subsistence farmers to seek cash earning opportunities). Female labour was not required, except for domestic work in the latter period of colonial rule.

The migrant labour system and super-exploitation of black male labour which was the cornerstone of the booming Rhodesian economy in the 1950s and 1960s specifically excluded the costs of a social wage. Migrant labourers were housed in single sex hostels and compounds and were paid a pittance. There were no facilities for wives or children. Men would be allowed "home" once a

year (farms were a slightly different case where cheap female and child labour was required for peak season casual work like weeding or picking cotton, and where the families of farmworkers would eke out their meagre wages by growing a small plot of maize and vegetables. But living conditions were still appalling).

In all cases, the end result was often the same. A married woman was forced to stay in the countryside with the children, in the village of her husband (where he had traditional land use rights), growing crops (which she was not allowed to sell) and with little access to agricultural advisors (who were all men). She was largely prevented from visiting her husband because of lack of cash for bus fares as



well as the notorious "vagrancy" laws which prevented people without jobs — mainly women — from entering towns, or staying longer than two days.

The other side of the coin for the men was that traditions of male responsibility for families and men's roles in the extended family broke down. This fragmentation also encouraged prostitution, promiscuity (with a sharp increase in sexually transmitted diseases) and dual families (with the rural family often being forgotten and abandoned over time).

At the same time, the countryside itself was changing. The traditional farming, grazing and hunting areas of Zimbabwe, which had been used for centuries by the various peoples of the fertile central plateau, were systematically expropriated by settler farmers especially during the 1930s, 40s and 50s. The country was divided into "commercial farming areas" (where bourgeois laws of property ownership applied — to whites only) and "native reserves" (where "customary law" was meted out by hated white District Commissioners backed up by a stooge police force).

These "reserves" were the preserve of women, children and old people. Traditional shifting systems of agriculture and the seasonal pasturing of large cattle herds were impossible. The result was accelerated land degradation, poor yields and frequent crop failure leading to increasing mass impoverishment.

### Women seek gains from independence

All of this fuelled support for the liberation struggle. And it was women in particular who saw that they had most to gain by breaking the multiple bonds of their oppression. But having succeeded in getting rid of the illegal, racist state of Rhodesia, the situation today is that the government of Robert Mugabe (with the parties of ZANU and ZAPU united) has shown itself politically unwilling to tackle the fundamental causes of poverty and inequality. Not only that, but the patterns of social fragmentation and degradation, patriarchal oppression and gender subordination are still deeply imprinted in the social fabric today.

The coming of independence saw at least some of women's grievances addressed. Besides all the important gains which accrued to both women and men from the new constitution which prohibited discrimination on the basis of color and creed, a series of laws relating specifically to women have been passed. The most important of these was the 1982 "Legal Age of Majority Act". This provided for formal equality between men and women at the age of 18, enabling women to own property, contract a marriage without anybody's consent, become guardians of their own children and sue and be sued as individuals.

This law coupled with the Customary Law and Primary Courts Act, the Matrimonial Causes Act and other legislation like the Labour Relations Act bestowed basic bourgeois democratic rights on women.

In a country like Zimbabwe, such reforms are fundamentally important for women and should not be underestimated. Although judging from the bitter and often vitriolic contestation which continues over each bit of legislation concerning women both before and after entry onto the statute books, most men consider that this is taking the meaning of the liberation struggle too far!

For example, the outcry from the "traditionalist" lobby at the passing of the Legal Age of Majority Act predicted that families would fall apart, women would immediately indulge in an orgy of unbridled promiscuity and children would be abandoned if the act were passed.

Interestingly, the core of the issue (who controls women, their bodies and their sexuality) was revealed in the first major test case to which the law was applied, "Katekwe vs. Muchabaiwa". This concerned a young woman (aged 20) who had a willing sexual relationship with her boyfriend who subsequently left her. Her father (using widely upheld traditional practice) wished to sue the boyfriend for "seduction damages" (meaning that because his daughter was no longer a virgin, she would be worth much less on the marriage market in terms of the payment of *lobola* or bridewealth, which would accrue to him).

Under Customary Law, the father's claim would have no doubt been upheld, and indeed, this was how the law was applied in the lower courts in this case too. Eventually, the boyfriend's appeal against the judgement of the lower courts reached the appeal court and the judgement was handled by the Chief Justice, Judge Dumbutshena who applied the new law. He ruled that the woman's father could not sue for damages, but that the woman could sue for damages in her own right if she chose since she had now reached the legal age of majority. She never took the opportunity.

This simple judgement threw the whole issue of women's oppression into stark relief, revealing, uncomfortably, that women's oppression did not start with the coming of the settlers, but has long roots reaching into the very heart of African "traditional" (patriarchal) culture and values. To its credit, despite the male backlash, the Mugabe government has so far resisted the repeal of this fundamental reform or others which establish minimum civil rights for women.

But despite certain advances, at the level of legal reforms, the problems of socio-economic development in Zimbabwe have remained unresolved. Despite some limited new investment in agriculture, mining and manufacturing, this has tend-

ed to be capital rather than labour intensive. Looked at overall, and taking into account population growth, the economy has not grown in any substantial way since independence, although the government sector has tripled in size and is grinding to a standstill under the burgeoning bureaucracy. The result is that there has not been any substantial increase in formal employment opportunities for the majority of the population since independence, which means women's prospects for formal employment are almost nil (in 1985, women's employment made up only 12% of the total, a decline from 14% in 1981).

The change that has come about is that in the few jobs available for women (most in the public sector) where previously these had been done by white women (in 1981, white women comprised 54% of the female workforce, black women 46%), these roles have now been reversed with black women comprising 83% of the female workforce in 1985.

### Eking out a living from the soil

In the countryside the "mothers" of the liberation struggle still struggle to eke out a living from a small plot of land. There have been some concessions as women can now get access to agricultural advice, small loans and marketing channels in their own right. There has also been a degree of price incentives for key crops like maize and cotton, almost 50% of which are grown by small producers (who, unlike the large scale commercial farmers, are still prepared to engage in the production of these labour intensive crops).

But at the macro level, the government has a poor record of development policy for small producers or cooperatives. Despite the fact that almost two thirds of the whites (200,000) left Zimbabwe in the years following independence, they are still very much in control of the economy. For example, in the agricultural sector, commercial farmers (that is, large-scale capitalist farmers) account for approximately 92% of marketed output. Meanwhile, three quarters of the country's population still resides in rural areas, many of whom are women and children.

It was a woman, Rosa Luxemburg, who argued nearly 100 years ago that social democrats could (under certain circumstances) pass laws which could improve the situation of the working class but could never abolish the operation of the market or the exploitation of wage labour which lies at the core of capitalism.

This is the experience of Zimbabwean women today — limited reforms which have done little to improve their living conditions or fundamentally alter their prospects for regaining the wealth of the society they risked their lives for. ★

# From Patagonia to the Rio Grande

MORE than 2,500 women from 35 countries in Latin and North America, Europe, Africa and Asia, participated at the 5th feminist meeting of Latin America and the Caribbean, in November 1990, at San Bernardo, in Argentina. Alicia Ponce, a member of the Revolutionary Workers' Party (PRT) of Mexico, and Laura Rodriguez, a supporter of A Luchar, a Colombian revolutionary group, spoke to us about the meeting and the struggles in their respective countries.



## WHAT are the mechanisms of coordination and the discussions of the women's movement in Latin America?

**Alicia Ponce:** The first meeting, in 1981 in Colombia, brought together 200 women from five countries; it discussed above all the question of the autonomy of the movement. In the course of other meetings, we discussed patriarchy and power, solidarity with the Nicaraguans, the development of the feminist movement and, finally, in Argentina, we have begun to draw the balance sheet of these ten years of work. Other discussions have taken place, notably on the actions of the state in relation to women, on the institutionalization and the problems of coordination between the groups.

A current began to emerge in these meetings which argued that the women's movement had more a social expression than a feminist consciousness. There are also certain tensions between the women who intervene in the social movement, and meet certain obstacles (lack of specific women's commissions in the trade unions for example) and those who are involved, sometimes in paid fashion, in the women's movement, in the non-governmental organizations, with exterior financing. The social movements began to coordinate themselves, in Mexico in 1990, in a continental front of communal organizations, and women have organized themselves in a specific commission.

Today we must advance in the creation of a feminist pole, with all its diversities, inside this movement; this is the difference that we have with the so-called radical feminists who have often remained outside of the current movement.

■ **What has been the impact of these meetings at the level of the different countries, faced with concrete national realities?**

**Laura Gonzalez:** In the case of Colombia, the bourgeoisie's process of modernization affects women also. The Gaviria government has come up with some proposals which take up some traditional demands of the women's movement, notably on the possibility of maternity holidays for the father.

The wife of the president has begun a process of discussions with feminist groups, excluding from the outset women involved in the social movements or the left. Finally, Gaviria has announced that the new Constituent Assembly will discuss the problem of divorce for Catholic couples (the church having an important influence in the affairs of state of our country, this subject was until now taboo).

The government is taking up long standing demands of the women's movement in order to gain legitimacy in a sector of the population which has won itself some space through its struggles.

Since the 1980s, women have organized and linked themselves to social mobilizations, even if the forms of organization have obviously changed. The dynamic of the women's movement is marked by the general political situation. They fight above all against the violence which strikes the different social sectors (the repression has led to more than 84,000 deaths in 4 years); they fight also for the suppression of obligatory military service (which affects above all the poorest).

There are some problems of coordination between the feminist movement and women organized in the trade unions or in the countryside: we must work harder for the convergence of these struggles (this is already being done; during the campaign for the Constituent Assembly we arrived at an agreement to make common propaganda on the specific demands of women, without however agreeing to support the same candidates).

But the need to maintain joint pressure on the new assembly has been agreed (on the secularization of the state — our constitution begins "in the name of God" — on maternity, domestic work, social functions, and so on).

**Alicia Ponce:** In Mexico, the women's movement campaigns for the recognition of violence against women (notably rape) in the context of reforms of the penal code (before being elected the current president, Salinas, had promised the penalization of rapists).

In the context of the Network against Violence, we have worked around a draft law against rape, with all the parliamentary groups. This has allowed the opening of discussion on possible reform of the Penal Code in several states of Mexico, and the holding of public meetings on violence against women.

In the state of Chiapas, the party in power proposed a law on abortion — far from being perfect — in December 1990; this has led to a discussion in the women's movement and in society (the proposed law envisaged that an unmarried woman would decide by herself but that, in a couple, the decision must be made by the two partners — which is not our position — and abortion is presented as a method of family planning — whereas we think it is the final resort).

It is not by chance that this proposition came from Chiapas, where the indigenous population is in the majority and where forced sterilizations are common; but it nonetheless represents an advance. The Church has obviously responded in a very violent fashion; the adherents of liberation theology have followed its lead, even though their social base is essentially composed of women.

There now exists in the capital and in certain regions a front of more than 50 organizations, which campaigns for voluntary maternity and for the depenalization of abortion. ★

# In the shadow of Japanese imperialism

**MATSUI Yayori is a journalist and co-founder of the Asian Women's Association, which is conducting a program on Women and Development to raise the consciousness of people in Japan on the realities of women in other Asian countries. The following interview was first published in the *AMPO Japan-Asia Quarterly Review*. It has been shortened slightly for space reasons.**

**YOU** have been researching the situation of Asian women for two decades now. What changes have there been over that period?

My first involvement in Asian women's issues was the campaign that we started against *kisaeng* tourism - that is, Korean women who are serving men sexually. We heard news that Korean female students went to Kimpo airport putting up placards saying "Don't make our country a brothel for Japanese men". Naturally, under the dictatorial government, these women students were arrested. I remember it well; then we tried to start something, but we didn't know what to do.

At the time we were campaigning against pollution, and it was much easier because we could attack the polluting company. In the case of *kisaeng* tourism, anyone, your father, your husband, or your friend could be the men who are responsible. How to organize a campaign? That was our problem.

The first thing was to find out about the situation. We were really shocked to find out that as many as half a million Japanese men per year had been visiting South Korea, mainly for sex. After we uncovered this reality, we began a campaign at our end in Haneda airport, handing out leaflets to embarrass or shame these men.

## ■ Was the campaign a success?

To some extent, yes. At least the wives for the first time realized why their husbands were going to South Korea. More women got angry, or became conscious of these sorts of things. Also we campaigned to change the practices of travel

agents, and were successful in damping the open advertisement of pleasure with the "beautiful *kisaeng*" — "you won't even have to use your chopsticks, they'll even put the food right into your mouth". That kind of stupid publicity.

Soon after that I attended the Asian People's Conference which was held in Tokyo in 1974. We were a little bit disappointed. The participants were largely men, and they didn't pay any attention to this kind of sexual abuse of other Asian women.

After the conference, the women participants decided to form a small group, which is now known as the Asian Women's Association. The Association launched a broad campaign across several countries, not only South Korea, because Japanese men began to go to other countries, such as the Philippines or Thailand. So our campaign had to be Asia-wide.

Through this campaign, we realized that we didn't know anything about our sisters in the neighboring countries, we were more aware of women in the Western countries. This resulted in raising our consciousness about our relations with other Asian women.

## ■ Does the Asian Women's Association as a Japanese organization, have relationships with counterpart organizations in other countries?

Yes, but this took time. In Asian countries in the 70s there was no strong women's/feminist movement. It was only in the 1980s that these groups were formed under the influence of the United Nations' Women's Decade from 1975 to 1985. I think that this UN Women's Decade was a very strong opportunity to change consciousness in Asian countries. I was sent to Mexico City to cover the conference of the International Women's Year in 1975. I was very shocked to see the confrontation between the American and the Third World women, particularly the Latin American women.

They really confronted the North Americans, to the point of even trying to take the microphone, saying "Look, you in the First World have such a comfortable life, and you are trying to talk about women's equality. But do you know about what the United States is doing to our sisters? You come to Latin America and take all our resources, and then our women are really poor and oppressed. Don't you think you are responsible for

this?"

American feminist women responded by accusing the Third World women of being too politicized. "You are just tools of the male political system, and you had better talk about your own personal sexual problems. Why are you only talking about political and economic things?" So they spent a lot of time fighting.

Ten years later, I attended the Nairobi conference, where I noticed a big difference. The American or Western European women were more aware of their responsibility for the suffering of the Third World women, and wanted to understand their situation.

And Third World women themselves wanted to be more feminist, not to talk about only politics or economic structures. I think this kind of change is positive. My observation is that for the past 20 years the situation for women in Asia has only gotten worse in many ways, but the consciousness of women has been awakened. More and more women realize their situation, even as the situation is getting worse.

## ■ The idea of international solidarity is an old one, for example in the labor movement, but mostly as solidarity among men. I think that the idea of international solidarity among women as women is historically new.

You talked about the relationship between the US women and Latin American women - what about the relationship between the women of Japan and Third World women in Asia? What kind of communication difficulties do you find?

In our part of the world, the relations are more complicated. The United States and Latin America have very different cultures. In the case of Japan and other Asian countries, it can be said to be one Asian cultural area, but economic development has changed their relations. Another factor is that Japan was responsible for military aggression during World War 2, and Asians will never forget this. Now some women see a kind of second invasion, this time economic.

After the war, Japanese women, even feminist women, did not really think about responsibility for the past military aggression. And most of the feminist-groups in Japan today don't realize their responsibility for the past economic inequality. Frankly, most Japanese feminists are not yet aware of this issue. That is why our Asian Women's Association tries to look at these problems: economic inequality or exploitation is combined with sexual abuse or sexual exploitation.

## ■ You mentioned the Asian People's Conference in 1974 and how it was almost entirely men. I remember the movement in those days in

Japan was almost always like that. The men in the movement looked puzzled and worried, but they basically had no idea what the women's movement was about. I have the feeling that this has changed some. Is that true?

To some extent, but on the whole the consciousness gap between men and women is widening. It is true that more Japanese men are listening to women's voices seriously. But outside the movement most men are still ignorant of feminism. Why is there such a shortage of women to get married, not only in the rural areas but in many cities too? Because the gap in consciousness between men and women is so wide, more women feel that it is stupid to marry men who cannot understand about women's basic rights. In Japan, women are still much more conscious than men.

There is a growing minority of women who are increasingly more conscious of their rights and situation. But the general society is still backward. Look at the housewives; they can hardly question their situation, the reality of their family relationships. Their husbands pay little attention to their family and their children are forced to study to keep up with extremely competitive school life.

■ If that is true about housewives, how do you explain in the last few years the very lively political activism among housewives in the anti-nuclear movement, and how housewives have become a new power base behind the Socialist Party? It seems to me that many non-feminist women have been extremely active in recent years.

Yes, I'm proud to tell you it is these middle aged women who are speaking up against the system. But there are two problems. One is that it is still a tiny minority; often they are isolated. Another thing is that they are not necessarily feminists. They try to be nice wives, they want to go home as soon as possible, to cook before their children and husbands come home. They are not really prepared to change their lifestyles.

It is not only the recent anti-nuclear plant campaign; the first wave of Japanese women's political activism was the anti-pollution campaigns in the early 1970s. It was really the women who took the lead to organize anti-pollution campaigns all over the country, and many were very strong in the local areas. This is what led to many of the so-called *kakushin jichitai* (progressive local governments).

The peace movement, the anti-war movement in the post-war period was also carried out mainly by women. The anti A-bomb movement since the 50s was part of it. During World War 2, more than 3 million Japanese were killed. Hundreds of thousands of women lost their husbands, sons and brothers. It was natural that women, determined to refuse to send their beloved as soldiers, built the base of the anti-war movement.

■ The first wave of the anti-prostitution movement came in the late 40s. How did it continue after the war?

Actually the anti-prostitution movement was much stronger before the war. The *Kyofukai* (Christian Women's Temperance Union) launched a very strong movement, but it is hard to say that it was widely supported. It was rather isolated, and Japanese attitudes towards prostitution hardly changed. On the other hand, the peace movement of the 1950s had a much bigger base, especially the anti-nuclear bomb movement. Then since the late 1960s, the anti-pollution and environmental movement, and in the 70s the consumer movement; then, in the 80s, this new wave of the anti-nuclear power plant movement. This is a brief history of Japanese women's actions which have had some impact on society.

Movements for the rights of women have existed in Japan continually since the end of the war. That history can be divided roughly at 1970. The period until that year was characterized by a women's movement under the influence of leftist



political parties. Working women fought for equality in employment, demanding equal payment, jobs, promotion, and at the same time, maternal protection measures such as longer maternity leave, menstruation leave, and so on. Another force was the mothers' movement which made a variety of campaigns from peace issues to child care demands. This 'old' type of women's rights movement didn't really question patriarchy or sexuality, but concentrated on improvement of physical conditions for women.

## The Japanese Women's movement

According to Akemi Maedai and Sachl Kaneko of the revolutionary Marxist Socialist Women's Association of Japan

"THE Japanese women's movement is not a well organized movement. There are networks at a local level involving above all women who went through the war. The full time coordinators are mainly housewives, but the participants are mostly workers, mainly in the service sector where they are employed as saleswomen or clerks.

Much of the factory work has been transferred to other Asian countries. Only 30% of workers are organized in trade unions, less for women. The main trade unions are based in the public sector. Usually women work part time and are very difficult to organize.

Since the 1980s many women have been sensitive on the issue of arms, especially during the period of ex-Prime Minister Nakasone.

There are three main currents: those who have been involved since the Second World War — quite old now. The second is organized by the Socialist Party, and the third was influenced by

the new left and is very radical. The Japanese Communist Party also has an organized movement. We, the Socialist Women's Association, are very influenced by the new left current.

The CP women's organization is very tightly controlled, but there are many conflicts between the SP women and their party.

The Japanese peace movement has been led by the Women's Democratic Club which was founded in 1947. This

organization was supported in the beginning by the United States. It was led by CP women at first. In 1970s a very radical women's movement emerged, which the JCP opposed. As a consequence the Club decided to break with the CP. Since then the Club has been an autonomous organization and now some of the younger, very radical, women belong to the Club. ★

As we entered the 70s, the new women's liberation movement from the United States was introduced to Japan. Especially young, educated women were inspired and awakened through a new feminist ideology which tried to challenge sexism in all of society. In spite of the prejudice and hostility to the militancy of feminists, small groups were formed all over the country and began to influence the consciousness of women.

■ **Do you see a potential in women's movements for achieving things that men's cannot achieve?**

Definitely. Japan's economy has developed so rapidly because the gender roles for men and women are so traditional; men working so hard as company warriors, with the women always in the background consulting them. But, because women are excluded, they have more possibilities. The men are chained by the system, but women can see the system more clearly from the outside, as victims, and have more room to get angry and take action. Japan is not yet a civic society, but a company society, and women are excluded as full members. They are outsiders.

■ **Paradoxically, they have more freedom.**

Yes, that is why in the anti-pollution movement they can take bolder action. They aren't anxious over promotions or getting fired. I know many cases, like that of the company Showa Denko, which polluted the water with mercury. In the beginning, both men and women employees took action to protest. But later, all the men dropped out and only the young women continued to protest against their company. The women were only clerks or typists, they were not afraid of being *madogiwa-zoku* (those passed by for promotion), but the elite men were afraid to speak up. This is a very typical example that I wrote about many years ago.

■ **But you mentioned that while the movement is developing in these ways, in some ways things are getting worse, and the sex industry is one of the things that was expanding.**

In the 1970s export-orientated industrialization was promoted as the new type of development, and more and more women were brought into the employment of the transnational factories in the export industry. They were pushed out far from the rural areas to the industrial zones.

This transition was partially positive, because these women have a little more freedom than in a rural community under the traditional control of their parents, without any money or economic power. Even though what they earn is extremely little, still it is their own money.

Now as factory workers, they are under the control of a different kind of man, the managers and owners. They often have to face sexual abuse on top of the economic exploitation, so we cannot say the situation has improved overall.

We also have to think about the change in agriculture to agribusiness, which results in more women having to work on plantations growing bananas, or other cash crops.

Also being commodified at an enormous rate are women's bodies themselves. The sex industry has grown in almost all of these countries. The number of prostitutes has grown to four, almost five times what it used to be. Thailand's urban development has been remarkable, while the rural poverty has been the same if not worse. This poverty pushes women into prostitution, and there are in the range of one million prostitutes in Thailand.

The Thai newspapers report so many stories of how the northern hill tribe girls are being sold into prostitution. So I want to point out that it is said that economic development has been promoted rather successfully in Thailand, and they are seen as a newly industrialized nation. But it is only in the urban areas, and the rural areas are abandoned and forgotten, so the income gap between Bangkok and northern Thailand is seven to ten times. The yearly average income in Bangkok is about 70,000 baht, while in the northern three provinces it is about 10,000 baht. Women suffer the most from this uneven development.

■ **Which countries' men are the main customers for the Thai prostitutes?**

It is first of all the local Thai men in terms of numbers, but tourism has worked to expand and promote prostitution. The number of foreign tourists is now five million per year; that is why the shortage of women is so serious. Agents have begun to reserve or "book" girls at the age of four, and they get them into the brothels at ten or eleven years old in the cities or tourist areas. So while of course many local Thai men buy these girls, it is the foreign tourists who have the economic power to really expand the industry.

As for numbers, I couldn't say which country has the dubious distinction of being the biggest customer. But in terms of money, the Japanese male tourists are the big spenders.

■ **Is the opposition to tourism growing?**

Yes, in many countries in Asia. There are Thai women's groups and feminist groups campaigning. "Thai Friends of Women" has

begun working for Thai migrant women going to Japan to work in the sex industry. From this organization a new group "Friends of Thai migrant women in Asia" is going to be formed in 1991. Our group, the Asian Women's Association, has a fund to work together with them, and to make Japanese women aware.

As far as Thai women sent to Europe are concerned, the Thai Women's Foundation is doing support work. "Empower" is another committed group, organizing the bar girls in Patpong, the internationally known sex zone.

In the Philippines, the national women's group Gabriela has a project on prostitution. In South Korea an anti-prostitution bill was proposed in the congress by the female vice-president of the major opposition party. In Chejudo Island, an international tourist resort heavily trafficked by Japanese men, after investigating the *kisaeng* tours, young women formed the group "Women and Democracy" and succeeded in closing a notorious *kisaeng* house.

In Taiwan, the Rainbow Project was started to protect especially young girls from the mountain tribes from the cruel treatment they receive in the city brothels. This is the underside hardly seen in this shining example of a successful economy — an economy that victimizes the weaker sectors.

■ **In what Asian countries is the women's movement strongest?**

First India, because politically they have more freedom than other countries. And their religious traditions of Hindu and Islam, which are very oppressive to women, combined with the severe poverty of the poor rural and ordinary women,



have brought out such a large number of women's groups, so many you cannot count them, with their own network and strong magazines. The variety, creativity, and power of these women's movements are really overwhelming. The next, perhaps, would be the Philippines. The women's movements are closely connected to the national struggle. The large coalition of women's groups, Gabriela, is made up of over 100 groups, women workers, farmers, urban poor, intellectuals.

I would also comment on the strength of the women in South Korea. The long struggle under the dictatorship brought out so many women who risked their lives, so now they continue to fight and are not afraid of going to jail.

Japanese women have much to learn from other Asian women's movements. Still many Japanese look down on their Asian sisters, and maybe they have "pity" for them. From the Asian women's point of view, Japanese women look very oppressed and manipulated. They wonder why Japanese women don't get angry. It is not Japanese women but other Asian women who are much stronger, are much more vocal, and much more courageous.

#### ■ They feel pity for the Japanese women?

Yes. Many women visiting Japan comment that Japanese women seem to them to be just like robots. They don't have their own opinions at all. They are manipulated by the media, the consumer culture, by the very disciplined and controlled education. "How dehumanized" — that is what they say.

#### ■ So in the coming decade of the 1990s, what are the issues and strategies that the Asian women's movement should concentrate on?

One thing is that they should confront the type of development strategy that promotes strong consumerism, with only material things being important. Asia used to have a very rich spiritual culture, but because of this economic development, Asian women are losing their spiritual culture. So we should look at our own positive spiritual tradition.

Also, Asian women should have some kind of organization or network to fight together. Usually, Asian women have been divided because of the colonial bond with their former colonizer, so that Indian women know more about English women and Indonesian women have stronger ties with the Dutch women. They don't know each other. Regional consciousness should be strengthened. And already there are many attempts in that direction, with many meetings, workshops, and conferences being organized that cover subjects such as migration, human rights, women workers. ★

## Blood and oil

**AS THE gigantic inferno of the Gulf War flickers out, the time for drawing the balance sheets has arrived. It will take some time for the most terrible one, the human toll of the most murderous Desert Storm in history to become fully known. However, it is already clear enough that it is numbered in tens of**

**thousands of deaths — perhaps a hundred thousand or more — and in hundreds of thousands of people physically and materially harmed by being left with no shelter or resources. And the number of people of all ages who have suffered psychological damage as a result of the dreadful experience, unprecedented in history, of six weeks of intense and uninterrupted bombing (with more than one air sortie per minute) will certainly run into millions.**

**SALAH JABER — March 1, 1991.**



**T**HE cost of the damage wrought by the war is estimated in hundreds of billions of dollars — a large part of Iraq's economic infrastructure (industry, transport, communications) has been destroyed. To this should be added the hundred billion dollars spent on the coalition's war effort. It is not possible to put a figure on the ecological disaster, but it is sure to be enormous, and is not limited to the one of the worst oil slicks in history and the massive carbonic cloud rising over the Kuwaiti oilfields.

Only in the course of the coming days, months and years, will it be possible to draw the full balance sheet of all these aspects. But there is one area where some conclusions can even now be drawn — subject to correction in the future, since they involve variable elements — that of the political balance sheets of the main protagonists of this spectacular introduction to the century's final decade.

Let us begin with the most powerful: the United States. Whatever the imponderable long term consequences, the US victory in a war that it to a large extent desired goes far beyond the strictly mili-

tary success — which was no surprise, almost without risks and certainly without any really merited military glory.

Schwarzkopf is no more Montgomery than Saddam is Rommel. The coalition's military undertaking was, essentially, 95% a matter of air power and ballistics. In this area, the coalition's superiority was so overwhelming that it enjoyed near exclusive use of these means from the start of the battle. Apart from a handful of Scud missiles, which compared technologically to the American Patriots and Tomahawks are worth about as much as the German V2s of the Second World War, Iraq suffered, without any means of responding, a deluge of iron and fire which would have put an end to any land army submitted to the same treatment in the same conditions.

#### Playing video war games — with real victims

Thus, the coalition's land offensive, after more than five weeks of intensive bombing, was hardly more "heroic" than the mission of the pilots, who frankly explained that they felt as if they were

playing video war games. The assault that began on February 24 was not, furthermore, a purely ground offensive, but a combined air-land operation. Alongside continued bombardment from planes and missiles went the Coppola-style charge of the "tank-killer" Apache helicopters. There was nothing original in all this. It was a 90s remake of the Nazi Wehrmacht's *Blitzkrieg*, with the immense advantage of complete control of the skies — an absolutely decisive factor in a desert war.

Even if Baghdad had, despite everything, been informed (by the Soviet military for example) of the movement of enemy troops preparing the "big surprise" promised by their commanders — that is, the deeper than originally intended breakthrough to the north and west of Kuwait — it would not have been possible for the Iraqi forces to take the necessary counter-measures.

This was not only because their command networks had been extremely disorganized, but also, and above all, because they could not make any move without air cover. Thus these forces had to passively and painfully submit to the hell that was unleashed on them for 40 days.

### **Coalition employs atrocious weapons**

And hellish it was! After two weeks of bombing with indecisive results — shown by the Iraqi capture of Khafji on Saudi territory on January 30 — the US went onto a higher stage of violence, an "escalation" in the Vietnam tradition. As we predicted<sup>1</sup>, the American bombing became less and less "surgical" and more and more devastating, with stepped up use of B-52s. The troops massed in Kuwait and southern Iraq were systematically carpet bombed with weapons deceitfully categorized as "conventional". Among the more horrible of these, the fragmentation bombs, the massive 15,000 pound "daisy-cutters", napalm and fuel-air explosive CBUs (cluster bomb units).

These killing machines, particularly the cluster bombs, already used in Vietnam, are more terrible than chemical weapons. Protective suits can guard against the latter, but not against the shock and fire waves of explosions which are as strong as those of a small atomic bomb, but without the radioactivity. As in Vietnam there was a hypocritical pretext for their use: then it was to clear the jungle, this time to de-mine the ground and set fire to trenches filled with oil.

After three weeks of such treatment, what army would have been in a state to fight, and fight blindly, moreover, coming after two weeks hardly more bearable? Certainly Saddam Hussein has more reason to accuse the allies — who postponed the land battle in order to profit to the maximum from their absolute superiority in long-distance attacks — of being cow-

ards, than Bush has to be "proud" of his soldiers.

But it would take a good dose of stupidity to believe that, out of chivalric bravura, the coalition was going to abstain from exploiting a decisive advantage to the full. Quite the opposite. The coalition wanted even to avoid the land battle, hoping at the start that the bombing would suffice to put an end to the Iraqi regime and its army.

As a result, the war that has just ended has been the most technological, the most capital intensive, in history. Never before has the determination of the troops played such a limited and marginal role as in the coalition's aggression against Iraq. And this was a big change for Baghdad, from the poorly equipped Iranian "human waves" of the eight-year war. It was quite illusory to draw conclusions from that war that would be valid for this. Both imperialist propaganda, with its talk of the "fourth army in the world", and its deliberate exaggeration of the danger that this presented for the "world order", and Iraqi Ba'athist propaganda, exalting the invincibility of troops hardened in battle against a numerically superior enemy, fostered this illusion.

For anyone not taken in by this double deception, the military victory of the coalition was never in doubt. It was an inevitable result of the unequal strength of the United States and Iraq. We have constantly emphasized this, ruling out, from the start of the bombing, the idea that the Iraqi troops would put up determined resistance even where they could — that is, in the urban areas<sup>2</sup>.

There was no room for illusion on this subject, knowing the nature of the Iraqi regime and its real relations with the population. But, even if the debacle of the Iraqi army was no surprise, the American triumph is nonetheless of enormous significance: Bush has been able to keep his promise that this would not be "another Vietnam". The *New York Times* has even felt able to affirm, rightly, that Vietnam — or the Vietnam syndrome — had been "buried in the Iraqi desert."<sup>3</sup> And so it has — militarily and psychologically.

### **The crowning moment of Reaganism**

The collective therapy represented by this war for the imperialist ideological consensus in the US, both for the morale of the army and the psycho-political conditioning of the population, requires no commentary. From this point of view as well, the war represents the crowning moment of Reaganism. Washington should light a candle to the despot of Baghdad — the ideal enemy — for providing the perfect opportunity by invading Kuwait for a demonstration of its strength — with the bonus of an un hoped for degree of national and world consensus.

Indeed, in keeping quiet, in the interests of mystifying Iraqi and Arab opinion, about the real number of victims, Saddam Hussein shored up the imperialist myth of the "surgical" and "clean" war, depriving the anti-war movement in the coalition countries of a fundamental moral argument.

On the military level, the crushing of Iraq has decisively confirmed the Pentagon's new doctrine, which was worked out precisely in response to the Vietnam trauma<sup>4</sup>. This is the doctrine of a massive strike, based on absolutely overwhelming superiority, in contrast with the gradual and prolonged escalation that the US undertook in Indochina between 1964 and 1973. That was the main lesson that Washington could draw from its defeat in Vietnam. The human and political factor is a weak spot for the imperialist forces, and time works against it. Thus technology — in which, by definition, imperialism always has the advantage — should be used to the maximum in the shortest possible period of time.

### **Hitech weapons shown to work**

By passing the test in Iraq, this doctrine also vindicates the Reaganite choices with regard to developing super-sophisticated weapons, choices that were strongly questioned in their time owing to their prohibitive cost compared to their expected use. Ken Adelman, who was director of arms control in the Reagan administration, can now crow: "Without President Reagan's victories in Congress during the defence battles of the 1980s, we would not be enjoying such Gulf victories in 1991."<sup>5</sup>

He attributes these successes to what he calls the "four Ss: stealth, sea-launched cruise missiles, SDI-like defenses and space systems". The trying out of these arms on real targets in the Gulf will provide the Pentagon with a powerful argument in the budgetary battles to come. The prestige won by the \$100m F-117A "stealth" fighter, which cannot be detected by radar, will be used for example to justify the production of the \$850m-\$1bn "stealth" B-2 bomber.

It is, however, true, that the main objections to the Reaganite choices were economic rather than military. In this respect the very way in which the war in Iraq was conducted — without regard for cost, because of the importance of the issues — also speaks in favour of adopting the most expensive options. The leap forward in

1. *International Viewpoint*, no. 200, February 18, 1991.

2. *IV*, no. 199, February 4, 1991. The Israeli military expert, Ze'ev Schiff, recently made the same assessment of the Iraqi army's ability to resist the allied offensive by regrouping in Kuwait City (*International Herald Tribune*, February 20, 1991).

3. *IHT*, February 26, 1991.

4. *IV* no. 197, December 24, 1991.

5. *Newsweek*, February 18, 1991.

the American administration's military budget will be justified at the expense of social spending, with, in the last analysis, an economic rationality. The Gulf War, has, in fact, firmly established the United States as the undisputed leader in the production of military goods and services, followed a long way behind by France and Britain.

Since a large part of the American armed services and the means they consume is financed by governments other than that of the US — such as the Arab oil monarchies, Japan and Germany — this part moves from domestic consumption, aggravating the chronic domestic budget deficit, to exports, improving the balance of payments.

More generally US military-political supremacy is being thrown into the balance to compensate for its relative economic decline. Since the start of the crisis we have described this stake<sup>6</sup>, underlining the fact that it was oil money more than oil which Washington sought to control. This is assured through its hegemony over four states — Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar — of a very peculiar kind, states whose specific

function is to "recycle" petrodollars in the imperialist economies or in ways from which they profit.

The present world economic situation confirms the considerable importance of this latter aspect. After years of surplus liquidity (according to the logic of capitalism) there has been since 1990 a period of contraction in disposable capital in the world.

The annexation of East Germany by the Federal Republic has absorbed and will absorb German financial resources for several years to come. Japan's financial and stock market problems, added to the uncertain international economic outlook caused by the recession in the US, is now leading to a sharp fall in Japanese capital exports, notably long-term. This is taking place at a time when the capital requirements of Eastern Europe are estimated at \$300bn in the coming five years, and the US requirement for external financing at \$100bn for 1991 alone.<sup>7</sup>

### Critical importance of petrodollars

In this global context, the Arab oil monarchies, those suppliers of tens of billions of dollars of "excess" capital, acquire critical importance for imperialism and above all for the imperialist power most greedy for capital — the United States. By imposing itself as the main and irreplaceable "shield" of these regimes, American imperialism is guaranteed the lion's share in the various forms of recycling of petrodollars, to the detriment of all its competitors, including its coalition allies. The capitalist

rationality of Kuwaiti investment decisions abroad, and the inclination of the Saudi and UAE rulers to act similarly according to economic criteria, will be replaced in a lasting way by the political-military priority given to the United States, to whom the oil monarchs will do obeisance in the manner of feudal vassals to their suzerain.

However, the subjective will, if not the objective capacity of the oil monarchies untouched by the destruction, to import civilian material and equipment has shrunk severely. Less than ever, after the Kuwaiti experience, will they be inclined to increase the mass of workers in their territories.

The million Yemeni workers expelled from Saudi Arabia during the crisis, on the pretext of punishing the government of their country of origin for refusing to join the anti-Iraqi coalition, along with the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians expelled in one form or another from the Gulf monarchies owing to their solidarity with the Iraqi people<sup>8</sup>, or those from all over the world who have fled from Kuwait, will only be replaced in part, mainly by Egyptian workers, in payment to Mubarak's regime for its role in the coalition.

With the exception of Kuwait, the main forms of petrodollar recycling by the three other monarchies will be, on the one hand, deposits of all kinds — notably the purchase of American treasury bonds, to finance the US budget deficit, which is continuing to grow<sup>9</sup> — and on the other the tens of billions of dollars to be spent on sophisticated weaponry, which, of course, will be more than ever supplied by the United States.

In this field, indeed, the Pentagon's murderous toys have proved their worth, and will not be bought solely out of obligation. It is also a safe bet that the last

Israeli inspired resistance in the US congress to the sale of the most modern weaponry to the Arab oil monarchies will fall away after "Desert Storm", all the more so as Washington's control over the armies of these states is more firmly established. For Kuwait, recycling is bound up with reconstruction. There is a big market here — estimates vary between \$40bn and \$100bn for the three to five years ahead. The market for

6. *IV* no. 190, September 17, 1990.

7. *IHT*, February 28, 1991.

8. Let us note in passing that the imperialist media, present in force in Saudi Arabia since August 2, 1990, and full of concern for workers fleeing Kuwait and Iraq after the invasion, have said almost nothing about the plight of the million Yemenis and hundreds of thousands of Palestinians expelled from the fundamentalist kingdom. They have also managed to overlook the ban on leaving imposed on many others who wanted to go home to await the end of the crisis.

9. *IV* 197.

10. *Newsweek*, February 25, 1991.



the reconstruction of Iraq is even bigger. (However the latter is too risky for the moment to be taken into account.)

In the present world economic climate this is really a godsend, in particular for an economy in the middle of a recession, as is the US. Before August 2, 1990, the US provided only 12% of Kuwaiti imports, behind the European Community and Japan. Now the Americans are grabbing the majority of the orders — of 181 post-war contracts already signed by the Kuwaitis, 130, or 72% have gone to US companies. These are worth some \$270m out of a total of \$356m — that is 76%.<sup>10</sup> On the stock markets of the US, as well as in other countries expecting to get a slice of the cake, the shares of construction, engineering, and oil and infrastructural equipment companies have been rising sharply.

The economic circuit set up by this war for the US is mind-boggling. American arms such as the Tomahawk cruise missiles at \$1.3m apiece rendered surplus to requirement by disarmament on the European front, have been destroyed in Iraq and Kuwait.

Now they can be entered into accounts under the heading "war effort" and to a large extent paid for by the US's rich protégés. They have, meanwhile, wrought massive destruction, which, in the case of Kuwait at least, gives rise to big orders benefiting American companies, notably in the oil sector, often tied to the industries that supply the arms.

### **The military-industrial-oil complex in charge**

The genealogy of the firms involved, as well as the CVs of the leading actors — such as Bush himself, whose ties with the oil sector are well-known — are quite revealing. We find, for example, that the FMC Corp. of Chicago which builds the M-2 Bradley armoured troop carriers is going to supply oil installations; that Raytheon, which makes the Patriot anti-missile missile is going to contribute to the reconstruction of Kuwait City airport; that the godfather of the Tomahawk programme in the 1970s, W. P. Clements, joint Defence Secretary under Nixon, is an oil tycoon, and was twice governor of Texas subsequently; or that among previous top directors of Bechtel, the firm which is placed to pick up a large part of the reconstruction work, are to be found George Schulz and Caspar Weinberger, and so on. It really is the military-industrial-oil complex that is pulling the golden chestnuts out of the fire of the Gulf War.

All the above listed factors have to be taken into consideration, and not only military spending, if we want to assess the effects of the war against Iraq on the American recession. The guarantee of a politically motivated capital inflow, relatively insensitive to the level of interest

rates, can make it possible to keep these rates at a level low enough to be compatible with a relaunch of economic activity. Kuwaiti orders, along with arms orders can also give a decisive pull to key sectors of the economy. There are however too many imponderables in the present highly unstable economic situation to allow confident predictions. But what must be underlined here is that, far from being a "sacrifice" for Washington in the minds of the decision makers, the Gulf War has been a juicy enterprise, if not for the American economy as a whole, then at least for those sectors to which they are most closely tied. They, furthermore, put their money on a short war and won their bet.

From the global strategic point of view, the US have come out as the big winners from this massacre. In the immediate term, Bush has gained all his objectives. American military supremacy has been effectively invested to renew and reinforce their global political leadership and to improve the terms of the economic competition with their imperialist partners. Europe has appeared disunited and unable to collectively and independently affect the course of the conflict, although its interests were even more directly involved than those of the US. The famous European defence seems a distant dream today. The French social democrats have proved faithful to their Atlanticist tradition, and have partially liquidated the Gaullist heritage.

The attempt by the Soviet Union, meanwhile, to climb back in through the window after leaving by the tradesman's entrance, failed. Under Shevardnadze's reign as Soviet foreign affairs minister, Moscow sold off its influence in the Middle East, in the building up of which it had invested so much. The Gorbachev leadership approved the use of force against Iraq in exchange for dollars from the oil monarchies.<sup>11</sup>

Pressure from the Soviet army, disturbed at the strategic implications of the Gulf war and the disastrous effects of the abandonment by the Kremlin of its former Iraqi ally, pushed Gorbachev to try to regain centre stage. The last minute Soviet peace proposals were aimed at saving Saddam Hussein's regime, and notably the elite Republican Guard, the main defence of the dictatorship, from collapse.

### **Moscow seeks to save Saddam Hussein**

If the attempt had been successful the result would have been the maintenance in power of a Saddam, who, although much weakened militarily, would still have disposed of not inconsiderable resources. The Iraqi despot would also have kept intact his prestige in the eyes of the Arab and Muslim masses, including in the Asian republics of the Soviet Union

itself. Finally, Iraq would have had no choice but to depend more than ever on Moscow to rearm, as well as rebuild, given the complete degradation of the country's relations with imperialism.

Thus, the maintenance of the Ba'athist regime is firmly in the interests of the Kremlin, which, with the Palestine Liberation Organization now in the same basket as Saddam Hussein, while preserving its authority among the Palestinian masses, would have continued to dispose of very important political instruments in the Middle East.

Thus it is understandable why Washington systematically worked to block Gorbachev's manoeuvres. In the final days of the conflict the issue was no longer war or peace, but the aftermath of the war.

The US had to attain its main objective of the final weeks of the war whatever the cost. Not so much the overthrow of Saddam Hussein — an accessory objective, not worth big risks by Bush<sup>12</sup> — but the dismantling of the Republican Guard massed in southern Iraq. The problem for the American administration is that, unlike in Grenada and Panama, it does not have a satisfactory replacement for the Iraqi dictator. The Iraqi opposition is a conglomerate of tendencies, going from pro-Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalists to pro-Soviet Communists, to which should be added the Kurds, themselves divided into several tendencies.

### **Washington fears destabilization**

All told, Washington would prefer even Saddam Hussein to such successors. The United States administration wants to avoid persisting chaos in Iraq that would threaten the stability of the whole region. Such catastrophe scenarios have been ruled out from the start: "A vitiated, leaderless Iraq might be even more dangerous for US interests. The defeated nation could fall victim to the same internal feuding and external pressures that have torn apart Lebanon for 15 years."<sup>13</sup> wrote *Newsweek* magazine in October 1990, referring to the Shi'ite and Kurd problems and Turkish, Syrian and Iranian ambitions.

The magazine continued, referring to US secretary of state James Baker: "US policymakers are prepared to live with an armed, still hostile Saddam for the foreseeable future, but he would be held in check with a continuing embargo of military hardware and a "tripwire" of Arab or UN forces along Iraq's borders with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia."

This option was presented as an alternative to war. In fact, it is coming to pass now, via a war whose objective was to destroy the offensive military potential of the Iraqi army and to reduce its size by two thirds. In this way the threat this army presented to imperialist order in the region would be removed, at the same time leav-

ing the Iraqi state the means to defend itself against internal and external dangers, which, in destabilizing Iraq, would destabilize the entire region.

Washington wants to see Saddam Hussein overthrown from within his own entourage, so that the regime can be both preserved and redirected. However a revolutionary overthrow of the tyrant would be a worse outcome for the United States and its Arab protégés than his remaining in power.

The American administration has lost no opportunity to restate its commitment to the "integrity of Iraq". This clearly means that it opposes the right of self-determination of the Kurdish people, although it has just employed half a million troops to defend the "rights of the Kuwaiti people." What this latter principle means in practice can be gauged from the first act of the restored Emirate: martial law, installing wholly arbitrary rule, has been decreed, to the great annoyance of the Kuwaiti liberal bourgeois opposition.

The ruling family has fixed as its first task the hunting down of undesirables — Palestinians and others — and the disarmament of the population that stayed behind in Kuwait. This is the least privileged part of the Kuwaiti population, without the means to go into gilded exile as many Kuwaitis were able to do, who have picked up the arms left behind by the fleeing Iraqis. The heir to the throne calls this "the cleanup". The stupidity of believing that the imperialist war would lead to the introduction of "democracy" in the region is already clear.

### Threat of expulsions

The Iraqi defeat is a bitter pill for the Arab mass movement to swallow, and above all for the Palestinians threatened with new expulsions from their territories.

This is a time of great danger for all the anti-imperialist struggles directly confronting a United States now more arrogant than ever. Cuba is particularly threatened. We should not be discouraged. On the contrary, it is necessary to redouble our efforts to prepare for the next round; at present we must oppose any further embargo against exhausted Iraq and demand the immediate withdrawal of the imperialist troops from the Gulf region.

Imperialism has won a battle against an adversary of its own choosing. It has not won the war, and cannot, indeed, win it, since it endlessly produces its own gravediggers. Even the military victory over Iraq has much enlarged and radicalized the anti-imperialist front of the Arab masses. This will rebound against imperialism in the medium or long term. ★

11. *IV* no. 199, February 4, 1991.  
12. *IV* 200.  
13. *Newsweek*, October 29, 1990.

## The lesser evil

**THERE are few precise facts about what is now happening in Iraq. Contradictory reports are still coming, mainly from four sources: the Iraqi opposition and its backers in Teheran and Damascus, the Iraqi regime, US sources, and the refugees fleeing the "unrest" in southern Iraq.**

SALAH JABER - March 8, 1991

**O**NE thing however is already obvious: the tone of the imperialist governments in dealing with Saddam Hussein's dictatorship has moderated considerably. Yesterday's incarnation of evil has become again a lesser one, in comparison to the forces challenging his rule.

The form of the present strife in the country is the natural consequence of the type of defeat inflicted upon the Baathist regime. The coalition deliberately chose to smash Iraqi power within certain limits, leaving the regime with the means to survive against its internal foes.

They were concerned not to jeopardize the stability of Iraq, a key to the stability of the imperialist order in the whole area, and this meant that the coalition chose to dismantle the Iraqi troops that occupied Kuwait, including their spearhead — that part of the Republican Guard massed in southern Iraq at the border with the Emirate.

Other parts of the Iraqi army came off relatively lightly. This was the case of the troops in Kurdistan, on the Kurdish and Turkish borders, the function of which is undoubtedly even more oppressive than was that of the troops occupying Kuwait. Had the former been pounded as the latter were, the Kurdish people would have been in a position to liberate their lands in Iraq.

But liberating any people from oppression was not the goal that the coalition forces had set themselves. They were only interested in freeing the assets of the Emir of Kuwait. Who could really believe that the coalition would seek a better fate for the Arab and Kurdish masses of Iraq than that suffered by the populations of Saudi Arabia and Syria, two of its key Arab components?

Southern Iraq has been the exception. Not because the population there is overwhelmingly Shiite, as is stated by journalists seeking simple explanations, but



first of all, because it is the area where, due to the political-military choices of the coalition, the repressive apparatus of the Baathist regime has been most weakened. The southern Iraqis did what any other segment of the population of their country, including the people of Baghdad, would do, had they faced the same provisional power vacuum.

It is not a matter of religious sectarianism, but the deep resentment of a whole population against the tyrant who has submitted them to one of the harshest totalitarian rules of this second half of the century and who has led them into two horrible wars.

Teheran, to be sure, is interfering in the turmoil going on in southern Iraq. It is probably helping its own Iraqi supporters from among those who took refuge in Iran from Saddam's butcheries, to get back and take part in the uprising.

But the uprising is nevertheless spontaneous, as acknowledged by various sources, if only because no organized structures have survived in Iraq after years of bloody dictatorship. Baghdad has had to shift troops from Kurdistan to the capital and the south to quell the rebellion, thus opening the way for the Kurdish population, in the north, to take control of some of its cities. Here once again, there are many indications that the uprising is largely spontaneous.

The Iraqi opposition, based in Damascus and Tehran, is made up of Islamic fundamentalist factions, mainly Shiite and Iranian, various kinds of bourgeois nationalists including pro-Syrian Baathists, the pro-Moscow Communist Party and the Kurdish movement, involving semi-feudal backward forces and petty-bourgeois nationalists linked to Syria or Iran.

Last December all these forces formed a front in a bid to replace Saddam's regime in power.

They sent a common delegation to Saudi Arabia, which welcomed them in an attempt to keep an eye on any possible alternatives to the Iraqi Baathist regime.

But Saudi Arabia has also been nurturing its own candidates to succeed Saddam, of a type more congenial for both them and their US protectors; that is, candidates who can come to power through the existing repressive structure, and not through a revolutionary overthrow of the regime. But the Saudis and their US masters still have no credible alternative to Saddam that would really suit them. And as long as this is true, Saddam will remain in their eyes a lesser evil. ★

# Down with the aggression against Iraq! Imperialist troops out of the Gulf!

**I**N THE name of justice, a new massacre is being carried out. In the name of liberty, they are murdering once again. In the name of democracy, a whole country is being smashed by bombs. After so many others, it is now the turn of Iraq. Who will be next?

The goal of the assault which is now being carried out by the army of the United States, its imperialist allies, including social-democratic governments, and its Arab and other supporters (fundamentalist monarchies or dictatorships) in the Persian Gulf goes far beyond the so-called "liberation of Kuwait" and the alleged defence of "international law". The actions of this coalition of oppressors of peoples, as always, are quite opposite to the "values" they claim to be upholding.

In reality, for the imperialist powers, it is a question of decisively establishing a "new world order", where every attack on their vital interests will be punished by the same treatment as is being received by Iraq today. This "new order" is more than ever subject to the political-military hegemony of the United States, whose terrorising arrogance now knows no bounds. The policy of collusion with imperialism followed by the Soviet leadership, far from opening up a new era of peace, has greatly encouraged the governments of London, Washington and Paris to carry out their most criminal plans.

The aggression against Iraq is the biggest air attack in history. It is the first major electronic war, with Iraq being used as a vast testing ground for the latest murderous gadgets from the imperialist military array. The immediate aim of this attack is no longer in doubt: it is the total destruction of Iraq's military-industrial potential. American imperialism wants to remove from the scene a regional power liable to challenge its oil interests and capable of counterbalancing the power of the Zionist state, the USA's main ally in the region. In order to achieve this, the Pentagon is prepared to consider anything, including the use of nuclear weapons.

Nothing can justify this barbaric attack on the people of Iraq. Neither the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait nor the nature of the Baghdad regime can justify the US and its allies setting themselves up as police and arbiters of the world. We know all too well to what degree these "dispensers of

**THIS international appeal was drafted before the cessation of the war against Iraq and adopted by the XIIIth World Congress of the Fourth International (see IV201 and p. 25 of this issue), with the intention of proposing it for signing to a wide range of revolutionary organizations of various backgrounds united in their common principled stand against imperialism. We publish it again below with a first list of signatories.**

justice" respect the rights of peoples. Only yesterday, they supported the Iraqi dictatorship in its war against Iran and closed their eyes to the massacre of the Kurdish people. It is these "liberators" who have equipped and financed the Israeli army of occupation in Palestine, and who are even now multiplying this support, as the Zionist government is openly planning to expel a large proportion of the Palestinian people once more from their own land.

Faced with this offensive, whose real motives are eminently reactionary, anti-imperialist movements cannot be neutral. They are on the side of the people of Iraq, subjected to bombing by the coalition forces. They are for an immediate and unilateral end to the aggression, for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of imperialist forces from the Gulf region, for the right of the Arab peoples to freely decide their own fate without interference from the big powers. In particular, they must defend the Kurdish and Palestinian peoples' rights to self-determination against all their oppressors.

To be anti-imperialist today means being unconditionally for the defeat of imperialism, alongside the peoples of the Arab region and the Middle East, who have massively expressed their solidarity with the people of Iraq. It means being against the governments of the coalition and against those who take refuge in a embarrassed neutrality and join the blockade of Iraq, rather than supporting its people who are under threat of death.

We will step up our effort to strengthen the world movement against the aggression, creating the broadest possible unity so as to impose a halt to the bombing and the withdrawal of the imperialist troops. We refuse to pay the costs of this criminal war, undertaken in the interests of the

oil and financial magnates.

We denounce those who do not hesitate to waste billions in order to crush Iraq, while they refuse to cancel the debt which weighs down the Third World and reduce the provision of basic social needs everywhere. Together with the workers of the world, we shall unite to block the imperialist war machine. We will support the youth, the soldiers, the reservists who, in the countries of the aggressive coalition, refuse to take part in this massacre.

Against the oppressors' "new world order", we stand for a new world solidarity of all struggles against oppression! ★

## SIGNATURES

- Algeria : PST - Socialist Workers Party**
- Australia : Democratic Socialist Party**
- Belgium : POS/SOP - Socialist Workers Party**
- Britain : Socialist Workers Party**
- Euzkadi : LKI - Revolutionary Communist League**
- France : LCR - Revolutionary Communist League**
- Germany : VSP - United Socialist Party**
- Greece : EAS - Alternative Anti-capitalist Regroupment OSE - Socialist Revolution Group**
- Israeli State : Revolutionary Communist League**
- Italy : Bandiera Rossa**
- Jordan : Communist Party of Jordan — Revolutionary Line**
- Lebanon : Revolutionary Communist Group**
- Mexico : PRT - Revolutionary Workers Party**
- Poland : NLR — Revolutionary Left Current**
- Poland : Jozef Piniar, coordinator of the Socialist Political Centre**
- Portugal : PSR - Revolutionary Socialist Party**
- Senegal : OST — Socialist Workers Organization**
- Spanish State : LCR - Revolutionary Communist League**
- Sri Lanka : NSSP - New Socialist Party**
- Syria : Communist Action Party**
- Sweden : SF - Swedish Peace Committee Socialist Party**
- Tunisia : Organization of Revolutionary Communists**
- Turkey : Revolutionary Communist League**
- SI - Socialist Struggle**
- Uruguay : PST - Socialist Workers Party**
- USA : Fourth Internationalist Tendency Socialist Action Solidarity**
- USSR : Alexander Buzgalin, member of Central Committee of CPSU, member of club "Marxism-XXIst Century"**

# Darkness at noon

**THE WAR IS OVER, but its wounds will not be healed soon. We are not referring here only to the other wars that will follow throughout the Arab and Muslim world. We are thinking of the nightmarish ecological effects on an area the size of Europe, which threaten to spread to a large part of Asia.**

**GEORGE MITRALIAS**

**W**HEN, a few months ago, physicists, ecologists, meteorologists and other scientists published a warning from London about the likely consequences of the setting on fire of the Kuwaiti oilwells, they were treated in many "respectable" quarters as hysterics, if not apologists for Saddam Hussein. The allied defenders of International Law meanwhile decided to ignore the issue.

In fact, the "hysterical" predictions have been fulfilled, indeed over-fulfilled. Black rain, full of oil and a thick black cloud at least 2,000 kilometers wide are spreading from the Eastern Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean. This is already a day-to-day reality for millions in Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, the Gulf Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Iran.

According to official estimates from Washington and Riyadh, about 800 oil wells are now burning in Kuwait, and many more in Iraq. According to most Western sources, the Iraqis are responsible for most of these fires. According to Teheran, on the other hand, the great majority of them are due to coalition bombing.

In any case, whoever bears the larger share of the responsibility, the indisputable fact is that this fire is now raging and that nobody foresees it being put out in less than a year and a half.

We are only at the beginning of its effects. Even so, there is enough information to give good grounds for great anxiety. The thick cloud took only a few days to cover the Khuzestan region in southern Iran and to turn day into night in the towns of Ahwaz and Khorramshahr. Two weeks saw it spread over three provinces in south-eastern Turkey and reach Adana. According to the British Meteorological Service, a single day of strong wind would be enough for the cloud to touch India.

But what does the cloud represent? At first it seems to produce an effect like an eclipse of the sun. This could be seen from watching one of the famous "live" CNN reports from Kuwait, where what look at first like night scenes turn out to have been shot at midday.

Thus day turns into night. The immediate consequence of this is a sudden drop in temperature. According to Associated Press reports dated February 27, the temperature in Kuwait city had dropped from its usual 24/25°C to 6/7 °C. Such an unprecedented climatic disturbance, if it lasts a few weeks, will obviously cause all kinds of chain reactions.

## Black rain destroys crops

But this is only the start of the nightmare. The black rain that accompanies the cloud seems to destroy everything on which it falls. The first scientific evaluations from Turkey, done on the urgent orders of the local authorities, find that one day of heavy rain of this kind would be enough to destroy agricultural lands, grasslands and reserves of drinking water in urban areas, while lakes and rivers would be polluted beyond repair. On top of this, black rain directly and indirectly threatens the health of the populations, since it contains large quantities of cancer-inducing essences.

Exaggeration? Readers should bear in mind that at least three million barrels of

oil a day — twice as much as normal production — are being turned into smoke by the fires in the Kuwaiti oilfields. But it will take some time before the full damage becomes apparent. According to well-known scientist and popularizer Carl Sagan of Cornell University, there is an immediate danger of a disturbance to the monsoons — the rains that give South-eastern Asia its normal climate, and which sustain the agriculture off which hundreds of millions live.

Some — though by no means all — scientists claim that there could be serious effects on the climate of the whole planet, for example, by advancing the process of "global warming" by as much as 30 years. Whatever the validity of such predictions, we can say with confidence that we are witnessing an unprecedented event, involving ecological destruction on a scale greater than ever seen in the past. This is the view of organizations such as Greenpeace, Worldwatch, the WWF and the United Nations Environment Program.

According to a joint statement by 11 UN organizations, if the oilwell fires continue for more than one week there is a threat to "human health and the environment in a large part of the Northern Hemisphere....Not only in the Persian Gulf but also in areas thousands of kilometers away."

Thus, as Bush, Major, Mitterrand et al rejoice over their military victories and enthuse about the "new world order" in store for us, we prefer to agree with Greenpeace when it declares that "there are no winners, only the defeated." Among the defeated are us, our children and our grandchildren who will pay for decades to come the price of Operation Desert Storm.

Too many such triumphs and there will be nobody left to celebrate. ★





(Begrüßungsgeld = money paid to immigrants from East Germany before unification)

## Rising unemployment and workers' protests

**CONTRARY** to general predictions it was not the Social Democrats, but the conservative-liberal (CDU-FDP) alliance which won the last parliamentary elections in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). Most of the CDU-FDP votes were from workers. The conservatives made clear that West German capital was behind them, and insisted that if East Germans wanted to enjoy West German living standards they must vote for them. Many believed that in the short-or-medium term, after a period of hard work, such promises would be fulfilled.

**RAUL SCHMIDT AND BJÖRN KRÜGER**

**B**UT meanwhile people are faced with mass unemployment, social security is more and more endangered, and there is no light at the end of the tunnel.<sup>1</sup> After one year of accepting the West German bourgeoisie's austerity attacks, people are beginning to raise their heads once again. Their anger is intensified by the fact that the government has spent 17 billion Deutschmarks to restore the Kuwaiti monarchy, but at the same time denies money promised for support and investment.<sup>2</sup>

What as late as 1988 was the tenth largest industrial economy in the world is now in agony. Already after only three months of the introduction of an "efficient economic system", 760,000 out of a total of nine million workers are registered as unemployed. Some 1.9 million people are "part-time workers with a zero working week", that is, *de facto* they are also unemployed. So every third citizen of the ex-GDR is afflicted by this<sup>3</sup>.

But there is still more to come. While before last December's elections there was no public fuss from the mainly pro-government think tanks about the possible negative economic consequences of unification, now most of them say openly that at the end of this year there will be

between three and four million unemployed — that is, an unemployment rate of some 50%. Kurt Biedenkopf, conservative prime minister of Saxonia, commented: "The development is more dramatic than in the 1920s in the midst of a world economic crisis" — even if today there is a much better social security net.

Total industrial production in the ex-GDR in 1990 was 50% down on 1989. While in 1975, during the most severe recession seen in West Germany, GNP dropped by 1.4%, GNP in East Germany fell by 20% between 1989 and 1990. At the same time the hopes for big West German investments in the East have not been fulfilled. Some 70.3% of the money invested last year went into the creation of a network for the distribution of West German products, with only 17.7% invested in production.

It is generally believed that by the end of June the situation will be critical. The safeguards against lay-offs in the highly vulnerable engineering sector, negotiated last year, will be abolished. At the same time plans for a halving of the workforce in mining will be implemented. Furthermore, most of the 700,000 low-paid public employees, now "resting", will be formally fired. None of these people will be adequately compensated and

few will find other jobs.

People over 45 who lose their jobs will have practically no opportunity to get rehired; the re-introduction of capitalism literally makes them into a "no future" generation. After putting most of the immigrant workers from other "socialist" countries on the dole, it is women who are now bearing the brunt, especially in the southern regions of Saxonia and Thuringia, with their highly vulnerable industries relying on manual labour and on women.

Among the most affected sectors are:

- Agriculture. Out of the 880,000 agricultural workers at the start of 1990, about 200,000 have already left their jobs. Given the EEC's permanent agricultural crisis and the political influence of the West German farming lobby in Brussels, it is likely that the East German "process of reduction" will continue.

- Mining. Copper and potash mining are especially affected. Already half of the former 30,000 workers in the potash mines have been fired. The German government plans to use some of the pits, once they are no longer needed for mining, to store poisonous waste which would be difficult to store in West Germany because of the protest by the local population.

- Shipyards. Out of the former 55,000 shipyard workers in the Mecklenburg-Vorpommern region in the north, some 47,000 are still employed. But except for the production of a few special types of ship, it is unlikely that the ship building industry will survive.

- Other strongly affected sectors are airplanes, textiles and electronics.

### Factory occupations and demonstrations

This development has left its marks on the population. There have been a lot of protests:

- \* On February 19, the management told the workers of the Elektro-Physikalische Apparate Werke at Neuruppin that more than 2,000 of the 2,480 employees would be fired at the end of June. The workers immediately occupied this sixth biggest European producer of circuits.

- \* When the workers of the Erfurt-based electronics factory Ermic learned on February 27 that 4,000 of the 7,000 strong workforce were soon to be fired, they occupied the factory. Because they were dissatisfied with their local trade union branch they formed an independent organizing committee.

- \* On the same day, 50,000 people took to the streets in Erfurt. Actions took place in many other cities as well to protest against lay-offs, rent rises and the lack of adequate social security protection. In East Berlin, Schwerin and Halle some thousands of workers blocked streets, in Magdeburg some 10,000 people occupied the city centre. In Rostock there were some 5,000 demonstrators and 10,000 in

## Deutsche Bank



("Get your Deutschmarks here")

Leipzig. Many of the 70,000 engineering workers in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern took part in warning strikes. According to Saxonia's economy minister Kajo Schommer: "After the anti-socialist revolution, there could be a social revolution, controllable by nobody."

The crushing of the East German economy is obviously a deliberate policy. The *Treuhand* Trust Fund Agency, the biggest holding company in the world, with 8,000 factories and six million workers, controls the bulk of East German industry. It is not itself controlled by any democratic institution, not even formally by the parliament. It acts in the interests of West German capitalists who want to strangle the East German economy, both to liquidate likely competitors and so as to be able to buy bankrupted firms at the lowest possible price.<sup>4</sup>

Since the *Treuhand's* role in destroying the East German economy is becoming increasingly clear, popular anger is directed more and more at this institution. Some of its regional offices have already been occupied by workers.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) experts put the amount needed to bring East Germany up to the same economic level as the West at somewhere above 2,000 billion Deutschmarks. The West German bourgeoisie has enough money to do this. But it is hesitant to invest such an enormous sum in such a risky enterprise as the former "workers and peasants' state", which has neither a reliable infrastructure nor a consolidated political and state machine nor a docile population. Instead, the West German capitalists prefer to invest their fortunes in the international money and capital markets.

There is enough spare capacity in West German factories to largely satisfy the East German market in consumer goods. There is, therefore, little incentive to build new factories in the East. Thus, so far the reintroduction of capitalism has had much the same effect in East Germany as in Hungary and Poland — deindustrialization.

The trade union and political structures are not capable of responding to the growing social unrest.

Under forty years of Stalinist rule it was impossible for workers to organize collective resistance. So, after the collapse of the state/party it turned out that no independent workers' activists existed. In

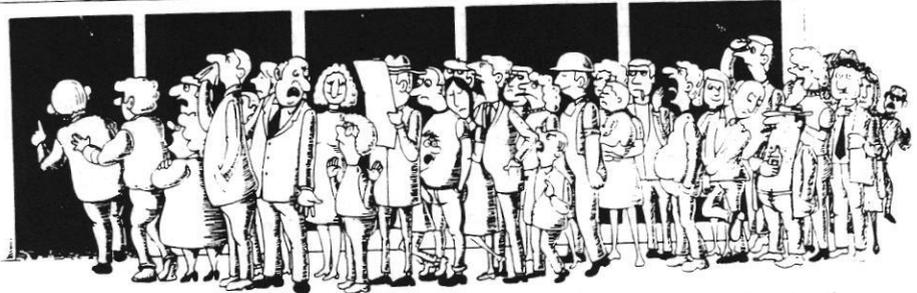
October/ November 1989 and after, numerous independent trade union initiatives have surfaced, but there is virtually no reservoir of experience in how to fight for workers' interests.

Due to the growing disenchantment and passivity of workers<sup>5</sup> all independent trade union initiatives collapsed or became totally marginalized. Also the former official trade union movement, the FDGB, was dissolved in favour of its West German counterpart, the DGB, which wanted to take over the high level of organization (90% union membership) but not the old structures and functionaries.

As a result it was impossible for the workers in a factory to go over collectively to a DGB trade union: they had to do this one by one. If you add on the massive plant closures, you get the explanation for the rather low level of trade union organization in East Germany.

Most of the trade union and factory council leaders were elected on the ideological basis of social compromise with the management. Meanwhile reality is

### Arbeitsamt



(Arbeitsamt = unemployment office)

1. A recent opinion poll by the Wickert Institut Tübingen showed that 81.3% of all East German voters are discontented with the CDU/FDP government. Two months ago only 37.6% had been discontented. This is the most dramatic turnaround in public opinion during the 40 years of the Institut's existence.
2. In mid-February, 500 mayors demonstrated in Leipzig under the slogan: "Money for kindergartens — not for the Gulf war."
3. Klaus Gehn, president of the East German Unemployment Federation, estimates that all in all 3.7 million people are affected by unemployment, reduced work or early retirement.
4. The *Treuhand* was empowered to sell the sole East German airline, *Interflug*. By accident it became known that the agency, contrary to their instructions, frightened off capitalists interested in taking over *Interflug* by deliberately giving them untrue negative information on the state of the airline's affairs.
5. The widespread mood at the time of the December election was to support and vote for political parties

making it more and more obvious that a fight to defend workers' interests is needed and that social compromise is not stopping the factory owners from getting rid of non-profitable employees. Out of this empirical experience a radicalization is developing, which expresses itself through actions such as occupying streets, town centres and factories.

But so far this radicalization has not been carried through to the overall ideological or organizational level. Compromise with capital is challenged only by those directly affected by lay-offs and only from the point of view of their particular enterprise. There is as yet no widespread questioning of the principles of capitalist economy. After four decades of "planned Socialist misery" the lack of an alternative to capitalism, which can guarantee not only social justice but also efficiency, is evident.

The workers' protest actions have in most cases remained isolated from each other. This is partly due to the DGB unions which are not interested in widening strike actions, which might lead to too much militancy.<sup>6</sup> So the sponsoring of an as yet non-existent East-German wide structure of critical and militant trade unionists remains an urgent task.

Consistent Marxist thought remains a marginalized and non-organized force in the East German left. Hence revolutionary socialist positions play no direct role in the current struggles. It remains to be seen if, because of their experience in the coming clashes, a section of the working class will lose its illusions in the capitalist economic model in East Germany. ★

with the closest connections to big capital, because, as it was correctly feared, to fight for good working conditions would frighten capital away and block the financial means necessary for an economic upswing. Remarks to the effect that: "In the first elections we will vote Christian Democrat because they will bring us capitalism as soon as possible. But in subsequent elections we will vote Social Democrat because they will defend us from the bad effects of capitalism" were widely heard.

6. However, the trade unions are interested to a certain extent in widening and deepening the protest actions in order to improve their position vis-à-vis the capitalists and attract new members.

So for instance the DGB public sector trade union, the ÖTV, and the engineering union IG Metall have organized regional protest meetings. On the other hand trade unions like IG Chemie have hesitated to do even this. It is characteristic that the latter union also denies posts in the union to members of the PDS (the former Communist Party).

# New attacks on sexual choice

THE fall of Thatcher has brought no respite for lesbians and gay men in Britain. Close on the heels of Clause 28 (see IV141), the Embryology Act and a diverse assortment of ideological and economic measures aimed at bolstering the nuclear family and denying sexual choice, the government and judiciary have launched a new series of attacks on the lesbian and gay community.

REBECCA FLEMMING

**C**LAUSE 25 of the Criminal Justice Bill, currently on its way through parliament, proposes to classify consensual homosexual activities as "serious sexual offences", alongside such crimes as rape, indecent assault and child sex abuse, and to enable the courts to pass *more severe* sentences upon those convicted of them. The three most important consensual homosexual offences covered by the Bill are all contained in the Sexual Offences Act of 1956 and clearly contrast with the heterosexual offences of the same name, which, needless to say, are not in the new Bill.

They are — "soliciting", which includes a man cruising, chatting up or even just winking at another man; "procuring", which includes anyone who introduces two men who go on to have a sexual relationship, anyone who allows a room in their house to be used by two men for sex and so on, and, most significantly, "indecent between men", which covers any sexual act between men in public — kissing at a busstop, cuddling on the bus.... Three additional homosexual offences which were in the first draft of the bill — living on the earnings of a male prostitute, homosexual acts on merchant navy ships and "procuring" an act of buggery — have now been withdrawn by the government in response to the "genuine concerns which have been expressed."

This comes in the context of a systematic escalation of the policing of public lesbian and gay sexual behaviour, combined

with a clear hardening of the attitudes of much of the legal establishment towards such matters. The state now relentlessly prosecutes homosexual offences rather than dismissing such relatively minor infringements with a caution, and the courts treat these cases increasingly severely.

In 1989 (the latest year for which full figures are available) 2311 men were convicted for homosexual "soliciting", "procuring" and "indecent" in England and Wales. This figure represents a 51% increase since 1985 which is mainly attributable to the massive rise in convictions for "indecent", where the figures have more than doubled from 729 in 1985 to 1503 four years later. A recent example of this toughening of police and judicial policy towards consenting homosexual offences is the judgement given in the celebrated "Sadomasochism case" at London's Old Bailey last November. As a result of a major police operation in 1987, codenamed "Operation Spanner", eight men were sentenced to up to four and a half years in prison for consenting homosexual sadomasochist activities. The judge ruled that "consent was no defence" in such a case.

## Consensual sex equated with rape

These statistics clearly demonstrate the impact that Clause 25 is going to have on thousands of gay men in Britain. Nor is it simply the prospect of harsher penalties, inevitably involving prison sentences, which has so alarmed the lesbian and gay community. It is the insidious and outrageous equation of *consensual* homosexual offences with crimes such as rape that gives an added ideological edge to the proposed legislation. The idea that victimless "crime" such as "indecent between men" in which both parties are perfectly willing, should be placed in the same legal category as such a serious violation of a woman's bodily integrity and self-determination as rape, underlines to the point of absurdity the distorted value system of capitalist society and further contributes to the continuing conceptual and actual criminalization of the lesbian and gay community.

The response of the lesbian and gay movement to these proposals was immediate and diverse. It has ranged from polite lobbying of the government by the Stonewall Group, symbolic direct action from the group Outrage, attempts to rally labour movement opposition to the measures by the Labour Campaign for Lesbian

and Gay Rights and a demonstration of some 8,000 people organized by the newly established umbrella grouping the Lesbian and Gay Rights Coalition on February 16. This multifaceted approach reflects the diversity and fragmentation of the British lesbian and gay movement, but it has not been without its successes.

The withdrawal of three, relatively minor, homosexual offences from the Bill by the government is a small victory and now several key amendments have been tabled by the Labour Party, in line with its comprehensive official policy in support of full equality for lesbians and gay men. The first, which has been endorsed by the Labour leadership, is simply to remove the three consensual acts from the Bill. A slightly stronger amendment backed by left Labour MPs such as Ken Livingstone and Tony Benn would effectively remove the threat of prison sentences for all consenting sexual offences — heterosexual and homosexual — committed by persons from the age of 16 upwards. However, it is unclear whether the Labour Party will exert discipline on their MPs to vote either for or against the amendments.

## No place for equal rights

A government measure which has received altogether less attention, despite the fact that its ideological consequences are more far reaching than Clause 25, is Paragraph 16 of the draft Guidelines on Fostering. These were issued for consultation by the Department of Health just before Christmas, and declare that "...the chosen way of life of some adults may mean that they would not be able to provide a suitable environment for the care and nurture of a child... 'Equal rights' and 'gay rights' policies have no place in fostering services."

These Guidelines are not legally binding. Local authorities must have regard to them in drawing up and carrying out their fostering policies, but do not have to follow them. However, as in so many similar instances, particularly in the area of lesbian and gay equality, it is likely that local authorities will take such government advice unless there is a substantial and public campaign on the issue. As with Section 28 of the Local Government Act, if councils are not actively pressured they will needlessly self-censor. The effect of the paragraph, if it is implemented by local authorities, will be to exclude lesbians and gay men from consideration as foster parents, simply because of their sexuality, rather than being judged on the same rigorous criteria as other potential fosterers.

This will have a far from negligible impact as a considerable number of lesbians and gay men do foster and growing numbers are applying. The very many children in local authority institutions, looking for foster homes, gives this measure a twofold detrimental effect.

# The thin end of the wedge

**THE Czechoslovak government's plans for the transformation of property relations are divided into four parts: the "restitution" of state enterprises to their original owners, if they can be found; the "small privatization" — auction of about 100,000 shops and services to Czechoslovak citizens; the break-up of the collective farms; and the "large" privatization — or sell off of state enterprises to foreign capital, with a limited coupon scheme for the population.**

ADAM NOVAK

**N**EITHER the large privatization nor the restitution laws were approved at the time the small privatization started, with 16 auctions in Prague on January 26-27, 1991. The restitution particularly threatens to re-allocate many small shops and enterprises earmarked for the small privatization. However, nothing is to be allowed to delay the small privatization, which is an important symbol for the government, a proof that the de-statization is actually starting. For this reason, the instruction from the Czech Ministry of National Property and its Privatization has been to put contentious enterprises into the second round of auctions and proceed now with only those enterprises about which there is no dispute.<sup>1</sup>

The official goal of the small privatization is to transfer state property to Czech and Slovak hands. Thus, only citizens are allowed to take part in the first round.<sup>2</sup> The plan was that enterprises offered for auction would be small enough for citizens to be able to afford them. The small privatization, along with the coupon distribution in the large privatization, was to be the population's share in a deal largely conducted between the bureaucracy and foreign capital. For example, 10% of Slovak petrol pumps will be sold or leased to citizens, 40% sold or leased to foreign companies, and the rest maintained by the present bureaucratic enterprises.<sup>3</sup>

The privatization of a large number of enterprises generates a large amount of revenue. Where does this money go? In the first place it does not go to the enterprise previously owning the privatized unit. The only possible benefit to this enterprise is to offload unwanted stocks and equipment by assigning them to the lost unit, and collecting their official value in crowns from a helpless new owner. The money raised is controlled by the Ministries for National Property and its Privatization. These bodies use the money

raised first of all to pay themselves. Official statements suggest, at some point in the future, the transfer of a part of the funds to act as a state guarantee on loans to private entrepreneurs.

## Privatization funds bureaucracy

At the moment, however, the money is simply paying the day-to-day expenses of a growing section of the bureaucracy. As emigré economist Milan Zeleny argued, the privatization "drains away capital from the entrepreneurial sphere, where it is needed, to the state coffers where it is completely useless, stops being capital and becomes simply a pile of money, good for paying the wages of bureaucrats and politicians, but very bad for enterprise."<sup>4</sup> It is indeed interesting to note that the Czech privatization ministry has always been vehemently against any lease of enterprises to private entrepreneurs, a measure which would have enabled a much wider participation in private enterprises, and the accumulation of small amounts of private capital, but which would, of course, have raised less money for the state.

The local bureaucratic/mafia groupings managed to exclude enterprises from the privatization in several ways.

The most attractive food shops in Usti nad Labem, Liberec and Jablonec nad Nisou were divided from the state enterprise *Potravinny* and amalgamated into the *Pramen* organization (a retail cooperative, hence excluded from the small privatiza-

1. Prague's top restaurant, Moskva, was withdrawn from the first auction two days before the event, when a man turned up claiming to be the long-lost nephew of the 1938 owner.
2. Should an enterprise not be sold for its starting price, and be placed in the second round, however, then foreigners will be allowed to buy.
3. *Ecoservice* no. 22, November 30, 1990.
4. *Ceske noviny*, January 1, 1991.

There will also be a much wider, ideological, impact, which will be strengthened but will not depend on the actual implementation of the paragraph by local councils.

This proposal serves to reinforce once again the status of lesbians and gay men as second class citizens, unfit to raise or care for children.

It will exacerbate and deepen existing inequalities and prejudice and in particular, it will add to the climate of fear and intimidation already surrounding lesbian mothers. Is the next step to remove children from existing households where the parents or carers are lesbian and gay?

## Thread runs through attacks

Paragraph 16 picks up a thread which has been running through all of the Tory attacks on the lesbian and gay community in recent years — a clear focus on the issue of lesbians and gay men and children, and on lesbian mothers in particular — and takes it several steps further.

It coincides with a High Court ruling that a lesbian couple in Newcastle-on-Tyne may not adopt a two year old boy who had been placed with them by the city council's social services department. This case has been surrounded by media hysteria from the outset, orchestrated largely by Tory Party Central Office and epitomized by bigoted outpourings from the gutter press.

Unfortunately, as with the vast majority of these attacks on lesbian mothers and lesbian and gay parenting in general, the response from the movements to paragraph 16 has been inadequate.

The issue seems (like the Embryology Act before it) to fall uncomfortably between the central concerns of the lesbian and gay movement and the central concerns of the women's movement and though lesbian activists in groups such as Lesbian Action are working to galvanize and mobilize both, neither has really risen to the challenge.

The lesbian and gay movement in particular has prioritized Clause 25 — its general drift away from radicalism over the last period has turned the numerical domination of gay men more and more into a political domination, reflected by the media and by activists.

The women's movement has not provided any counterweight to this; lesbian issues remain on the fringes. The Labour Party, meanwhile, has expressed its opposition to this proposal only privately. The massive offensive to buttress the nuclear family launched by the Thatcher government has not ceased with her downfall.

It continues on apace, with lesbians and gay men still at the sharp end. It is essential that resistance to this project is built as widely as possible, to prevent the consolidation of the successes it has scored so far, and to defend the lives of lesbians and gay men. ★

tion), strengthening *Pramen's* dealing with the formation of a joint venture with the Netherland's foodstuff's firm, Ahold.<sup>5</sup>

Some enterprises or workplaces unilaterally declared themselves to be state joint-stock companies. Not a movement for workers' self-management, even if supported by workers opposed to private enterprise, this was a legalistic manoeuvre of the managers alone. There is no evidence of workers taking action they saw as defending their enterprises against privatization, such as barring entry to valuers, prospective buyers or new "owners".

Many of these "independence" declarations have been ruled by the privatization ministry to be illegitimate.<sup>6</sup> Only the ministry has the right to create state joint-stock companies, the legal form into which the bureaucratic enterprise must be transformed before shares in it can be sold. Many enterprises quickly took on apprentices, since enterprises where apprentices worked could not be included in the first round of the privatization process.

### Apprentice system collapses

Given the imminent collapse of the apprentice system, enough young people jumped at the chance to train in the relatively efficient enterprises concerned. One enterprise even applied for exception from the privatization on the grounds that they were intending to transfer the workshops in question to a collective of disabled people. Very commonly, enterprises signed agreements, sometimes illegally backdated, leasing an outlet or unit. This is because those leasing an outlet before 30/11/1990 had the right to buy it at its estimated value without auction.

As has been said, the district privatization commissions were under instructions not to become bogged down in struggles with the bureaucracy at this stage. Thus, it didn't take much effort to persuade the commissions to leave an enterprise untouched for now. This may well prove to have been the largest group of exemptions from the first round of privatization.

Many local governments opposed privatization of services under their control, in some cases virtually boycotting the privatization commissions. The mayor of Liberec justified this opposition by pointing to the fact that under current legislation, the city is obliged to provide the same services until the end of 1992, even though much of their budget is formed by profits from enterprises under their control.<sup>7</sup>

The main winners at the auctions were not usually present. These winners were certainly groupings in the bureaucracy/mafia, whose gains are measured in terms of the number of enterprises they managed to exclude from the privatization. The mafia now has several months to find a way of removing its favourite smaller

enterprises from the privatization process altogether. As a result of all these manoeuvres, the district privatization commissions<sup>8</sup> and ministry have demanded, and will certainly receive, greater powers to overrule and defeat opposition from enterprises and employees to their work in the future.

The small privatization so far is hardly a victory for the nascent Czech bourgeoisie. The first 16 enterprises auctioned in Prague<sup>9</sup> brought in some ten times their starting price. This seems both due to their central Prague location, their nature (including antique and clothing shops) and their low starting price. Given such prices, it is not surprising that only one enterprise passed into the hands of an independent Czech entrepreneur not acting as an agent of a foreign interest.<sup>10</sup> Some foreign residents operated through Czechoslovak agents, while some, mainly Viennese, foreign entrepreneurs of Czechoslovak birth were able to buy openly. Ordinary citizens were unable to compete financially.

There is another aspect of the victory of bureaucracy. State enterprises often registered large amounts of unsalable goods and obsolete material under the inventory of units to be auctioned — thus "selling" this material for its full price<sup>11</sup> to the new owners.

Liberals have centred their defence of the government around the necessity to break up the bureaucratic monopoly over retail. It is, however, already clear that private sector interest is in restaurants and city centre shops. In a large majority of auctions of food shops away from the centre of Prague, only one or two bidders take part in the auction.<sup>12</sup>

### Supermarkets better value

The most plausible reduction in price and increase in service for the working population comes not from the corner grocer, but from the West European supermarket chains. The Czech Commerce Ministry has long been negotiating with the aim of withdrawing some 10% of food shops from the small privatization for sale direct to those Western buyers able to give certain guarantees of autonomy and investment. An open statement by Commerce Minister Stepova to the effect that a move to foreign domination of the retail system is "inevitable sooner or later, and we have just wanted (with our plan) to save the population time and money" provoked governmental concern, but there has been no theoretical challenge to her assertions.<sup>13</sup>

Given the crisis in the food retail system, many suppliers have started selling a part of their produce direct, from stalls or lorries. Despite the appearance of chaos, this trend may be forcing some retailers to drop their prices.<sup>14</sup>

The small privatization was originally conceived, against the opposition of the

powerful clique around Civic Forum leader Vaclav Klaus, as a protected redistribution of national property to an emerging middle-class layer of citizens. Different variants of this scheme allowed for collectives of employees to have the right to purchase or lease their workplace before it was placed on the market, or for cooperatives of citizens to form with the aim of taking over village services, or other enterprises of their choosing.

However, the growing alignment of the bureaucratic centre with international capital, its desire to create large private capital at the expense of small, and its hostility to any kind of collective ownership, have increased. The small privatization project has been assimilated closer and closer to the large privatization. On an ideological level too, the soft, acceptable option of the small privatization has served to introduce people to the hard reality of the large privatization, in which private individuals will be almost totally excluded. By the time the auctions finally started, the government no longer felt constrained to stress the national nature of the privatization. Refusing to confirm or deny allegations that in Prague almost no enterprises were being taken over by ordinary citizens, Czech privatization minister Tomas Jezek said: "I should be unhappy that foreign capital is coming here?"<sup>15</sup>

The bureaucracy will get its injection of cash from the liquidation of national property. The Czech ministry of privatization, along with Vaclav Klaus's federal finance ministry, will continue to grow in power. Their tight control of the destatization process will continue to strengthen the legitimacy of their "white communism". There will indeed be some sort of private sector, though so far only in commerce and services. What there will not be is any real introduction of competition and price competition among the shops ordinary people use. The cheapest food will continue to be that you buy off the back of a lorry. ★

5. Jiri Leschtina, *Mlada fronta dnes*, January 31, 1991.

6. Interview with Czech privatization minister Tomas Jezek, *Mlada fronta dnes*, January 31, 1991.

7. Quoted in "Navrat k prirodzenosti", *Mlada fronta dnes*, January 31, 1991.

8. These commissions, each of 15-20 members, were named by the minister. According to one report "among them are lawyers, economic workers, entrepreneurs, someone from the town council, town-owned enterprises, and someone from a bank or savings bank". Jiri Leschtina, *Mlada fronta dnes*, January 31, 1991.

9. *Ecoservice*, no. 20, January 29, 1991.

10. This claim came from Vlasta Stepova, Czech minister of Commerce and Tourism, quoted in *Rude pravo*, January 31, 1991.

11. Such stocks were not counted as part of the cost of the enterprise in the auction. Instead, the new owners were required to pay separately a non-negotiable price for stocks to the previous bureaucratic "owner" of the enterprise.

12. *Ecoservice*, no. 23, February 13, 1991.

13. *Zemedelske noviny*, January 24, 1991.

14. See my "New behaviour of food producers and retailers", *Ecoservice*, February 5, 1991.

15. *Rude pravo*, January 31, 1991.

# Fourth International holds 13th World Congress

**A**N HONORARY presidium of the congress was chosen consisting of political prisoners from our movement and from the revolutionary and workers' movement as a whole, along with victims of bourgeois and bureaucratic repression.

The Congress opened with a report and discussion on the Gulf War, its background and foreseeable consequences. It was clear that all the sections and sympathizing organizations of the Fourth International have been working in their countries against the imperialist intervention and for the immediate withdrawal of the troops of the so-called "coalition" and allies from the Middle East. An appeal addressed to the entire international revolutionary left was adopted (see IV 201), urging it to make yet greater efforts to step up the struggle against this dirty imperialist war, through the broadest and most unitary mass mobilizations possible.

It also became clear that, while revolutionary currents do not have the same weight in this massive antiwar movement as they did in the movement against the Vietnam War, in this case important sections of the organized labour and trade union movements have actively mobilized in a number of European capitalist countries, in the ex-German Democratic Republic, in the United States and in Japan.

## Several resolutions discussed

The Congress heard reports and took discussions on a number of resolutions: on the world situation; on the situation in the Soviet Union, Latin America and capitalist Europe; on the problems of women's liberation in Latin America and in the imperialist countries; on the state of the women's movement in these latter; on the feminization of the mass organizations and leadership bodies of the Fourth International; and on the construction and functioning of the leadership bodies of the Fourth International. More than 160 comrades intervened in these debates.

They attempted to interpret and explain the main changes that have taken place in the world over the past few years; the capitalist offensive and the throwing of the working class onto the defensive; the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe; the problems of the Central American revolution; the beginning of a reorganization of the workers' movement in Brazil and South Africa; and the reawakening of the political activity of the Soviet masses and

**AROUND 200 delegates and observers, representing 80 organizations from 48 countries, attended the 13th World Congress of the Fourth International which took place in Italy between February 7 and 17, 1991. Representatives of organizations from another half dozen countries — mainly in the Middle East — were unable to attend because of the war, but sent written messages and explanations.**

the difficulties and contradictions that they meet in regaining their organizational and political autonomy.

In line with the democratic traditions of our international movement, counter-proposals and resolutions were put on a number of the agenda points, setting out the positions of comrades organized in minority tendencies. The resolutions put forward by the outgoing leadership were adopted by a large majority.

The Congress discussed draft theses on "Ecology and Socialist Revolution" (to be published in a forthcoming issue of *International Marxist Review*). This document will be more thoroughly discussed inside the International and will be put to the vote at the 14th World Congress.

The Congress also discussed a draft manifesto, a text which sets out to explain the causes of the crisis of credibility of socialism which has been rocking the workers and revolutionary movement for some years, a crisis that has been accentuated by the collapse of the so-called "socialist camp" in 1989-90.

## Manifesto meets new challenges

The aim of the manifesto is to offer insofar as is possible a coherent and overall response to the new challenges facing revolutionaries; challenges which will unavoidably affect their activity in the coming years. Voting on this text will take place after further discussion.

The Fourth International does not pretend to have a definitive or complete answer to the new and harrowing prob-

lems facing humanity. It will discuss these problems with anyone who is disposed to enter into such a discussion. But it remains for the moment the only international force which has set to work on a project for a coherent answer, thus providing a possible reference point for various currents throughout the world.

The Congress adopted a number of appeals:

- In support of Algerian women threatened by the rise of reactionary fundamentalism;

- In support of Moroccan political prisoners, forgotten for 17 years in the jails of King Hassan II;

- In defence of the Bolivian workers movement, threatened with disappearance after the massive sackings carried out at the behest of the International Monetary Fund;

- For the liberation of the leaders and activists of the "Beijing Spring" of 1989 who had just been handed severe sentences by the regime of Deng Xiaoping;

- For solidarity with the Haitian people.

The Congress sent its fraternal greetings to two Japanese comrades who had just been freed after spending ten years in prison for their part in the campaign in defence of the Sanruzuki peasants, during the building of the new Tokyo airport. It demanded the immediate liberation of comrades of the Mexican Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) and the Sri Lankan Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP), who have been kidnapped and "disappeared" by the repressive governments of these two countries.

## Veteran Trotskyists present

The oldest participants in the Congress — which greeted them warmly — were comrade Morris Stein, who joined the Russian Communist Party in the aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution, and then became a founder member of the Trotskyist movement in the United States and of the Fourth International; and Charlie Van Gelderen, originally from South Africa, the only participant at this Congress who had also been present at the founding Congress of the Fourth International in September 1938.

The Congress heard an appeal from Jose Dirceu, the General Secretary of the Workers Party (PT) of Brazil, to consider the calling for next year of an international conference to discuss and reaffirm the actuality of socialism at the end of the Twentieth Century. The Congress expressed its unanimous support for this initiative and decided to make an active contribution to its success.

Among other organizations represented by observers at the Congress were the Popular Democratic Organization from the Dominican Republic; the Popular Democratic Party (PDP) of Paraguay; the Communist Movement (MC) from the Spanish state and the MK from Euskadi; Lutte Ouvrière (LO) from France; the United Socialist Party (VSP) from Germany; the United Left from the ex-GDR; and a socialist organization from South Africa. The Communist Action Party of Syria (PACS) and the National Liberation Movement (MLN) from Uruguay sent messages of greeting to the Congress.

The NSSP, one of the main workers organizations in Sri Lanka, asked to affiliate to the Fourth International during the Congress, which will take effect in a few months.

The greetings from French writer Gilles Perrault, who repeated his condemnation of the imperialist war in the Gulf, and the intervention of Christine Serfaty, who denounced the repression in Morocco, were among the most moving moments of the Congress.

### Congress reflects changes in Eastern Europe

The change of the situation in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was reflected in the participation of a significant number of observers from these countries, including Alexander Buzgalin, one of the leaders of the Marxist Platform in the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and a member of this party's central committee since its last congress, and Kolganov, a member of the central committee of the Communist Party of Russia.

Also taking part in the Congress were Jozef Piniór from Poland, one of the historic leaders of Solidarnosc in 1981, and Petr Uhl, a deputy in the Czechoslovak parliament and former leading activist in Charter 77, who spent nine years in prison under the bureaucratic regime. As militants of the Fourth International they made contributions illustrating the problems facing revolutionary currents in their countries.

The Congress noted the historic fact of the near complete rehabilitation of Leon Trotsky in the Soviet Union, where his works are being published in big editions. The Fourth International will continue the campaign for his rehabilitation to be completed on the judicial level.

The Congress recognized that at the present time the revolutionary movement confronts serious difficulties. However it also recognized that possibilities for development exist.

The Congress outlined measures to strengthen the leading bodies of the International, while at the same time reaffirming our determination to consolidate and extend links with other revolutionary, anti-imperialist and anti-Stalinist currents. ★

# Sri Lanka: reviving the revolutionary tradition

VICKRAMABAHU is the general secretary of the Nava Sama Samaja Party, a Sri Lankan Trotskyist party. He was recently interviewed by Colin Meade.

## CAN you tell me something about the origins of the NSSP?

Our origins lie in a party called the Lanka Sama Samaja Party, which was a Trotskyist party and which became a powerful movement at the time of the struggle for national liberation in Sri Lanka, the struggle for democracy and against feudalism. But in 1964 this party went into a coalition government with Mrs. Bandaranaike's Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP). After that the LSSP went into crisis and there were breakaways, but we remained within the party and tried to fight against the coalition policy. After 25 years we have emerged as the New Sama Samaja Party; we are not as strong as the old party in terms of support but we are a substantial party now — we can say we are the largest working class tendency in Sri Lanka.

## ■ Is there a strong LSSP tradition amongst the masses in Sri Lanka? Is it something to which you refer?

Yes. Sama Samaja means "equal society" or communism, it is known as a Trotskyist tradition, and Trotsky and the Fourth International are known about by more or less all educated people here. Sama Samajism was really the force behind the national liberation struggle against the British, and also the kind of democracy we have — human rights, the welfare state and so on — was due to the struggle of this party. It has a rich tradition of mass struggle, and everybody thought there was going to be a revolution and a Trotskyist government by the 1960s. But our leaders wanted to take a short cut so they went into the coalition, which of course like any coalition went against the workers, and finally they were thrown out after getting the work done.

That led to a real collapse in the workers movement and for the last 25 years, from 1965 onwards, there was defeat after defeat, and the vacuum created by the collapse of the revolutionary tradition led to desperation amongst both the Tamil and Sinhalese people, particularly the youth. They couldn't see a way out with economic conditions collapsing, and in 1971 there was an insurrection led by the

JVP (Janata Vikmukti Peramuna). The JVP developed from a youth movement formed out of the Maoist breakaway groups. They claimed to be Marxist but they were based amongst the educated unemployed youth.

The insurrection resulted in the murder of 10,000 young people by the coalition government in which the LSSP participated. Recently, in the last five years we have had a second tragedy both in the south with the JVP leading another revolt, and in the north around the struggle for the liberation of the Tamil people. In the south the JVP took up a Sinhala chauvinist [anti-Tamil] stance this time, but nevertheless due to the poverty and the appalling conditions many young people were drawn to the struggle, and this time over 40,000 Sinhala youth and nearly 25,000 Tamil youth have been murdered.

So the entire period has been drowned in blood. During this period we managed to slowly but steadily fight against the broken tradition of the old LSSP leadership, against coalition politics, against opportunist politics, and revive the Trotskyist tradition. In 1977 we managed to organize a conference coming out of the old LSSP, and we called ourselves the Sama Samaja Party, but we called ourselves the New Sama Samaja Party to distinguish ourselves. In the last elections we contested both the parliamentary elections and the provincial council elections, we have one parliamentary member and five provincial council members, and we also have a municipal councillor. We have trade union work in the private and public sectors, and we have a nationwide organization including Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims.

We have stood up for the right of self-determination of the Tamil people, and in fact because of our defence of the rights of the Tamil people we have been under attack from the JVP during this recent period of violence. Seventeen of our members have been killed during this period, one of our leaders had his house burned down and many people were injured and wounded. But we have emerged out of this crisis as a fairly strong party.

■ When you talk about the organized working class, what propor-

tion of the population are you talking about? How big is the unorganized working class?

80% of our population is still rural, so we are talking about an urban population of 20% and within that we have organized labour. But in the rural areas there are plantations, with a predominantly Tamil workforce, although in the rubber and tea areas there are Sinhala workers. We have some organization in these areas, but our trade union work is concentrated in the urban areas. Even though we are a working class party we have substantial support in the rural areas — most of the provincial council members are from rural areas and even our MP comes from a district which has a very large rural population.

■ **Are trade unions in Sri Lanka connected to political parties?**

Yes, trade unions are divided along party lines and we control two federations. These federations and unions come together in a joint council which includes 30 odd unions and federations. There is a council elected as the secretariat of this joint committee which has five members, we have one, another is from the SLFP, one from the Communist Party, one from the LSSP and one from one of the other organizations.

■ **How many workers does this organize?**

15,000 out of 100,000-200,000 workers. There are trade unions which are pro-government and which are not involved. But, although they nominally have large memberships, there is no activity in these unions.

■ **Does your support in the rural areas represent a repudiation of the JVP?**

The JVP had militant educated youth in the rural areas. But there was a division amongst these youth, between the left organizations and the JVP. Because the LSSP repudiated its hegemonic role in 1964, there was not a tradition beyond Sama Samajism at that period; there was room opened up for a radical youth movement, so there was a split in the rural areas. There were those who remained with the radical youth movement, which was a minor current at that stage, and those who went into the JVP.

We were struggling to win over the young people, but since we didn't have a strong social base we could not attract as many young people as in the 50s and 60s. Now, we are in a position to address a larger audience, a larger section of the youth and definitely those who are turning away from the JVP. That we can see because in the recent period we have had very successful meetings in all the campuses in the south.

■ **You seem fairly optimistic that**

**the crisis which has occurred is being overcome.**

We have gone through a series of defeats after the coalition period, but we have emerged from it as a political party gaining in membership and in authority and prestige, so while there is a general defeat in the country as far as the mass movement and the working class is concerned, from the point of view of our party there is a certain victory. We have shown that we mean business, and that we stand for certain principles and that we are prepared to struggle. People are turning to us, they realise that there is a party that is taking a different line and is prepared to make a real challenge to the system. We can see that because, when we had our 13th anniversary celebrations in Colombo, we expected 5,000 people but we got more. People came from many areas, remote areas, including many young people.

■ **What about the government repression?**

The repression which started under the pretext of fighting the JVP and the LTTE (Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam — the main guerilla force in the Tamil areas) is continuing. In the south over 40,000 young people have disappeared, many others are in prison camps, and still the disappearances are taking place.

Even three days before I left Sri Lanka, in a suburb of Colombo in the middle of the day, a young person who was teaching at the Buddhist school was taken away in a van by three people in police uniform. We went to the police station, to the police superintendent, and they denied all knowledge. The government has this apparatus for attacking people illegally and in the north the war is continuing. There is a terrible war against the Tamil people, there is almost near starvation in the Tamil areas and every day there are scores, if not hundreds, of people dying.

■ **Are the Tamil Tigers a genuinely hegemonic force amongst the Tamil people?**

They do not participate in elections and they terrorize other organizations. They killed our most popular Tamil leader, even though we as a party have defended the rights of the Tamil people, simply because his name was on the list put forward for elections. It is clear that they don't have popular hegemony; they impose their will by ruthless terror. They have maintained hegemony in the Jaffna area, but in other Tamil areas they don't have the same kind of hegemony even after using ruthless terror.

■ **So does the government control most of the island?**

Yes, except the Jaffna area. In the other



Tamil areas the government controls the towns but not the rural areas, except in the night. But in the Muslim areas the Tamil-speaking Muslims are completely opposed to the Tigers. They are about 7% of the total population and out of this maybe half live in the eastern province. There are Muslim organizations, including the Muslim Congress and also self-defence organizations.

■ **Are there other Tamil groups apart from the Tigers?**

Yes, there are a number of other groups which are left and claim to be Marxist. They are opposed to the Tigers because their leaders were murdered by the Tigers, indeed they hate the Tigers so much that some of them have joined the government. They are getting arms from the government and fighting against the Tigers in many areas, and they have supplied manpower to the government. Because of that you can see a clear division among the Tamil people. The most important organization outside of the LTTE is the EPRLF (Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front), which was the party which ruled the north eastern province after the elections — of course that election was not democratic in the sense that everybody could participate — and also in the parliament there are EPRLF representatives. In the parliamentary elections the non-LTTE forces won. But the Tigers don't allow any democratic process to take place, so there is no argument for them to say that they are the sole representatives of the Tamil people.

■ **Do the main bourgeois parties or governing parties organize in the Tamil areas?**

They were organized earlier, even in the provincial elections they won a certain percentage of votes, but many of their

**NSSP deputy attacked in Parliament**

A VERY grave incident took place on February 21 in which Vasudeva Nanayakkara, a supporter of the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) and a member of the Sri Lankan Parliament, was attacked during a session of parliament by government members, including senior ministers. During the incident, one minister pulled out a knife. Subsequently, the security facilities provided to cde. Nanayakkara as a member of parliament have been withdrawn.

An NSSP statement issued after the attack characterized it as part of "the desperate attempt by the UNP (United National Party) regime to reduce the Parliament to a mere rubber stamp for the IMF dictated policies". Following the incident the Opposition Group in its entirety condemned the "barbaric and ugly behaviour" of the government thugs and decided to boycott Parliament until the Speaker resolves the problems involved.

Facing enormous problems because the Gulf war has reduced worker remittances from and exports to the Middle East, the Premadasa regime is seeking assistance from the IMF under very harsh economic conditions.

Opposition to government repression is also gathering pace, particularly with the launching by the Mothers' Front of a campaign against the disappearance and killing of thousands of youth. The NSSP has played a big role in this latter campaign.

The NSSP has appealed for urgent action to launch the widest possible international campaign against the UNP government. It is demanding an immediate end to illegal arrests and disappearances in Sri Lanka; an end to the repression of the Tamil people and the immediate supplying of sufficient food and medicine to Tamil areas; and the immediate release of Raymond Perera and A. B. M. Ratmalana of the United Federation of Labour.

Protests should be sent to;

- 1) President R. Premadasa, Presidential Secretariat, Colombo 1, Sri Lanka.
- 2) Minister of state for defence, Ranjan Wijeratne, Defence Ministry, Colombo 1.
- 3) Sri Lankan envoys in all countries.

organizers have been killed by the Tigers. What is important is not the UNP and SLFP but the bourgeois Tamil parties, which had big support mostly amongst elderly people, the middle classes and the peasantry, and the left leaning organizations, that had support among the radical peasantry and the working class. So even if you leave out the support for the UNP and SFLP there was significant support for the Tamil bourgeois parties, and the LTTE was trying to compete with them and become the sole representative by eliminating other groups.

■ **Have they succeeded?**

Yes, some groups are not operating at all, but the EPRLF is maintaining a certain level of activity, while other organizations are supporting the government.

■ **So has it been possible for you to do any political work in the Tamil areas?**

Only secretly; we have been publishing our paper monthly and sending it where we have contacts in the area, but open politics is out because of the LTTE.

■ **Is the present government hegemonic among the bourgeoisie?**

No, there is a national bourgeois party, the SLFP, but the comprador bourgeoisie

connected with the multinationals are represented by the United National Party (UNP) irrespective of the community, it is not a party connected to the Sinhala bourgeoisie alone. But in terms of policy they take a Sinhala chauvinist position, they ruthlessly try to suppress the Tamil demand for autonomy.

In the present war Tamils are dying like flies and the LTTE's sectarianism is no way out, because it antagonizes potential allies. If they abandoned that a massive movement could be built. They put hope in the Indian bourgeoisie for some time but the latter have betrayed them totally.

The Tamil Nadu state government in India, for opportunistic reasons, tried to give some sort of refuge to them but the central government in India has dismissed the state government and put it under presidential direction, and now they are hunting for Tiger camps and safe houses and so on. The Tigers support base in India has been eroded substantially, so only Sinhala-Tamil unity can win now.

■ **What is the position of the SLFP on the repression?**

They give indirect support as far as the Tamils are concerned. They would prefer the government to do the repressing so that they can come to power and wash their hands of it. Actually their party has

always had a policy of Sinhala only. However in 1957 Mr. Bandaranaike proposed a very democratic solution, as a result of a pact with a very popular Tamil leader of the time. The pact offered a substantial level of autonomy, reasonable use of the Tamil language and so on, but at that stage the UNP, then in opposition, agitated against the solution and did not allow it to be implemented. Thereafter the SLFP policy has been racist but in the coalition period, under the influence of the LSSP and the Communist Party a degree of restraint was exercised. On their own, they take a more Sinhala chauvinist line, and they are influenced by the Sinhala petit-bourgeoisie.

■ **What is the Communist Party's position on the national question? Does the CP have significant support?**

In 1987 we entered into an alliance with the Communist Party and also the LSSP and the Mahajana Party — the latter was a breakaway from the SLFP opposed to their chauvinist policy against the Tamils on autonomy and language. It broke from the SLFP as a social democratic party, taking the working class layers of the party. We formed the United Socialist Alliance (USA) — we stood for devolution to the provincial councils, secession rights and language rights, that is, the use of Tamil as a national language. The general policy of the CP at that stage was for autonomy and devolution and other rights.

But in the recent period the USA has broken up, because the CP and the LSSP want to join in coalition with the SLFP, and the Mahajana Party want to have a tactical agreement with the UNP in defence of democratic rights. So the CP and LSSP positions are now the same as the SLFP, undermining the interests of the Tamil people. Whatever the differences of policy, we are fighting for all opposition forces to come together on the issue of repression, of rising prices and privatization, either on all three or on any one of these.

The CP and LSSP have failed, it seems, in their overtures to the SLFP, and the latter seems to recognize that the best way to bring the opposition together is to agree on a common agitation on the basis of these three issues. We have also appealed to the Tamil and Muslim organizations to come together.

All the Tamil groups except the LTTE have agreed nominally to participate in common action, as have the Muslim groups. Only the LTTE has held back because of their sectarian policy. If we establish a common agitation it will have the possibility of mobilizing people.

We are against coalition in government of course; it is unity in action we propose — meetings, demonstrations, strikes, to build up a mass movement to defeat the government. There is some hope here and already a common meeting is planned. ★