

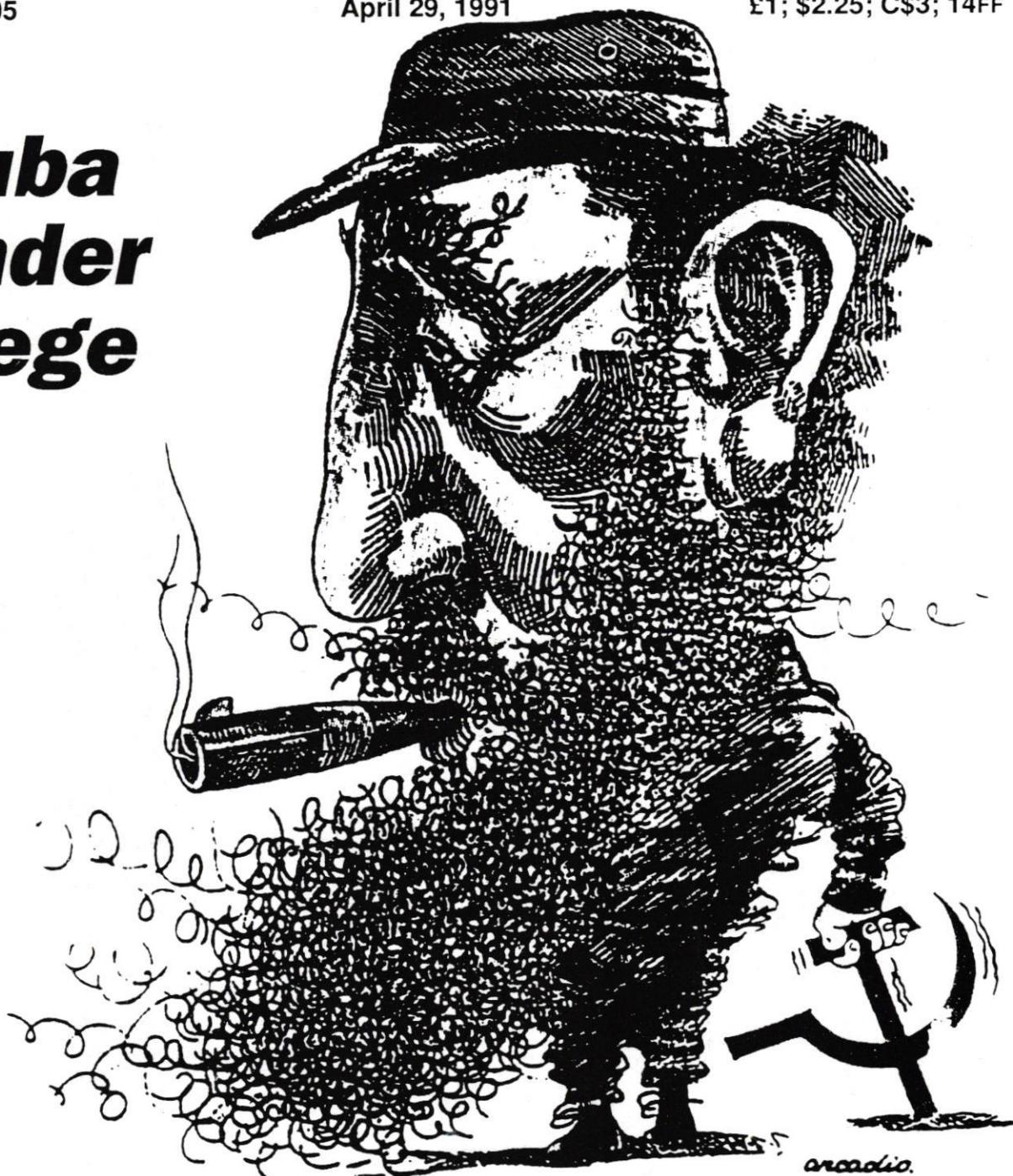
International VIEWPOINT

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Cuba under siege



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International Viewpoint sends Mayday greetings to all its readers!
(And reminds them that subscriptions received before the end of May will be exempt from the price rises that take effect as of the next issue....).

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The Kurdish cause is ours!

THE GULF WAR has finished without the promised showdown between Saddam's dictatorship and imperialism taking place. However the war has sharply accentuated national and religious divisions in Iraq. As it turns out it is neither the United States nor Saddam nor their various allies who are paying the price for the war; it is the Kurds who have picked up the bill. Hundreds of thousands of Kurds have had to flee towards the Turkish and Iranian borders to escape extermination by Saddam's troops.

FUAT ORÇUN

first step towards the creation of an autonomous or independent Kurdish state. But what is really under discussion is the creation of permanent refugee camps on the border. There the Kurds would be dependent on outside aid for even their most basic requirements, in a situation of artificial survival, and deprived of their national identity. The comparison with the situation of the Palestinians in their refugee camps is only too obvious.

Furthermore the direct or indirect origins of this proposal, which has been wholeheartedly adopted by Britain and, with some reservations, by the United States, are open to great suspicion. It can even be said that Saddam himself, by chasing the Kurds to the borders, has put this scheme on the agenda. In 1988, following the Halabja massacre, nearly 60,000 Kurds took refuge in Turkey, and half of them remain there, living in refugee camps. Saddam had no complaints about this. He got rid of some of his Kurdish problem and at the same time gave Turkey — which has been solidly pro-American throughout the war — a poisoned gift.

The second idea is that of the overthrow of Saddam. Insofar as order is restored, and the integrity of Iraq preserved, a plot or a "democratic" referendum could put an end to the much-hated dictator.

Narrow nationalism

We do not have a crystal ball with which to predict postwar developments. However, what is perfectly clear is that without solutions to the region's chronic problems, the nightmare is set to continue. All those who saw in Saddam an anti-imperialist symbol of the unity of the Arab nation have fallen victim to their narrow nationalism. The present silence of those who yesterday demonstrated with pictures of Saddam is bitter in the extreme.

The traditional leaders of the Kurdish national movement have never gone into battle unless they believed that they had the green light from imperialism. The Turkish president Turgut Özal had already smelt the wind and invited Kurdish leaders to Ankara for talks on a future Kurdish state, which, if not independent, would be at least autonomous. He has even decreed

certain rights for the Kurds of Turkey.

But, as in 1970 during the previous revolt led by Barzani, after the same kind of victories, the Kurdish people now finds itself disarmed in front of its butchers. The chief weakness of the Kurdish movement are the conciliatory outlook of its traditional leaderships.

These latter are rooted in tribal relations and have been unable to gain sufficient political support for the legitimacy of their struggle among the workers of the countries in which they find themselves. If this remains the case, and if no democratic alternative arises in the dominant nations, the Kurdish nation will find it impossible to create the conditions for its self-determination when confronted with the regular armies of the region.

But whatever the nature of its leadership, there is an urgent need now to respond to the danger of the extermination of the Kurds. The Kurds' right to existence must be protected through a broad-based mobilization. There needs to be an international campaign for the Kurds to be allowed to return to their homes.

But without any delay, all internationally recognized rights must be granted to the Kurds and adequate material aid supplied. The allies of the Gulf war have a particular responsibility to its victims. Turkey must open its frontiers and recognize citizenship rights in accordance with international agreements until the Kurds are able to go back home.

However the urgent humanitarian needs should not lead us to forget the need for political solutions. There is a need for support to all forces working to overthrow Saddam and install a democratic regime — not in the interests of the imperialists, but in that of the region's peoples.

The Kurdish question has often been overshadowed. But it will be at the centre of the democratization of the region.

The Kurds have been conquered and massacred. Their defeat will also be ours. Their leadership's policy of reliance on imperialism was wrong, but the cause itself is just and is ours. ★



Who are the war criminals?

THOSE fine souls, the European Community governments, have proposed that Saddam Hussein be put on trial for "crimes against humanity." This will no doubt be a great comfort for the millions of Kurds who are currently living through yet another nightmare. But at least the crusaders for peace, democracy and the rights of peoples, led by Bush, Major, Mitterrand and the delightful Norman Schwarzkopf can sleep soundly at night. After Operation Desert Storm we now have Operation Manna for Kurdistan. Saddam Hussein is more horrible than ever and the West remains its profoundly humanist self. All is in order in the New World Order, founded, in Bush's own words, on the "peaceful settlement of disputes" (sic) and "just treatment of all peoples."¹

SALAH JABER

IRONY seems the only outlet for the impotent rage which the terrible outcome of the imperialist military action against Iraq inspires. To the massacre directly perpetrated during the six weeks of coalition fury against Iraq and the Iraqis, are added the apocalyptic ecological and economic consequences of the "surgical war" in Iraq and Kuwait, and six weeks of carnage (up to now) by Baghdad's troops against the Kurdish and Arab populations of their own country, leading to the gigantic problem of millions of refugees fleeing from the Ba'athist terror in truly tragic conditions. All this to restore to a few hundred thousand Kuwaitis, subjects of a despotic princely family, a sovereignty over their oil-gorged little patch of desert that is even more illusory than before.

Today, the western governments are preoccupied with the dramatic fate of the Kurdish people. Their reasons are not entirely unselfish. The awful plight of the Iraqi Kurds also serves to distract attention from the overall balance sheet of the coalition's military operation. The Kurdish regions were spared the six weeks of bombing. The massive flight of a terrified population from Saddam Hussein's advancing army serves to underline once more the vile nature of his regime. Here the West seeks to find an after-the-fact justification for Operation Desert Storm.

True, at the same time, the Kurds' new tragedy highlights the inaction of the coalition forces who were and are in a position to dictate terms to Saddam Hussein. The latter has even accepted United Nations' Security Council resolution 687, which should carry as its inscription the

famous Roman saying, *Vae victis* — "woe to the vanquished."² But the western chancelleries have their line ready: non-interference — a highly flexible variable that can justify on requirement peaceful coexistence and the worst atrocities.

A master of grandiloquent hypocrisy

The French president Mitterrand, that master of grandiloquent hypocrisy, has added a note of which he is particularly proud: the "duty of humanitarian interference." That is to say, the duty to ensure to the disaster-struck populations the means to remain on their territory. The fundamental aim of this (in case it has escaped anyone) is to avoid massive exoduses which, as we know, end up feeding the flood of immigrants from the Third World towards the West, whose prosperity has been built on their own distress. More immediately there is a need to stop the Iraqi Kurds from leaving their lands under Iraqi Arab control for those under Turkish or Iranian domination, a development that would render even more explosive one of the most iniquitous "national questions" of this century.

It is simply revolting to listen to the western governments generously handing out plaudits to Iran and the Turkish ally for their great humanism. Apparently the Kurdish people should now feel gratitude to these two of their oppressors. They are to feel particularly grateful to a Turkish government whose soldiers have not hesitated to fire on panic-stricken

crowds of Kurds, in order to prevent them from reaching their compatriots' territories now under the Turkish jackboot. And they should surely thank the Turkish government for having finally passed a law allowing the Kurds to speak their own language to each other!

The hypocrisy is limitless. These people, whose latest enthusiasm is to throw stones at Saddam Hussein for his oppression of the Kurds, pretend to know nothing about the oppression of the same people in Turkey and Iran, which is no less harsh than in Iraq. These same people, who just yesterday had no problem getting along with Saddam Hussein, now want to put him on trial for his crimes, and this at a time when they themselves have just committed a terrible crime in this region of the world, a crime whose final cost, when it can be counted, will be dizzying. They today reproach Saddam Hussein for doing what they wished him to do, and for which they have provided the means.

Even some of the warmongering editorialists of the American press are beginning to bitterly face up to the facts; thus William Safire of the *New York Times*: "Masoud Barzani of the Kurds knew he could defeat Saddam Hussein's war-weakened forces in the rugged hills if the United States denied the dictator use of the skies. The Kurds would then control the oil fields of Iraq and could negotiate autonomy. But that was when George Bush got cold feet....It turns out he did not want the Iraqi people to rebel; he merely wanted the military to change dictators....But by changing his mind about protecting Kurdish skies, the president effectively intervened on the side of Saddam Hussein. Once he gave the weapon of gunship terror from the air to Baghdad's merciless butcher, Mr. Bush abandoned tens of thousands of Kurdish fighters to death and their families to starvation."³

No change in Bush's attitude

This says it all; both the real reasons why the coalition wanted the Kurds to be defeated and the real complicity of Bush and co. with Saddam Hussein.⁴ Safire's only, and predictable, mistake is to believe that Bush, in ignominiously leaving the Kurds to their fate, had "changed his attitude", or to put it another way that he had ever had any intention of protecting them. One of the "president's men", the ineffable Brent Scowcroft, has stupidly, that is unintentionally, disproved the thesis of Bush's cold feet. "Mr. Scowcroft said the United States had prepositioned relief supplies in Turkey in anticipation of refugees at the end of the Gulf war, and in hindsight, probably should have had more supplies waiting."⁵

1. Speech on April 13, 1991 in Montgomery, Alabama.
2. See *International Viewpoint* no. 204, April 15, 1991.
3. *International Herald Tribune*, April 5, 1991.
4. *IV* no. 203, April 1, 1991.

In sum, the United States knew perfectly well that their Gulf war would lead to a new tragedy for the Kurdish people — certainly a far more deserving object of compassion than the Kuwaiti exiles. Tents and supplies indicated what these Lords of the Earth had in mind, as they had to the Palestinians a short while ago. The fact that so many worthy souls who supported the anti-Saddam crusade believed in good faith that the coalition would raise the flags of democracy and the rights of peoples in the region is a sign of their naivety and complete ignorance of the real motives of the western powers.

The problem is that the Kurds themselves were taken in. Once more the Iraqi Kurds allowed themselves to think that the West would help them throw off the yoke. They forgot the way in which Washington abandoned them in 1975, after an agreement to that effect was signed by Baghdad and the Shah of Iran; at that time several hundred thousand Kurds had to seek refuge in Iran. They also overlooked the more recent lesson of the West's acquiescence in Saddam Hussein's gas attack on the Kurdish people in 1988.

But one cannot reproach a people for its repeated illusions when it is headed by leaderships whose visceral opportunism constantly reproduces false hopes. Thus Talabani, the chief of the Kurdish Patriotic Union (KPU) has publicly expressed his desire that the Turkish president, the grotesque Özal, should be the Kurds' spokesman! Such is the fate of this part of the world, where the leaders of two peoples, the Palestinians and the Kurds, who

are subject to several oppressors, ally themselves in an unceasing round with one of their oppressors against another, hoping always for salvation by the biggest oppressor of them all, the United States.

It must be admitted, however, that this time, the illusions of the Kurdish people do not count for much in the tragedy which has just befallen them. The void left by the short-lived withdrawal of Saddam Hussein's troops, required for more urgent repressive tasks in the south of Iraq, was an irresistible invitation to a population exasperated by its endless martyrdom to rise up in revolt. They had to seize the moment. Furthermore, the outcome was not pre-determined: nobody could predict with certainty that the Ba'athist regime would be able to stand up to a generalized popular insurrection after the crushing defeat of its army by the coalition. In these conditions the risks attendant on rebellion had to be taken, with or without illusions on the subject of external support.

Unfortunately, with the coalition's complicity, Saddam's henchmen have for the moment proved the stronger. For how long is another, still undecided, matter. The Ba'athist regime is fighting with the energy of a regime with its back to the wall. Its men are unleashing on the population of their own country the same fury as they themselves experienced, almost without reaction, at the hands of the coalition.

But every day that passes sees the common fate of all of Iraq's inhabitants get worse, making heavier the apocalyptic

disaster inflicted on them on the combined responsibility of Saddam Hussein and the imperialist coalition. The flames of revolt in Iraq will be much harder to put out than the burning oil wells of Kuwait. New flames will ceaselessly flare up from the embers of the despair of a people, of whom the Kurds form only the minority that is today most visible in the western media.

The rest of Iraq is suffering just as much, if not more, than Kurdistan. But the governments in Washington, London and Paris prefer to pass over this disaster in silence since it is the direct result of their "liberation". This is shown by the lack of publicity given to the explosive report of the United Nations commission of inquiry sent to Iraq to evaluate the consequences of the war for that country.

Iraqis face famine and epidemics

This report was presented to the Security Council on March 22 by the UN's under general secretary, the Finn Martti Ahtisaari. He explained straightforwardly that Iraq had been thrown back to "the pre-industrial age" by "near-apocalyptic" bombing that had seriously affected food supplies, agriculture, water, electricity, hygiene and health. He stated that if a humanitarian operation was not launched urgently in these different domains an "imminent catastrophe" would strike Iraq, with terrible and massive human losses through epidemics and famine.

The president of the American organization, Physicians for Human Rights, Dr. Jack Geiger, returning from Iraq, estimated that the number of deaths due to this catastrophe would soon reach "many tens of thousands".

This appalling reality, currently concealed, was the subject recently of an excellent — and lone — article by Jessica Matthews in the *Washington Post*. It ended with a series of highly relevant questions:

"With whom were the allies at war, Saddam Hussein or all Iraqis? If not all Iraqis, which? If the goal of getting rid of Saddam Hussein has failed, at least for the time being, should geopolitical or humanitarian concerns take precedence? Specifically, if epidemics and starvation take hold before the terms of the ceasefire's 120-day schedule are met, which is more important? How far does America's and other coalition members' responsibility extend for Iraq's suffering? If Iraq cannot pay for what its people need while also paying reparations, what should be done?"

"Finally, unavoidably, Was it worth it?"⁵

And let us add a question of our own: who should be the first to be tried for crimes against humanity? ★

5. *IHT*, April 15, 1991.

6. *IHT*, April 17, 1991.



Protests snowball

THE steep price rises carried through by the government of Valentin Pavlov on April 2 have considerably increased the tension in a Soviet society which is now experiencing an unprecedented rise in workers' protests and actions. From Minsk to Kemerovo, from Vorkuta to Tbilisi, a wave of strikes and demonstrations is now putting forward demands of an explicitly political character.

POUL-FUNDER LARSEN

ON APRIL 9 Gorbachev tried to regain the initiative: at a meeting of the Federation Council, where all the republics plus the Union leadership are represented, he announced a new package of economic and political measures to stabilize the situation.¹ It is a plan which combines authoritarian interference with political and democratic rights with a strong pro-market tendency in the economic sphere: "What we have in mind is developing active steps towards destatization and privatization, first of all inside trade and social provisions, in the sphere of daily services, and in connection with small and middle sized industries, in order to develop entrepreneurship, de-monopolize the economy, support the small and medium businesses, speed up the formation of exchanges for goods and stocks, and facilitate the transition to a convertible rouble."²

Market prices for all goods in two years

This involves a rapid shift to market prices for all goods over the next year and a half, the immediate drawing up of schemes for large-scale privatizations and a systematic encouragement of foreign investments, through a modification of laws restricting the transfer of profits and a further de-centralization of foreign trade.

These liberal economic ideas are bound up with a call for strongly centralized control of the political system. This would include a so-called "moratorium until the end of the year on strikes, meetings and other political actions, which are destabilizing the situation in the country."³ But it is far from assured that the Kremlin leadership can mobilize the necessary support within the bureaucracy to carry through its plans — and it is almost certain that they will meet with strong opposition from the many sections of the population affected.

6 Previous attempts at economic change through administrative measures —

including the aborted price rises of May 1990, the money reform of January this year, the unpopular 5% purchase tax and the recent price reform — have created deep suspicion, and indeed hatred, towards government economic policy.

Both the supporters of Boris Yeltsin (president of the Russian Republic and Gorbachev's main opponent) and the conservatives are trying to take advantage of the situation, demanding that Gorbachev resign immediately. Yeltsin still occupies a key position, and the Russian People's Congress of April 5 granted him the right to rule Russia by decree.

Conservative forces lack credibility

The prospects for the conservatives, however, look bleak. They lack both a credible project, a leader and a minimum of credibility in the eyes of the public. The limited success of demonstrations against the price rises summoned by conservative forces bears witness to this, as does the split within the Russian Communist Party faction in the Russian People's Congress, where a sizeable group of RCP deputies formed a new group "Communists for Democracy" which stated its support for Yeltsin.

Meanwhile the miners' strike has now been going on for six weeks and political demands are more and more coming to the fore in their struggle.

At the outset the strike was a reaction to social grievances in the mining regions and a protest against the failure of bureaucratic *perestroika*. In many ways the social and material situation in the mining districts is as bad as before the 1989 strike. Food is incredibly scarce: "bitter words (were spoken) about the extremely serious situation of the inhabitants of the coal-mining regions: the meagre ration of the miners is 21 grams of meat, 11 grams of grits and 25 grams of fats per day, one egg every three days and no cheese or butter."⁴

The construction of houses and flats in the mining areas has come to a virtual

standstill, and thousands of workers are still living in wooden huts. These social conditions and the disastrous environmental situation is seriously affecting the health of the people living in these areas; in Kusbass, 20% of newborn children have some kind of defect, and in Donetsk it is estimated that among the school-children only one in five is in a satisfactory state of health.

After the strikes of July 1989 the miners' movement went through a downturn. In various mines many conservative officials on the management bodies and members of the Workers' Collective Councils (STKs) were ousted. The strike committees were transformed into permanent structures, often with considerable influence in their region. But the liberal tendency within the movement and the purely trade unionist orientation mapped out by some of its leaders did not offer a coherent perspective for action to unite the different coalfields. During 1990 there was only one major action by the miners: a one-day walkout on July 11 — a year after the 1989 strikes — which coincided with the 28th Congress of the CPSU and raised a series of political demands, including de-politicization of the enterprises, the army and the KGB, as well as a call for the resignation of the Ryzhkov government.

Demands for Gorbachev's resignation

In January this year, following the bloody attack by pro-centralist forces in the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, the Workers Committees in Kusbass and Donbas called for a political strike, but the call was not heeded. However the demand for action was growing in the mining regions. The miners' fury is clearly directed at the centre and expressed in demands for the resignation of Gorbachev and the dissolution of the Supreme Soviet. Not surprisingly Gorbachev and the government of Valentin Pavlov have rejected any negotiations concerning these political demands, while granting some economic concessions.

As the strike unfolds it is also becoming less evident what kind of political alternative the miners' leaders have in mind. At a press conference on April 4, Anatoly Malykhin, a leader of the Kusbass miners, stated: "From our point of view only a coalition government, trusted by the people, can lead the country out of its crisis."⁵

1. It is not clear whether these measures should be seen as a continuation of the plan "Main guidelines for stabilization of the economy and transition to the market" adopted by the Supreme Soviet in October 1990 (*Pravda*, October 18, 1990), or an entirely new anti-crisis programme.

2. Mikhail Gorbachev in his speech to the Federation Council, *Izvestiya*, April 10, 1991.

3. *Ibid.* In the aftermath of the 1989 strikes similar, but not strictly enforced, anti-strike legislation was introduced.

4. *Izvestiya*, April 4, 1991.

5. *Ibid.* April 5, 1991.

This idea of a coalition is gaining renewed popularity in all camps. Yeltsin used it in a conciliatory speech at the Russian People's Congress on March 29, leaders of "Democratic Russia" such as Yuri Afanasyev are endorsing it, and even Gorbachev himself has voiced similar ideas. However, given the relationship of forces in the Soviet Union today such a government could only be headed by one person — Mikhail Gorbachev — and would have to rely heavily on the centre's bureaucratic apparatus, a perspective certainly not in tune with the thrust of the miners' demands.

Government hosts stage-managed negotiations

On April 2-3 representatives of some of the mining regions met with Pavlov's government. The miners were offered a hundred percent wage increase over the next year, linked to a rise in productivity, the right of the miners collectives to sell 5-7% of coal produced on the market without state interference plus some improvements in the social sphere.

In the end, however, this turned out to be largely a show staged by the government to prove their "good intentions". Of the 400 people present in the Kremlin's Sverdlovsk hall only 195 were representatives from the mines, and of these only 48 came from mines that were actually on strike. No wonder that leaders of the Vorkuta and Kusbass miners, who did not actually participate in the negotiations, rejected the offer, whereas some minor coalfields in the north decided to return to work.

So far the attitude of the official trade unions, the VKP, has been one of cautious support for the miners and clearcut criticism of the price rises⁶. At the end of March they granted the miners 200,000 roubles and called on Gorbachev to enter into negotiations. Following the "negotiations" of April 2/3 the central trade unions expressed slight optimism, but also demanded "the immediate preparation of a thorough restructuring of the system of wages." One VKP representative claimed that all wages should be increased by 70-100% and threatened that if this did not take place there would be a demonstration against price rises in Red Square on May 1.

However, in a recent speech to the plenary meeting of the VKP, Prime Minister Pavlov ruled out any wage increases which are not linked to a proportional increase in output. He went on to attack the miners strike in his usual crude fashion: "I think it is no secret to you that in the Donetsk Basin special brigades of 200-250 people are driving around in buses, blocking the mines at work — this is not done by the miners. It is representatives of Rukh [the Ukrainian nationalists] who are calling for strikes. Also in the Kusbass mines there are a kind of strike

ringleaders, but these commandos are headed by some deputies of the Supreme Soviet of the Russian Federation and of the Oblast [district] soviet."⁷

So far the government has refrained from threats of violence to end the strike. It is for the time being more likely that the government will try to co-opt part of the strike movement, while wearing down the militant regions.

But given the tensions in Soviet society after the price rises it is far from certain that time is on the side of Gorbachev and Pavlov. Since the beginning of April a snowball of protests has been rolling and it could soon turn into an avalanche.

The strongest outburst came where it could have been least expected — in Minsk, the capital of Byelorussia — which was formerly seen as a conservative stronghold. The protests erupted on April 4, when workers in a series of factories there went on strike and thousands assembled in the Lenin Square in the city centre. It was a protest against the price rises; as one striker explained: "I earn 200 roubles a month. I am alone with two children. How can I feed them, when all goods for children have become several times more expensive, and when a lunch in the factory canteen has risen to three roubles?"⁸ The social protest was accompanied by political demands akin to those of the miners: the resignation of Gorbachev and the dissolution of both the all-Union and Byelorussian Supreme Soviets.

Threat of political general strike in Byelorussia

After the meeting of the Federation Council on April 9 the strikes and demonstrations resumed. An estimated 200,000 workers, including those of the largest factories in Minsk, the car factory and the tractor works, took part in actions on April 10-11, and the workers of other cities in Byelorussia, such as the miners in Soligorsk, joined in. The strikes were called off when Byelorussian government agreed to negotiate with the strike committees, but the threat of a political general strike on April 23, if the negotiations fail, is still looming.

Other important regions are on the brink of entering the struggle. From the Urals, one of the Soviet Union's main industrial centres, the government has received repeated warnings. On March 27, the metalworkers in Sverdlovsk held a two-hour warning stoppage in support of the miners, and several bauxite mines have been out on strike in the same area. Delegates from some of the main industries in the Urals (for example, the steelworks in Nizhnyi Tagil) have participated in meetings of the Kusbass strike committees.

The backbone of industry in the Urals are the huge metallurgical works which are seriously affected by the reduction of coal deliveries from the Kusbass in partic-

ular⁹. On April 10, at a regional meeting in Chelyabinsk, representatives of the workers in the metal industry expressed worries about the situation, but at the same time stated their sympathy for the miners' struggle. The meeting demanded that the government adopt measures to improve the social situation in the region before April 20, or face actions, including strikes.

Likewise in Siberia a number of strikes have occurred. The nickel-miners of Norilsk in northern Siberia stopped working on March 28 and gave in on April 5 after promises from the management of a 100% wage increase. The oil workers in the Tyumen' region, the Soviet Union's main oil field, demanded at the beginning of April that the government should give them the right to dispose of 20% of their production; if not there is a risk of a "social explosion".

Liberal dream of far eastern adventures

Symbolically, in the midst of this crisis Gorbachev left for Japan to pay the first ever-official visit by a Soviet leader to that country. Sweet dreams of far eastern economic adventures, through a link with the economies of Japan and the countries of the Pacific Rim, are a recurrent theme in liberal thinking in the Soviet Union. Some initiatives have been taken such as the setting up of an economic free zone around the port of Nahodka on the Pacific Coast; and many high hopes in Siberia are bound up with these developments. Many sober-minded observers, however, have pointed out that an "economic miracle" in the far east is unlikely for now because of the disarray in the Soviet economy in general and the weak economic links between Japan and the Soviet Union in particular.

In any case, this visit comes at a time when Gorbachev's basic pro-liberal economic trajectory has been confirmed once more. The great unknown is whether he will be able to draw the necessary support behind the new emergency measures at a time when the central power structures seem to be almost paralyzed. The first and indeed most mighty opponent will be the Soviet working class exasperated by the crisis and showing in some sectors a new-found militancy, which could change the whole political scene in the months to come. ★

6. The central trade unions were renamed "the General Confederation of Trade Unions of the USSR" (VKP) at their 19th Congress in October 1990 in an attempt to escape the connotations of conservative stagnation linked to the old name "the All-Union Central Association of Trade Unions" (VTsSPS).

7. *Pravda*, April 12, 1991.

8. *Izvestiya*, April 5, 1991.

9. According to some figures the metal industry has suffered losses of two billion roubles during the strike. The minister for the steel processing industry has demanded that the strikes should be immediately stopped, even if this meant a Union-wide state of emergency.

After the elections — the “Bulgarian scenario”

ALTHOUGH a far cry from the 99.9% of the vote it had been accustomed to receiving in previous polls, the support of around two thirds of the electorate (on a turn out of well over 90%) was sufficient to guarantee the Party of Labour of Albania (PLA) a convincing majority in the country's March 31 parliamentary elections. In Albania's first multiparty elections since December 1945 more than 1000 candidates from 11 parties contested the 250 seats in the new People's Assembly.

BERNARD GIBBONS

HOWEVER, both the various PLA satellite parties and the anti-regime Republican Party, which has not succeeded in carving out any clear profile for itself, were irrelevant to the final outcome; everybody knew that the contest for power was between the PLA — the agents of liberation from the fascist occupation in 1944, but also the brutal overseers since then of a Stalinist tyranny of almost self-parodic proportions — and the Albanian Democratic Party (ADP).

The latter was only formed in December 1990 but is already the focus of immense hope amongst the youth and urban population of Europe's poorest country.

Those hopes were disappointed by the final result. Despite sweeping successes for the ADP in the urban areas — leading to the defeat of Albanian president, and PLA leader, Ramiz Alia, together with several of his “reformist” allies — the PLA's strength in the rural towns and villages where two thirds of Albania's population lives was sufficient to carry it to victory with 168 of 250 seats, against 75 for the ADP.

These were the final scores after the second round of voting on April 7 — the Omonia party, representing the Greek minority, won five seats and the hard line Stalinist “Union of Veterans” one.

Confounding the predictions of both western sentimentalists and the PLA — when it was still trying to justify the one party system — support for a restoration of Albania's pre-war monarchy appears to be practically non-existent.

8 The victory was a bittersweet one for the PLA, with the urban scores indicating

the extent to which it has lost control amongst youth, workers and even sections of the bureaucracy. Disillusionment and anger amongst the ADP's supporters rapidly reflected itself in demonstrations and rioting, particularly in the north of the country. In Shkoder, a hotbed of opposition and the traditional center of Roman Catholic intellectualism in Albania, 4 people were killed (including an ADP leader) and 58 wounded, while troops fired on crowds in the capital, Tirana, and elsewhere.

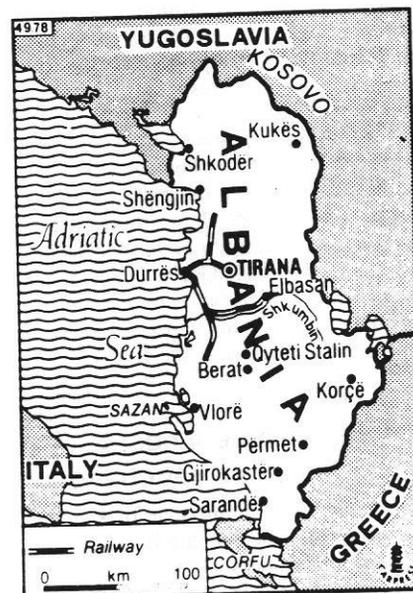
The recently formed grouping of free trade unions, with the support of the ADP, called a general strike for Thursday April 4 which appears to have been patchily successful.

Opposition adapts to mood of streets

The ADP had to some extent functioned as a “loyal opposition” in the months up to the elections, receiving both funding and an organizational infrastructure from the state. Its leaders are in the main ex-PLA. After the elections, however, it appeared to be stepping up its anti-PLA rhetoric and actions in an attempt to ride the mood of the streets, while ruling out entry into the coalition government that PLA prime minister Fatos Nano now desperately wants to see.

The ADP has now announced that it will boycott the new parliament until a satisfactory enquiry is conducted into the Shkoder deaths.

The backdrop to the current crisis is a nine month period of turmoil following the appearance of the first cracks in the PLA's Stalinist monolith in July 1990,



when thousands of people attempted to flee Albania through seeking refuge in foreign embassies (see IV 189).

Since then it is estimated that 80,000 people have fled Albania, mainly to Italy or Greece, and there have been successive waves of unrest and rioting.

In the face of this, Alia had been forced to make concession after concession to the emergent democratic opposition — the March 31 multiparty elections were supposed to represent the pinnacle of this process.

The PLA has proposed constitutional amendments eliminating references to Marxism-Leninism, socialism and the leading role of the party, and there have been significant economic concessions, with greater autonomy accorded to private landholdings and the possibility of peasants selling surplus produce on the free market.

The ban on religious practice — a legacy of Albania's attempt to ape Mao's Cultural Revolution during its period of alignment with China in the 1960s — has been lifted.

Meanwhile, top party and state officials have been retired or dismissed, a string of other democratic and human rights concessions have been made, and a more pragmatic foreign policy pursued, although the central foreign policy goal of joining the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe remains unfulfilled.

However, Alia's deft hand in dealing with foreign relations or inner party rivalries cannot conceal what appears as a loss of internal control. With the opposition now challenging the very legitimacy of the PLA, Alia has gone as far as he can for the moment in the direction of breaking with the Stalinist legacy of former president Enver Hoxha, who died in 1985.

Alia has made a Gorbachev-like transi-

tion from hero to villain, but in a drastically telescoped time-scale. As recently as the beginning of this year, his name was chanted during opposition demonstrations; the outcome and aftermath of the elections has changed all that.

The programmatic statements put out by the ADP reveal more nuanced and pragmatic positions than is indicated by the familiar rhetoric about an "end to communism" and "rejoining the west" — rhetoric which is hardly surprising given the legacy of the PLA's caricature of "Marxism-Leninism".

Their most prominent leaders are Sali Berisha, a surgeon, and Gramoz Pashko, an economist, said to have been a close friend of disgraced former Prime Minister Mehmet Shehu, who supposedly committed suicide in 1981 following one of the PLA's many internecine struggles.

The division of the Albanian nation

Berisha appears to strike a more nationalist tone than Pashko and his name indicates that he is of northern Gheg, or possibly Kosovar, origin. He has made fiery statements on the question of the persecuted Albanian population of Kosovo in Yugoslavia, going far beyond the mild positions of the PLA, which he has criticized for aiding Kosovo in words alone. The ADP newspaper, *Rilindja Demokratike* (Democratic Awakening) proclaimed in its first issue on January 4 that "the Albanian Democratic Party cannot accept the division of the Albanian nation as permanent".

This issue also carried an interview with Pashko on the Albanian economy, in which he defended the practice of receiving aid from abroad. Subsequent issues of the newspaper have included articles on the plight of Albanian women and attacks on bureaucratic nepotism and privilege.

The ADP's political programme, published on February 1, is in substance not radically different from the PLA's, published a month earlier. It called for the introduction of a market economy but also for the maintenance of state enterprises, together with new cooperative and private enterprises.

Land would be distributed to the peasants, who could choose whether to farm it individually or cooperatively, but the land of the large pre-1944 estates would not be returned to its former owners.

The programme also called for a reduction of the working week from 48 to 40 hours, a reduction in mandatory military service and "support for the struggle of the people of Kosovo for self-determination".

Whatever the optimistic declarations made to pre-election crowds, and the flights of fancy of the western press, ADP leaders privately conceded in advance that they faced an uphill task in unseating the PLA, even though they had succeeded in

forcing the latter to postpone the elections, originally scheduled for early February, to give them more time to prepare.

What then were the factors in the PLA victory? Obviously its omnipresence in every area of society for 45 years, its identification with national independence and its specific role in Albanian history give it a real base of support which is undeniable.

Nothing could be more ridiculous than the attempts of the western media to attribute Albania's dire poverty and backwardness uniquely to 45 years of "Communism" — pre-war Albania was little more than a semi-feudal rural slum, the first railway being built only under the Italian occupation in 1942.

Nor can the PLA's strength in the countryside simply be attributed to rural conservatism or fear of the party apparatus, real as those factors are. Rigidly faithful to the Stalinist model in the political sphere, Hoxha had been something of a heretic in the area of economic development. The utopia he envisaged was an agrarian-based one, and he eschewed the model of heavy industrialization followed in the rest of Eastern Europe.

Alia has also attempted with some success to woo the peasantry through a programme which would give the cooperatives more control over production and allow them to develop new organizational methods. In the past few months, considerable sums by Albanian standards have been invested in new agricultural sectors.

An element largely overlooked in many analyses of the election results was the ethnic factor; although Alia is himself of Gheg origin, the PLA remains above all the party of the Tosk south, which since 1944 has dominated all spheres of life in the country.

This factor reflects the wartime division within the Albanian resistance, over-

whelmingly dominated by the PLA in the south, but in the north tending more towards the monarchist faction of "King" Zogu — a military adventurer who destroyed Albania's previous brief experiment with parliamentary democracy in the early 1920s.

The interpenetration of traditional clan links with a classical Stalinist *nomenklatura* gives an especially Byzantine aspect to Albanian politics. The prospect of secession by the Gheg region, north of the river Skumbi which divides the country, is now being mooted by some of the Shkoder activists.

Whilst the opposition had previously talked about Albania facing a choice between the Hungarian and Rumanian paths from Stalinism, they now talk of a "Bulgarian scenario"; a ruling party of Stalinist origin wins a crushing victory in free elections but subsequently finds itself unable to govern because of significant mass opposition.

Evocations of this example are double-edged for the opposition however; the crucial factor in the Bulgarian scenario was the continuing denial of western aid to the country after its elections.

This had nothing to do with the question of democracy; as the *Financial Times* baldly puts it, "Bulgaria's Socialists received no assistance from the west because they failed to introduce radical market reforms aimed at paving the way for a market economy" (April 3, 1991).

The same scenario, the refusal of western aid unless a wrenching turn to a market economy is made, will be applied in Albania to the PLA — but it will also be applied in the event of the ADP coming to power, which would mean the latter having to break with many elements of its current political and economic programme, and turn against its current base amongst the youth and the urban working class. ★

Obituary — Sadik Premtaj (1915-1991)

SADIK Premtaj, one of the founders of the Party of Labour of Albania (PLA), who joined the Fourth International in 1948 before subsequently becoming a supporter of the International Revolutionary Marxist Tendency of Michel Pablo, died on April 7. He had lived in exile in France since 1947.

Born in 1915, Premtaj became an antiroyalist activist and then a Communist while a student in Tirana. He was involved from the beginning in the resistance to Mussolini's fascist occupation, and in 1941 he enthusiastically participated in the foundation of the PLA. However, in the course of the next few years, Enver Hoxha, aided at the time by the Yugoslav Communist Party, tightened his grip on the PLA and eliminated all significant sources of opposition.

Having seen all his friends in the PLA killed, and threatened with the same fate himself, Premtaj decided to escape to Italy. His faith in what he initially believed to be the "true Communists" of the Italian Communist Party was swiftly dashed, however, and he soon discovered that the cancer of Stalinism had infected the whole of the international Communist movement. His experience led him to adhere to the Trotskyist Fourth International, where he was known under the name of "Victor".

In exile, he had no contact with his family in Albania for almost 40 years. Enver Hoxha pursued him with a vengeance and tried on several occasions to have him assassinated. To the end of his life, Sadik Premtaj remained faithful to the belief that there can be no socialism without democracy. ★

Solidarity versus competition

The following interview with Hector de la Cueva, adviser at the Centre for Research on Labour and Trade Union Aid (CILAS) in Mexico, was conducted by Gonzalo Molina in February 1991.

WHAT will the "Latin American Initiative Plan" (LAIP) proposed by Bush mean concretely for Latin America, and more particularly Mexico?

The United States is seeking to respond to growing world economic competition and to assert its hegemony at all levels. Europe is going forward in the constitution of a more united entity and Japan has formed a block around itself in Asia, the United States is thus trying to create another in the American continent.

The LAIP is intended to overcome the existing obstacles which would prevent the multinational companies and the US government from organizing the economy of the whole of the continent according to their needs. When the United States speaks of "free trade" agreements or of the creation of a "big market" with the Latin American countries, this has nothing to do with the accords signed in Canada; the initiative is not going to create a big market, because the relations which exist between the United States and Latin America are marked by inequality.

■ What is the real goal of the US government?

First, it wants to control the future potential market. Then, and this is essential, the US wants to be able to count on cheap labour to be able to compete with the other economic blocs; in other words, it is not about winning new markets, but primarily about being in a better position to compete economically. Finally, the United States wants to exercise a downward pressure on the standard of living and the gains of the working class in Canada and in the United States itself. The Free Trade Agreement signed between the United States and Canada has already meant unemployment for thousands of Canadian workers (15,000 redundancies are spoken of). The Canadian bourgeoisie has taken advantage of the signature of



this agreement to make attacks on the standard of living of the workers, their gains, benefits, social security and so on, which were better than those of the US workers. We are witnessing then a process of levelling down of the standard of living which, with the Free Trade Agreements, will descend from the north towards the south.

The multinationals exert blackmail against the workers; the Canadians will be forced to accept worse working conditions, otherwise — and this is where the blackmail comes in — the factories will close and go south to the United States. If the US workers do not accept lower wages, the firms will close down and move out, and transform themselves into *maquiladoras*², in northern Mexico or wherever the labour force is cheaper — the Americas initiative has a tendency to become continental.

■ If this agreement has already been turned against the interests of the workers of two of the seven most powerful countries of the western world, what will happen to the Latin American workers?

In Mexico, as elsewhere in Latin America, the signing of the free trade agreements will underpin the maintenance of a very low standard of living, for the only way a country like ours can enter into competition on the open market is through the availability of a cheap labour force. Our government thus tries to keep wages very low.

The workers of the industrialized coun-

tries will see themselves forced to accept worse working conditions, and those of Latin America will hardly be able to survive.

This deterioration is the direct consequence of the economic projects being applied in Latin America — with the multiplication of the *maquiladoras* in Mexico (in a few years, the number of workers employed there has gone from 100,000 to 500,000), where the workers have no social protection and very bad working conditions, the level of trade unionization being very weak. The Mexican workers have despite everything extracted some gains — it is necessary to fight for these to be extended to this sector.

The free trade agreements also affect the small and medium bosses. In Mexico, some industrial branches like those of toys, shoes or textiles have suffered since the beginning of the 1980s because of the changing of the law on foreign investments and the opening of our frontiers — other countries have been able to penetrate our markets. With the Free Trade Agreements this situation is going to worsen; the big multinationals and their local associates will be the main beneficiaries of it.

■ This offensive obviously takes other forms...

We are seeing the emergence of other phenomena, such as privatization on the grand scale. In Mexico, nearly 85% of nationalized enterprises have been sold or put up for sale. There is also the "national agreement on productivity", which seeks to impose norms on the trade unions to increase productivity without wage rises. The labour laws are also being reformed.

At the same time, in some countries some kinds of "social programmes" are applied which, beyond their political objectives, seek to replace rights gained and established by laws and institutions by public charity, with state expenditure supposedly being directed to the aid of the most deprived sectors. This is part of the logic of the dismantling of the *benefactor* state and its replacement by what is called in Mexico the "solidarity state" — a state which is supposed to channel its resources to those most in need. In Mexico there is already a National Programme of Solidarity and in Peru a Social Compensation Programme.

In sum, the United States is trying to put all America on the same level; equalizing of levels of productivity, work methods, and so on. Only the workers will be differentiated; the Mexican workers will still earn 11 or 12 times less than the North Americans.

■ But at exactly what stage is this process of economic integration?

In certain countries, such as Mexico, the negotiations are going forward very quickly. The objectives are well defined; in the last report of his government, Presi-

dent Salinas de Gortari defined things very clearly; "We want Mexico to be part of the 'first world', not the third world". But it is attempting to get there not through the independent development of the country, but, on the contrary, through a total and absolute subordination to US imperialism.

Mexico is trying to enter the "first world" by the same path as Puerto Rico, which is a totally dominated country. The free trade negotiations are a violation of national sovereignty. Mexico also serves as a platform to advance the LAIP in the rest of the continent. Negotiations have recently begun with the countries of Central America; Salinas has travelled in South America to encourage free trade agreements with the countries of that region.

The Mexican government paved the way for the United States, but it hopes also to become a bridge for trade between imperialism and the rest of the continent.

This "free trade" zone has nothing in common with the project of European economic unity. If it is true that in Europe there are also hegemonic temptations on the part of certain countries, the inequalities are not so marked and the countries have a similar level of development — in America this "unity" would be between some industrialized countries and others which are extremely backward, it would be subordinated to the big multinationals of the United States and Canada.

At this level, it is necessary to differentiate between the defence of the rights of workers, even those of Canada and the United States, and the appearance of chauvinist manifestations — campaigns of this type have already been seen, and they certainly do not represent an alternative. So far as Canada is concerned, we can agree with the numerous trade unions which are opposed to integration, but we are not in agreement with opposing "Canadian nationalism" to "Mexican nationalism".

■ Concretely, what should be the response of workers and trade unions to Bush's project?

Contacts, links and meetings between workers and trades unionists of different countries — notably with those of North America, with which the negotiations are most advanced — are beginning to spread; this is the way to find an alternative to respond to the process of integration. In 1990, a meeting of Mexican and Canadian trades unionists took place, ending with a common communiqué concerning the Free Trade Agreement. There has also been a meeting between US and Mexican trade unionists, with some Canadians also present.

In 1991, a Canada/US/Mexico meeting should take place; some meetings of branches or service sectors are planned to seek common solutions and above all to break the competition that the multinationals and imperialism attempt to sow

between the interests of the North American workers and those of Latin America.

The response which the workers must make can be situated at three levels. First, they must show a clear political opposition to the Bush project, for it is by its nature totally antidemocratic — in Mexico, for example, the agreement has never been submitted to the population, or to its political or social representatives; it has been negotiated by the governments, the multinationals and their local acolytes.

Then, it is necessary to underline that this process of integration subordinates the national economies to the big multinational companies. This does not mean having an autarkic position, saying that each country should go its own way, but rather preventing these agreements from blocking the possibility of an independent development of the Latin American countries.

Mexico, for example, could demand that measures of compensation are established in relation to its foreign debt or other elements which have aggravated its economic backwardness; such conditions could be imposed in all the negotiations which are undertaken with other countries.

The economic subordination imposed on Latin America vis-a-vis the United States affects its sovereignty; this could have repercussions in the political domain.

However, to the extent that this project of economic integration advances, and to the extent that the relationship of forces today does not allow its defeat, it is necessary to prepare a practical response.

The social organizations must make concrete propositions for negotiation, for example concerning the labour force. The US is trying to put pressure on Mexico for the agreement to include oil — up to now the Mexican government has refused.

The problem of immigration of Mexican workers to the United States also fits into this framework. It is necessary to fight so that wages are levelled up, not down. If there are agreements on free trade and productivity, it is necessary that the wages go up and that the conditions of work and standard of living are raised to the level of the north. The same goes for the rights of workers and for problems like those of the environment.

Foreign companies subject to severe environmental protection legislation in the United States often shut down and move to Mexico where they dump their toxic waste and contaminate the environment.

The laws should be the same, so that the US bosses cannot escape their own rules and go to pollute elsewhere. Labour legislation and human rights also are more and more violated in our country; the social organizations and the trade unions must demand that they are respected. But all this can only be achieved through struggle.

Everything that is happening in our country is part of a strategy designed by the multinationals; the trade unions and the workers must oppose common strategies to this project. The "multinationalization" of the trade unions has even been suggested, going beyond frontiers.

■ But in the current situation that is not easy...

Effectively, this would be difficult and complicated. In the United States and in Canada, there have already been some experiences of this kind and the results have not been very good — the auto trade union in Canada ended up by separating from its equivalent in the United States. But we can go forward with common actions, common demands, common platforms, cooperation agreements; all this is possible and necessary.

We have already made some steps forward in this direction culminating in the meetings I mentioned. What has been done in relation to Ford is a good example. The Canadian trade union, some sections in the United States and Mexican Ford workers decided that January 8 would henceforth be the international day of Ford workers (on January 8, 1990, the hired thugs of the Mexican Confederation of Workers — CTM — attacked the Ford workers of Cuautitlan, in Mexico, leading to nine injuries and a death). This date has become a symbol and Ford workers in Mexico, the United States and Canada put on a headband with the name of the dead worker; Cleto.

Such an action shows that very concrete international workers' actions can be taken; this case could be extended to different branches and to other countries.

From this we could go forward to symbolic demonstrations and more important actions, and a greater coordination in the sense of meetings between branches. A meeting of the car workers of other countries of the continent, like Brazil, is already planned, as well as in the telecommunications sector; such coordinations could end up with engagements, agreements, declarations or joint actions. It is essential to develop this type of initiative; from this a concrete alternative could emerge, which is not merely ideological.

The workers of the United States and Canada are becoming conscious of this necessity. During a meeting in Minnesota, in the United States, an appeal was launched "For solidarity and against competition". North American trades unionists have understood that the best way to defend all workers is to defend the lowest; only in this way can we defend living standards, and stop blackmail and lock-outs. ★

1. See *International Viewpoint* no. 191, October 1, 1990.
2. See *International Viewpoint* no. 196, December 10, 1990.

Dismantling the Sandinista state

ONE year after the transfer of power on April 25, 1990, from the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) to the National Opposition Union (UNO), the pillars of the revolutionary state are being dismantled, and it is hard to see how this process will be reversed.¹

The disarmament of the civilian population undertaken by the Sandinista People's Army (EPS) has gone ahead; tens of thousands of arms have been recovered and General Humberto Ortega — who remains the head of the army — has stated: "national reconciliation is gradually being established, leaving the left and right extremes on the sidelines. Peace has been won and we are consolidating it through the total disarmament of the civilian population...; the reduction in size and the professionalization of the armed forces is clear, the National Assembly is functioning in a democratic manner, isolating the extremists".²

ARNOLD BERTHU

THE EPS has seen its forces drop from 90,000 in February 1990 to 28,000 by the end of that year. Some 5,000 officers have been sacked. At the same time some left wing elements have been sidelined — for example the eviction of Colonel Pichardo from the head of the airforce, and of other EPS cadres in August 1990, is a sign of the times.³

The Sandinista police, renamed the National Police, is under the direct orders of the government which is increasingly using it against strikers; it has been subject to purges; the revolutionary morale of many of its officers has been extinguished. But this is not enough for the government which is forming new police forces, recruiting from former Contras. An "urban and rural guard" is being set up — its name reminiscent of the sinister Guardia of the former dictator Somoza.

The zone of people's property (APP, the nationalized sector) is being privatized, with the agreement of the Sandinistas, since the signing of the collaboration agreement of October 1990. Industrial and agricultural enterprises are being handed back to their former owners or sold. The banking system, which was taken over by the state in 1979, is also being partially privatized, in contradiction with the constitution, but with the agreement of some of the Sandinistas. Finally the monopoly of foreign trade is threatened.

The health, education and cultural service systems are being run down. The Sandinista television network (STV) has

been dismantled; the Sandinistas now control only some private radio stations (one of which covers the whole country) and a short television programme — which the government feels able to suspend, as it did temporarily after the July 1990 strikes.

Strikes, land occupations, barricades

All this is not going through unnoticed. The counter-revolutionary measures have had to confront several waves of land occupations and strikes leading to barricades.⁴ Even if they are on the defensive, the popular organizations are capable of putting forward their demands in a way that is rare in Nicaraguan history. But, as could be foreseen during the general strike of July 1990, this social activity is not enough to provide the FSLN with a strategy in the current situation. Its errors of judgement on the state of play both inside and outside the country are a factor in its internal crisis.

After the election defeat, the question of the maintenance or not of the Sandinista army was posed. While the bourgeoisie was once more in control of the government, it did not have at its disposal an armed force capable of decisively crushing mass resistance. The abolition of the EPS was in the UNO election programme. But how to replace it?

The EPS was the product of an authentic revolution and its cadres from top to bottom came from the anti-Somoza gue-

rilla struggle. Furthermore this army had successfully fought external aggression and internal counter-revolution. It was impossible simply to abolish the Sandinista army and replace it with Contras. This would have meant civil war, especially since UNO had promised the demobilization of the counter-revolution.

The bourgeoisie was aware that, even if it controlled the government, it did not have a firm grip on the state, which remained foreign, powerful and hostile to it.

The UNO therefore decided to play for time, since it had no other choice. In exchange for a promise that the EPS and its command structure would be maintained — with Humberto Ortega at its head — the Sandinistas pledged not to use the army to regain lost ground.

Nonetheless, the FSLN made concessions: President Violetta Chamorro received the power to lead the army if she wished and remove Ortega; the EPS was drastically reduced in size, and the army cadres, starting with Ortega, had to give up their activities as FSLN militants. Finally, the government tested the reliability of the army by entrusting it with missions to maintain public order.

Concessions lead to debate inside Sandinistas

These concessions led to a debate inside the FSLN.

While nobody proposed that the EPS should be used for a short term taking of power, that wing of the Sandinistas that was most critical of H. Ortega's political line — that is militants coming from the former Prolonged People's War tendency, the GPP, who put out the bulletin *Nicaragua Desde Adentro* (see document below) — declared: "one cannot deny that the fact that the army chiefs and some of the troops belong to the Sandinistas is an advantage for the FSLN — beyond the fact that formally soldiers cannot be militants of the Front, for in the last analysis this means that, if it comes to it, the FSLN will have under its orders an organized military force that could support an eventual popular uprising against the government". This perspective was totally ruled out by Humberto Ortega and other Sandinista leaders.

Nicaragua Desde Adentro explained: "Nonetheless, it is equally clear that the subordination of the army to the executive power involves its implicit support to the hegemonic sector of the bourgeoisie [the Chamorro-Lacayo-Cesar wing], privileg-

1. See *International Viewpoint*, no. 184, May 7, 1990.

2. *El Semanario*, February 28, 1991.

3. Behind the scenes, Javier Pichardo was accused of having relations with the right and its journal *La Prensa*; of wanting to make the airforce autonomous and of having wanted to repress the strikers in June. Officially he was accused of having a "particular conception" of the army.

4. See *IV*, 187.

5. *Nicaragua Desde Adentro*, July 15, 1990.



ing thus its professional and constitutional character against its original Sandinista policy".⁵

This text insisted on the fact that the EPS was going to be the object of a struggle between the bourgeois government and the FSLN, with the government attempting to "seduce" key army personnel.

This thinly veiled attack on H. Ortega's line was broadened by a very strong critique of EPS military and political strategy in the 1980s, and the economic line followed since 1988 on the initiative of the circle around the Ortega brothers. This attack, expressed by those close to Tomas Borge, certainly had something to do with the hard line taken by H. Ortega in his meeting with the interior minister.⁶

But it is not so clear that this alternative to the economic and political choices of the 1980s was defended by Borge in a systematic fashion inside the national leadership of the FSLN.

The fact that, on April 25, 1990, Humberto Ortega decided to stay at the head of the army, at the same time giving up his functions in the leadership of the Front, was criticized by the supporters of the former GPP tendency. According to them, Ortega should have been replaced as army chief by his deputy, comandante Cuadra. He was reproached for preferring his role as a statesman and military chief to that of a member of a collective leadership. Apart from this point of criticism, there is no evidence of the left wing putting forward any alternative line.

The EPS faced its most serious test during the July 1990 general strike, when hundreds of barricades were put up in Managua on the appeal of the National Workers Front (FNT), which brings together the Sandinista trade union organizations. The army daily cleared the main arteries of the capital with bulldozers, but

did not clash with the workers, while the latter allowed the army to get on with the work as instructed by the government.

After the army finished the Sandinista militants rebuilt the barricades, sometimes with the help of soldiers in civilian dress. The government knew what was going on, but the mobilization was too powerful and the army too reluctant for UNO to try and order it to attack the strikers. The FSLN had to exert all its strength on the UNO government on the one side and the FNT on the other to get a (rickety) compromise which ended the strike.

Disarmament of civilian population

When the agreements were signed, H. Ortega pledged to the government that the army would follow its orders and those of the president, that it would go ahead with the disarmament of the civilian population (the barricades were defended at night by people with arms), but he also made it clear that the EPS would not shoot down workers.

The disarmament of civilians has been going ahead, but it is by no means complete. Tens of thousands of weapons remain in the hands of the population, including in those of many Sandinista militants.

A few months later, the EPS had to confront a second challenge, this time coming from the right.

In November 1990, there was an uprising by local authorities in region V of the departments of Boaco and Chontales — in the centre of the country, a poor region of crop farming, and an old fief of the Contras where the UNO won especially convincingly in 1990 — supported by armed former Contras.

The strategic route which links Managua and the Atlantic Coast, via the town of Rama, was cut and three hundred kilometers of road were blocked.

This action was orchestrated by the far right of UNO, led by the former vice-president of the republic, Virgilio Godoy.

The mayors demanded the removal of Antonio Lacayo from his ministry — Lacayo being Chamorro's *eminence grise* and a defender of compromise with the Sandinistas; of the defence minister Carlos Hurtado and of General Humberto Ortega; the departure of the police and the EPS from region V; the reduction of the defence budget; the formation of a rural police integrating former Contras; the disarmament of civilians; the distribution of land to former Contras to the detriment of the APP and former EPS soldiers; the granting of real powers to Virgilio Godoy, who, owing to his differences with the Chamorro-Lacayo-Cesar clan, has no specific tasks inside the executive.

The military officer responsible for this uprising was Aristides Sanchez, a CIA

agent and former Contra adviser who was finally arrested and expelled to the US without trial.⁷

The aim of the action was to destabilize the Chamorro government and force it to crack down on the EPS, and the EPS was indeed compelled to accept a bigger cut in its budget than previously envisaged.⁸

"The mayor's rebellion" had an impact on the debates and votes in the National Assembly. At first only the 33 Sandinista deputies voted for the defence budget presented by the president; all the UNO deputies voted against. Chamorro then had to use her right of veto to get round this vote. This gave her time to negotiate a deal with the leaders of the UNO parliamentary group involving an additional reduction of 8.5 cordobas-oros in the military budget. This was thus the price for getting the budget passed.

Chamorro also told the UNO leaders that "the removal of General Ortega is among my objectives, but it is not possible to set a date".⁹

After these discussions with the president, one of the leaders of the UNO right wing, A. Ubilla, explained to *La Prensa* (January 7, 1991), "We must be aware that the advantages today enjoyed by the Sandinistas are not solely due to Doña Violeta Chamorro. Her government came into being without arms, police or money, confronting a party that has everything that it lacked. Guiding the interests of the nation requires a lot of subtlety and patience".

All the evidence suggests that this leader had put his finger on the situation. He understood that the revolutionary state has not yet been completely dismantled and that this will need time; but he clearly also believes that the dismantling is well underway and that the Chamorro-Lacayo clan is not doing badly in this respect.

Missiles supplied to Salvadoran rebels

In December 1990, with the assistance of the Soviet Union, the Bush administration was able to prove that SAM 7 and SAM 14 missiles supplied to the EPS by

6. According to Humberto Ortega: "the FSLN was divided into three tendencies, and the differences were more than tactical. There were strategic differences with the thesis of the Prolonged People's War tendency led by Tomas Borge and the Proletarian tendency [led by, among others, Jaime Wheelock and Luis Carron]. If one of these two tendencies had won the debate, we would never have taken power in Nicaragua. It was the "third way", "insurrectionary" tendency led by us which predominated. The same pattern is present now." From an interview in *Brecha*, Uruguay, August 17, 1990, quoted by *La Prensa* on September 12, 1990.

7. See *NDA*, December 30, 1990.

8. At first, the EPS asked for a budget of 131 million cordobas-oros, The Chamorro-EPS discussions produced a figure of 78.6 millions. After the new reduction the budget is 78.1 million. This is a cut of 56% in the EPS budget between 1990 and 1991. See *Envío*, Managua, February 1991.

9. *Envío*, February 1991.

10. See *IV* 203.

the Soviet Union in 1986 had been used by the Salvadoran Farabundo Marti Liberation Front (FMLN) in November 1990 to combat helicopters supplied to the Salvadoran army by the United States.¹⁰ The Soviet foreign ministry publicly declared that it expected the Nicaraguan authorities to put a stop to such acts.

To get out of this impasse, the EPS leadership imprisoned four Sandinista officers who had given arms (without any material gain to themselves) and 11 Salvadorans. Furthermore, in a communiqué on January 1, 1991, the EPS accused Joaquín Villalobos, the FMLN leader, of having organized the transfer of the missiles.

On January 4, 1991, a declaration added: "this small group of officers, blinded by their political passion and guided by

extremist arguments, have injured military honour and infringed the loyalty of the institution and its commander, which is equivalent to an injury to the sacred, patriotic and revolutionary interests of Nicaragua".

The missiles crisis came as a big shock and disgusted many Sandinista militants who put their duty of international solidarity at the top of their scale of values. The Sandinista youth and the FNT have denounced the EPS stance and that of the FSLN leadership who supported it. The decision of the EPS to condemn internationalist servicemen has deepened the crisis in that institution's ranks which started in August 1990 when Colonel Pichardo, head of the airforce, and also held responsible for giving over-zealous help to the FMLN, was dismissed. ★

any case, would eat up enormous resources, be criticized internationally and become the central subject of negotiations. The doctrine of a war of the whole people was put on ice, awaiting the invasion, while the professional army was never able to totally fight the counter-revolution....

The Interior Ministry developed in another framework and ensured the immediate and direct confrontation with the Contras. It set up the Pablo Ubeda special troops which, with those of the State Security, dealt rapid and hard blows to the counter-revolution and infiltrated the ranks of the enemy rearguard. This irregular struggle achieved successes and led to the creation of the Battalions of Irregular Struggle (BLI), the Light Rangers (BLC) and finally the Small Units of Special Forces (PUFE).

The EPS has continued to make its main priority the defence of national sovereignty.... In order not to too much affect the sensitive structures of the army, it was necessary to have recourse to military service: thus an administrative solution was given to a strategic problem.

It is estimated that only 40% of the youth who went into the army, went willingly — the rest were compelled — and this had its effect on fighting efficiency...

Furthermore the demobilized youth — who identified much more with the revolution after their military service — ended up swelling the ranks of the unemployed; this meant a loss of potential cadres for the FSLN.

Seeking direct negotiations with the USA

In 1987 people began to talk about the strategic defeat of the Contras. This was true in the sense that the latter had no chance of taking power through arms; but the Contras remained one of the main forms of pressure financed by the US in its low intensity war and they already had an important social base in the country. The FSLN persisted in its desire to establish direct negotiations with the United States, and refused any dialogue with the Contras. But insofar as the Esquipulas peace process advanced, the possibility of negotiating with the US receded and pressure for bilateral negotiations with the Contras became stronger.

1988 saw an endless spiral of unilateral concessions by the Front, which ended up with openings to the right, on the backs of parts of the popular sectors; inflation reached 34,000%. The popular sectors were no longer active. They had become the objects of supra-structural political and economic decisions; the revolution began to weaken.

In 1988, after the Sapoa negotiations with the counter-revolutionary leaders, the EPS hit the Contras with operation Danto 88; this would have been hard to push back if the harassment had contin-

Strategic defeat and tactical victory

THE document published below is taken from *Nicaragua desde Adentro*, a bulletin produced by militants of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) close to Tomas Borge. It puts forward the view that the fact that Contras had neither demobilized nor surrendered was one of the main reasons for the Sandinistas' electoral defeat on February 25, 1990. It was first published in July 1990.

DOCUMENT

AFTER the revolutionary victory, an army was set up to protect our frontiers and defend national sovereignty and not — as in the past — for the purposes of internal repression. The army had a popular character — its cadres were formed in the guerilla struggle against the Somoza dictatorship and it thus had a clearly defined class character.

Knowing that the United States would not accept the existence of a popular revolution...the Sandinista People's Army (EPS) became a regular force to defend the country against foreign invasion. At the same time, Popular Militias were created: their main task was to confront the counter-revolution which was beginning to get organized in Honduras. The main burden of the militias fell on the workers and students: while they played

an important role they were not efficient enough and did not get adequate training....

Contrary to the experience acquired during the long years of the guerilla struggle against Somoza's Guard, the EPS confronted the counter-revolution with regular methods of struggle. The Contras, who were at that time only at their beginnings, would have been more vulnerable to special units — all the counter-insurrectionary manuals recommend this. The EPS expanded to the point where it had too many tanks — in a non-oil producing country; it had a sophisticated anti-aircraft system, designed to fight against modern aviation, but of no use at

all against Contra raids; it became an army of professional cadres, trained for the most part in conventional techniques.

Even if a danger of a confrontation with US forces existed, it would be illusory to believe that a Third World army, even if very well equipped, would be able to fight a successful conventional war. If there had been a war, there would have been massive air bombardment, which, without doubt, would have destroyed the EPS' heavy arms. Only later would the US ground troops land.

Some say that, in such a situation, there should be a people in arms that could be led by the professionals of the EPS and which would inflict heavy losses on the invader. A man with a rifle, well dug in and preparing an ambush would be much more efficient in the long term than bulky and sophisticated technology which, in

ued. The Contras were thus in a weakened position when they arrived at Sapoa and the discussions revealed differences between the "military" and the "politicos". This was the time for the revolutionary government to demand the immediate demobilization of the counter-revolutionary army, to bury it for ever.

But everything seems to show that the choice was made not to launch a final offensive which would have had a high political cost. The military capacity of the Contras was retained, although weakened, but the Front was also able to maintain popular unity in the face of a grave economic and social situation. It was then that the counter-revolution began to be treated as an official interlocutor, and, despite its weakness, was reinforced. A unilateral ceasefire was decreed [by the Sandinista government] which allowed the Contras to recover and act with more ease.

The maintenance of Contra military capacity reinforced their political wing, facilitating the coming together of different groups against Sandinism; they explained that, if the Front remained in power, war, poverty, military service, the economic blockade and instability would continue.

It is possible that, at that time, given the progress of the Esquipulas Accords, the pressure of public opinion and the deterioration of the internal situation, the Front could not take another way out than that of negotiating, believing that the elections would go better for it, and that, with a renewed mandate, recognized internationally, it would be possible to get the revolution back on its original track.

If, at that moment, it would have been difficult to adopt a more intransigent position, it is also clear, in any case, that if the Contras had been crushed, military service could have been abolished, the army reduced and resources turned towards production...and disarmament achieved. The FSLN would then have been able to postpone the elections, or at least, the achievement of the demobilization of the Contras would not have been seen as the work of the UNO government....

The logic of the continuation of the negotiations, to the detriment of a military solution while there was still time, brought the Contras from Honduras into Nicaragua — they received land and had their own police — today their armed men are being used as shock forces in the towns. ★



"A period special in peacetime"



AFTER the collapse of the Soviet-led Comecon trading bloc, Cuba has inevitably found itself in a profound crisis. Since August 1990 it has been in a "period special in peacetime", to employ Fidel Castro's euphemism for the most difficult period in the thirty years since the revolution. The following article deals with the island's grave economic situation. In a subsequent issue of *IV* we will publish the second part of this article, dealing with political developments in Cuba.

JANETTE HABEL

THE plans for the country's economic development for this decade worked out in the framework of the so-called "socialist division of labour" have been rendered more or less redundant. Based on guaranteed Soviet oil supplies, industrialization was to be centred on narrow specializations; in particular sugarcane products, which have a very important industrial potential; bio-technology stimulated by the successes of Cuban healthcare, indicated by the discovery of the vaccine against Meningitis B; the undertaking, in liaison with East Germany, of the manufacture of parts for information technology; the modernization of the sugar plants; and the technological updating of the nickel refineries.

Oil prospecting and the building of a nuclear power plant were to prepare Cuba to overcome its greatest handicap; the almost total absence of energy resources, leading to chronic external dependence for which, given the volatility of raw material prices on the world market and their manipulation according to events, sugar production cannot compensate.

The Gulf war has shown the fragility and speculative character of the oil market and Iraq's offer after the imposition of the UN embargo to provide free oil to the world's most impoverished countries struck a chord. In fact most Third World

oil-importing countries buy in small quantities and at the highest prices since they do not have the money to finance long-term purchasing.

Until 1989 Cuba was free from this constraint, and this was without doubt the main advantage of "fraternal" aid, which in other respects was much less of a one-way business than is generally supposed. Any drop in oil deliveries means immediate chaos in transport and at work, affecting industry, food production and supplies to a population two thirds of which lives in urban areas.

Latin America's second most powerful army

The country's defence is in the hands of what is considered the most powerful army in Latin America after that of Brazil — in one form or another 15% of the population is under arms — and its military potential is often presented as a direct threat to the USA. Just recently Jeane Kirkpatrick has spoken of the danger of the destruction of the nuclear power station at Florida's Turkey Point by Castroite commandos¹. Such assertions, whose political function is to put pressure on the Soviet government to further turn the screw on Cuba, overlook the fundamentally defensive character of the Cuban army, whose scope is in any case

¹ *International Herald Tribune*, March 31, 1991.

limited by its almost total dependence on external sources of oil and oil products, as well as for spare parts.

It is thus no exaggeration to say that it is the survival of the revolution that is at stake. For the first time it is not the risk of direct intervention that is to be feared but the more insidious combination of an extremely serious economic crisis, a reinforcement of the American blockade, extreme difficulties in daily life and on top of that real but too superficial political changes. Such a combination can lead to explosions in the most demoralized parts of the population with an unforeseeable dynamic.

The result of eight months of discussions at a time when Cuban fears were at their height, Soviet-Cuban negotiations that began in May 1990 provisionally concluded in December by the signing of a new agreement. Provisionally, because the new structure of bilateral trade for the new epoch that has opened has not yet been fully defined. The final statements only concern 1991 and further negotiations will be needed to fix the new mechanisms of future economic and trade relations.

The uncertainty stems in part from the fact that, according to Cuban foreign trade minister Ricardo Cabrisas, the negotiations took place when neither the 1991 plan nor the Soviet budget had yet been approved.² Their completion is all the less certain in that the negotiators have yet to determine important details, including certain prices; but above all the economic and political crisis in the USSR does not permit any certainty about the future of any agreement.

The old bilateral clearing system will continue to apply until March 31, but after that trade must be conducted in hard currency, with prices being worked out on the basis of those on the world market.³ Even at this price, and whatever the quality, Cuba will not have a choice as far as spare parts are concerned, since much of industry has of necessity been Soviet equipped.

Calculating the price of sugar

Taking into consideration of world market prices is not straightforward as far as the price of sugar products (for example) is concerned. As Cabrisas has pointed out, this price reflects neither trade between the European Community and the ACP (Africa-Caribbean-Pacific) countries, on the one hand, or between the USA and its traditional suppliers on the other, which takes place at prices significantly higher than those on the world market.

The Soviet Union finally agreed to buy four million tons of sugar in 1991 at the preferential price of \$0.24 per pound, a lower price than under the previous agreement but twice the current market price. Ten million tons of oil and oil products

are to be delivered — three million less than previously — at a price of \$20 a barrel; slightly higher than the current world market price. Cuba will have to pay transport costs in hard currency. There are also numerous restrictions on other important deliveries.

Agreements had previously been negotiated with 62 Soviet institutions permitting 25,000 establishments to trade with the island.⁴ These accords have collapsed creating supply problems which have had to be met with emergency oil deliveries in January in order to avoid catastrophe.⁵

The most surprising political measure concerns the payment of Cuba's debt to the USSR, on the abolition of which Castro has been counting for years. It is estimated at (approximately) 15 billion roubles which will be made out in hard currency from next year at a rate of interest that is not yet known. Given the severe shortage of hard currency which the Cuban economy is suffering from, made worse by the fact that it will no longer as in the past be possible to re-export Soviet oil, the 1990s are opening on a sombre note.

Food production cannot feed population

Cuba has big agricultural potential. However neither crop production nor livestock are sufficient, despite the progress realized, to feed the population. This is due to the priority given to export crops, and in the first place to sugarcane and citrus fruits at the expense of output in particular on the state farms; the importance of imports (fertilizers, seeds, spare parts); without forgetting the cost in energy of the mechanization of cane cutting, which is seen as a way of compensating for lack of labour in the countryside. In this field as well external dependence and economic-political decisions have a big impact.

Food imports are being sharply cut back, with a big impact on supplies above all in Havana, where some 20% of the population live. The central importance assigned to the Food Plan is explained by the current necessity to ensure the country's self-sufficiency in food after the alarming deficiencies of 1990 which put the whole country on the alert: delays in Soviet grain deliveries have provoked bread shortages, while the lack of grain to feed poultry has led to a spectacular fall in the production of eggs, which were previously freely available but are now strictly rationed at four or five a week. Bulgarian chickens and Czechoslovak beer have not arrived and it has been necessary to reduce the quantities of imported rice, although this is a basic foodstuff on the island.

Cubans are not on the edge of famine, partly because the "libreta" (rationing card) guarantees basic nourishment for all and above all because Cubans eat once

a day in the collective structures, work centres, schools and so on, which have their own food supply networks. The situation nonetheless is all the more difficult insofar as the restrictions combine with acute distribution problems which make daily life an unbearable headache. Queues can be hours long and require complex organization; the whole family is mobilized (notably the grandparents), "rotations" are organized with numbered tickets; absenteeism from work has risen.

Since the end of 1990 the list of rationed items has lengthened. It includes 242 items of daily use such as shoes, clothes, furniture, toys, and hygienic products.

Recently detergent, soap, shampoo and razors have been unobtainable in some areas. The sale of electrical goods has also been severely limited for reasons of energy economy and because there is not the money to import them. Thus in Cuba, a tropical country, no refrigerators will be sold in 1991 while air conditioning appliances — an urban inheritance of the American epoch — will be replaced by Chinese ventilators and only the newly weds will have irons.

The bicycle age has arrived (the bicycles also being Chinese) at the cost of several serious accidents, since this form of travel is unknown in a country accustomed to using cars in the towns and horses in the countryside. As for the press, the number of journals, the number of pages and their circulation have all been reduced (without any compensating improvement in the quality of the information!).

Crisis in book production

The shortage of paper has also caused a big crisis in the book industry. According to *The Economist* (February 9, 1991) until last year around 500 new titles were published annually for "the island's inhabitants are avid readers and books sell so well that the Cuban Book Institute keeps a weekly list of the 10 bestselling titles." It is worthwhile recalling at this point, as *The Economist's* Havana correspondent does, that in "1959 a quarter of the population was illiterate." This shows both the dimensions of the cultural revolution in the past 30 years, but also the gravity of the present shock. Cuban scientists have been trying to find a way of using sugar cane husks to make paper, but meanwhile no more books are being printed and, despite a 50% price rise, the remaining stocks are disappearing from the bookshop shelves.

But the most significant symptom of the worsening situation is the strict control on the sale of medicines announced by the government in March. From now on, the

2. *Granma*, February 3, 1991.

3. *Informe Latinoamericano*, February 7, 1991.

4. *Ibid.*

5. R. Cabrisas, *Granma*, February 3, 1991.

sale of a wide range of medicines in public chemists' shops will be reduced, individual medical prescriptions are being controlled and essential prescriptions are done in the hospitals. The price of certain medicines is to be raised so as to inhibit any unnecessary consumption. Given how proud Cuba is of its healthcare system, one of the most advanced in the Third World, these measures are a striking sign of the gravity of the situation.

Cuba must make itself ready for "the worst of economic situations", Fidel Castro warned on February 17, 1991. "We must gain time in this first stage of the 'special period' and prepare ourselves for the second and third stages." This third period could lead in the worst case — that in which even the current agreement with the USSR is not respected — to the establishment of a sort of war communism in peacetime. To avoid this, the leadership is relying on an increase in trade with China and Latin America, on increased tourism, on the setting up, under as yet unspecified conditions, of joint ventures with European countries and on the end — entirely hypothetical, alas — of the American blockade. It is necessary to find an economic policy — or simply a policy — which will permit the Cuban people to hold on until the end of the tunnel and until international solidarity shows itself.

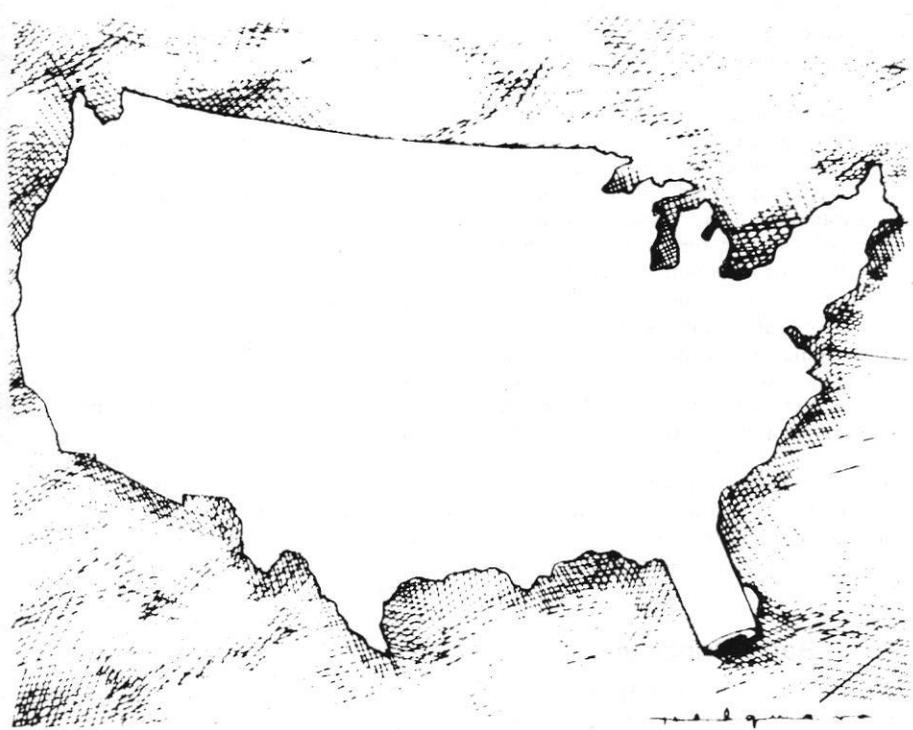
Joint ventures multiply

In the meantime it is necessary to prepare for the worst, make economies in all fields, in particular in energy, and play for time. The government has already changed its line on mixed enterprises. There are already many joint ventures in tourism: Spanish and Canadian firms have taken part in the building of new hotels and take on and fire staff according to their requirements. But there has until now been no recourse to foreign capital in industry.

For the first time the government has broken with a thirty year tradition and allowed a French consortium consisting of the Total enterprise and the Compagnie Européenne des Pétroles (CEP)⁶ to undertake off-shore oil exploration on Cuba's north coast.

The six-year contract signed in Havana in December 1990 with Cuba's Union del Petroleo, on financial conditions that have not been revealed, implies — according to a Cuban diplomat — that if commercially viable oil supplies are discovered "the income will be shared between the Compagnie and the Cubans."⁷

Cuba is also considering permitting foreign buyers to have 49% participation in certain enterprises — the limit being fixed in the law on foreign investment on



1982. According to the president of the Association of Cuban Economists, Luis Cardet Henando: "foreign investment would permit the elimination of economic dependence on one market" from which Cuba suffers, which at the same time favoured investment in the sugar industry, sugarcane products, biotechnology and word processors in the Comecon framework.⁸

Furthermore another significant event took place at the start of 1991: on January 16, a five-year trade agreement was signed for the first time with China. Since the disappearance of the GDR, China has become Cuba's primary trade partner. The joint inter-governmental commission, which was set up in 1988, a year when trade increased by 50%, met for the third time in Beijing in January; in 1990 trade between the two countries reached \$578,15 million. A five-year agreement has been signed along with a trade protocol for 1991. The Cubans will deliver sugar, citrus fruits, nickel and, for the first time, Cuban biochemical products.

But, according to the Cuban Communist Party paper *Granma*, the best hopes are in cooperation; the Chinese have granted credits permitting the construction of bicycle and ventilator factories and there is also collaboration underway in clothing, shoes, ceramics, motors, machine tools, tractors, the food industry, electronics and more.

The Chinese foreign trade minister Li Lanqing has emphasized that the reasons for Cuban-Chinese trade are economic — China is hoping to expand relations with Latin America, while Cuba is seeking outlets for products that it used to sell to Eastern Europe. But he also identified a

political aspect — which may refer to the means of payment envisaged in the five-year agreement, which are not known. Traditionally, trade between the two countries has been conducted in dollars, but it can be supposed that the Chinese government has made concessions in this respect, given Cuba's lack of hard currency; since March 1990 China has granted preferential payment and credit facilities to Cuba. But, although trade with China is going to expand, this will far from compensate for the losses Cuba has suffered elsewhere.

Big expansion in tourism planned

The third possible way to alleviate the economic tensions is tourism. More than 320,000 tourists visited the island in 1989 and there has been an average 10% growth over the past six years. The government is looking to quadruple the number of hotels in 1992, which also means more mixed enterprises with Spanish, Italian, Austrian, French and Finnish firms. Nonetheless, even if the number of tourists from Canada and Europe is already on the increase owing to the cheap prices, a more thoroughgoing expansion requires visitors from the nearest neighbour, that is American tourists.

However, American trips to Cuba are strictly regulated, (apart from journalists, Cuban-American families and research-

6. The CEP, which specializes in the exploration and production of hydrocarbons, is an affiliate of the Interagra group, which is headed by Michel Doumeng, with wide experience in eastern Europe as well as Laos and Vietnam. Cf. *Investir*, April 8, 1991.

7. *Financial Times*, March 8, 1991.

8. *International Herald Tribune*, April 1, 1991.

ers) and the penalties can reach \$250,000 or 12 years in prison.⁹ Even if these sanctions are largely theoretical, they are enough, in the framework of the embargo, to dissuade most potential visitors. Finally, the resentment aroused in the Cuban population by what some have described as "touristic apartheid" should not be under-estimated. The contrast between this privileged and protected sector and the difficulties of people's everyday life bears the seeds of conflict.

In theory, Cuba could take advantage of the breaking of its links with eastern Europe to return to its natural geopolitical framework: the Latin American continent. In practise, the country is no longer totally isolated and trade has developed. However this is limited by the fact that the Latin American countries are themselves too heavily in debt and the pressure of the American blockade is strong.

Bad neighbours

The group of three Latin American producers of hydrocarbons (Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia) from whom Cuba could buy oil with much reduced transport costs are refusing to make the slightest financial concession to Cuba at a time when they are involved in negotiations with the United States. The re-negotiation of the San José accord on oil deliveries in the region does not apply to Cuba, except to impose on the island conditions that Castro does not seem ready to accept.¹⁰

Given the drastic international constraints and an unfavourable immediate political environment, economic policy is made up from day to day. The tendency seems to be towards decentralization, with the Cuban foreign trade firms enjoying greater autonomy from the ministries, while Cuba's Chamber of Commerce is to play a more important role in foreign trade. The Arbitration Tribunal for Foreign Trade is being re-organized to resolve the likely conflicts between Cuban and foreign firms doing everything they can to circumvent bureaucratic controls.

But the main problem is to know whether decentralization will also take place on the social and political levels, that is to say whether real powers of control and management are devolved both to the enterprises and localities at a time when bureaucratic chaos can only aggravate the poverty and infuriate the population. The idea of the need to re-establish a free market in agriculture and stimulate the peasants to improve food supplies seems to be widely shared at least in Havana.¹¹

The suppression of the free markets was justified by the inequalities they caused, but it is not clear that inequalities resulting from the black market are better. The aim was to prevent profiteering by the peasants and intermediaries but the development of an underground economy

favours, according to an official report, "a process of capitalization" thanks to "growing commercial profits."

The serious problems in distribution are an additional headache and there are countless *chistes* (jokes) deriding the inefficiency and waste of the state sector, from which corrupt functionaries, whose *teque-teque* (jargon) hides their *doble moral*, are nonetheless able to profit.

The danger of the criminal classes

In a report entitled "Mercantilism and crime in Cuba: present effects and future consequences"¹² Fernando Barral notes "the constant growth in delinquency in the country, whether there is a severe penal policy, or whether some crimes are depenalized" and the danger of using the criminal law to "reduce social phenomena to individual deeds."

Barral estimates that three sectors of the population are involved in seeking illegal profits: "a marginal or anti-social group...which penal repression tends to strengthen; a layer of corrupt employees and functionaries, who are criminals 'by virtue of their office'; and a neo-bourgeois layer formed of intermediaries and illegal traders and what remains of the former petty bourgeoisie", their common characteristic being that they are not prepared to renounce their own interests.

"Insofar as these interests are contrary to those of the revolution they constitute a social group with a very dangerous potential and who in a favourable conjuncture could provoke a spontaneous political movement with considerable counter-revolutionary dynamism. In our opinion it is by no means excluded that the whole of the criminal classes may adopt negative political attitudes that could lead to spontaneous counter-revolutionary movements whose danger is all the greater at a moment when groups of intellectuals are helping them to become aware of themselves, of the identity of their interests, if they persuade them that the revolutionary institutions incarnate their enemy, if they succeed in giving them platforms and leaders."

This is the explosive context in which the fourth congress of the Cuban Communist Party will take place. This is supposed to be a "refoundation" congress according to some Cubans, but the date is yet to be fixed. ★

9. *IHT*, April 5, 1991.

10. According to the San José accord, Mexico and Venezuela supply oil to the Caribbean countries at preferential prices. This was revised in January 1991: the two countries have undertaken that 80% of the costs of oil deliveries can be paid over a five year period. See *Informe Latinoamericano*, February 7, 1991.

11. "Agriculture et alimentation: les enjeux de l'approvisionnement", Denise Douzant-Ronsfeld in *Problèmes d'Amérique latine*, no. 99, January-March 1991.

12. Dr. Fernando Barral: *Mercantilisme et criminalité à Cuba, effets actuels et conséquences futures*, AFP, Havana, April 1990.

Miners fight to save industry

BOLIVIA, today presented as the "good pupil" of the international creditors, is paying very dearly for their goodwill. A spectacular decline in the rate of inflation and the return of foreign capital has been achieved at the price of a savage economic adjustment, which has led to a drastic slimming of the workforce (particularly in the mines) and a spectacular impoverishment of the population (purchasing power has fallen by 75% in ten years, and the rate of infant mortality is 169 per thousand — comparable to that of the countries of Black Africa).

To succeed in the "restructuring" of the country, the Bolivian government must break the resistance of the Bolivian trade union federation, the COB, the most organized in Latin America.

Felipe Vazquez is a miner and a leader of the Bolivian Mineworkers' Trade Union Federation (FSTMB) in the Huanuni mine. He spoke to Cecilia Garmendia and Gonzalo Molina about the resistance of the Bolivian miners.

ECONOMIC neo-liberalism seems to have implanted itself without too much trouble in Latin America, in certain countries at least. Bolivia has been a veritable experimental laboratory for adjustment measures.

Indeed, it is in Bolivia that the imperialist offensive has been at its sharpest, and the neo-liberal policy most violently applied, since 1985, when the government of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR)¹ came to power. The government of Paz Zamora has, for example, adopted a decree legalizing the application of this line, drawn up by the US economist Jeffrey Sachs — today the adviser to the Polish government, and somebody who before that had “assisted” Menem in Argentina and Fujimori in Peru. This plan basically sought to liquidate the vanguard of the Bolivian workers’ movement, that is the mining sector. It has already led to 23,000 redundancies amongst the miners, out of 30,000 employed by the nationalized sector of the Bolivian Mining Corporation (COMIBOL)².

The MNR has been able to profit from the situation created by the defeat of the so-called government of the left — the bourgeoisie considered it as such — of the Popular Democratic Union (UDP), led by Hernan Siles Suazo³, composed of the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB) and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR).

The UDP’s incompetence opened the way to the MNR, which was then able to attack the workers’ movement. Since the beginning, the miners have opposed the economic policy of the MNR. In August 1987, the government decentralized the COMIBOL (see box); the miners immediately responded and organized what was called the March for Life, starting from Oruro with 5,000 people and finishing at Cajamarca.

On August 28, the demonstrators were encircled by the army. The leadership of the Bolivian Workers’ Trade Union Federation (the COB), led particularly by the PCB, gave in to the soldiers, despite the determination of the miners who wished to break the blockade; this discouraged the workers.

At the same time, the MNR has tried to atomize the movement by offering a series of supplementary social services, which do not figure in the labour law. It has, for example, proposed an annual bonus, to be added to the unemployment benefit; it said that it would pay the moving expenses of all those who would agree to give up their jobs; it would give them an unemployment benefit of 80 bolivianos [the national currency] a month (the wage of the miners is 60 bolivianos), and so on. These propositions have obviously facilitated the attacks on the workers.

The Bolivian model

THE neo-liberal policy applied in Bolivia may have brought about a slowing up in the rate of inflation (20% in 1990, as against 25,000% under the Siles Suazo government between 1982 and 1985), but it has also brought recession and unemployment. The rate of growth has been less than 3% and 80,000 redundancies have already taken place — affecting 25% of the active population.

Wages have been frozen since 1985 despite strong protest movements; in 1989, 80,000 teachers went on strike (the government responded by declaring a state of emergency, arresting and deporting 858 trade unionists).

Since 1988, Bolivia has also been a “model” in dealing with its foreign debt problem. Its borrowings, which had gone as high as \$5.6bn, fell to \$3.5bn in 1990 (which represents nonetheless 183% of Bolivia’s gross national product in 1990 and 63% of its export earnings). Bolivia had already redeemed \$470mn of its commercial debt in 1990 through the “transfer” of national wealth by means of large-scale privatizations.

The government has also embarked on a further vast privatization plan (100 state enterprises out of 157 are to be privatized in the coming five years, which should bring \$500mn into the state coffers). Despite this, Bolivia needs \$600mn for the year 1991 — as much as the annual product from exports of cocaine, cultivated over 140,000 hectares.

Seven of the biggest tin mines were put up for sale in December 1990; they are to be co-managed by the state (the COMIBOL) and the private sector purchaser (in what is called the system of “joint risk”).

Thus, the COMIBOL will become a holding company, which will entrust to the private entrepreneurs, according to the “joint risk” agreements, the administration of the sectors which the state is no longer capable of financing.

The rest of the nationalized enterprises will be directly sold to private investors (including milk, rubber processing, the sugar refineries, the cement enterprises, the agro-industrial plants, steel, and so on).

Other national enterprises will come under the regime of “performance contracts” (the state keeps control of these companies, which have a greater autonomy to define their programmes). This affects the COMIBOL, but also the oil company (YPFB), posts and telecommunications, electricity, water, airports and railroads. ★

■ Has the numerical reduction of the active working class led to a weakening of its political influence within society?

Without doubt, the dismissal of 23,000 miners has weakened the Bolivian workers’ movement, but the government wishes to go much further; it seeks to annihilate the combativity of this layer of workers and, obviously, its influence inside the COB. It wishes, in fact, to liquidate the Bolivian Mineworkers’ Trade Union Federation (FSTMB).

But, up to now, it has not succeeded, to the extent that the 7,000 miners who have remained in their jobs have continued to resist, which has prevented the application of other measures — the privatiza-

tion of education and health, and, obviously, the closure of the mines.

After the first dismissals, the workers decided that nobody would any longer accept being thrown out of work, or transferred to another enterprise; the miners should stay at their mines and defend their jobs. We are all convinced that, once distanced from their mining centre and their trade union, the miners will have no chance of remaining organized, or of participating in the political struggle.

■ The economic policy of the Paz Zamora government also envisages the so-called “cooperativization” of the enterprises, which would

1. In 1952, a mass insurrection carried the MNR, led at the time by Victor Paz Estensurro, to power. The first MNR government nationalized the tin mines and carried out an agrarian reform. In 1971, general Hugo Banzer came to power in a coup d’etat.

2. In 1985, after fraudulent elections, the MNR returned to power and immediately decreed a string of austerity measures, under the aegis of the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

3. In 1989, in the course of new elections, the MIR leader, Jaime Paz Zamora was elected president. He allied himself with the MNR and with the rightist formation of General Banzer (the Nationalist Democratic Alliance — ADN) and established a government of “convergence and national unity”.

2. During the nationalization of the tin mines, a nationalized company, COMIBOL, was set up.

3. The UDP government was formed by the Communist Party and the Movement of the Revolutionary Left. This coalition, led by Hernan Siles Suazo, won the 1980 elections. Before it came to power, General Garcia Meza led a coup d’etat and installed a military junta (one of the first “narco-governments” of Latin America). The UDP came back to power in 1982. Over three years, it applied an economic policy mid-way between its populist ideals and the Latin American “new reality”. Neo-liberalism won the day, whereas the price of tin — the principal product of the country — fell. In 1985, the UDP was replaced by the MNR government, led by Victor Paz Estensurro.

appear to imply reorganization under the control of the workers. What do they think of that?

The miners are opposed to this "cooperativization" of the enterprises. This does not mean that we are against cooperativization in its socialist sense; but, in Bolivia, these "cooperatives" resemble very much more private enterprises, with exploiters and exploited. They have a capitalist character — that is why we don't want them.

■ What alternative do you put forward to the government's economic measures?

The COMIBOL and the government have declared that they can no longer finance the functioning of the mining enterprises and that it was necessary to carry out important investments in this sector. Thus they have paralyzed production over a period of two years. But, basically, they wanted the miners to grow tired and let themselves be thrown out of work.

But this has not been the case, very much the contrary. The workers have developed their own alternative plans, enterprise by enterprise, while proposing a plan of recovery. The government has been forced to accept this because, from an economic, technical and administrative point of view, we have shown that it was not necessary to carry out these dismissals, but on the contrary there was a need for more miners, that it was necessary to create new jobs.

The government has been forced to accept our programme of recovery, whilst proposing that it would take two or three years. We have taken up this challenge and we have proved that it was possible to put an enterprise back on its feet within the space of three to six months, with wages of 60 bolivianos a month, working the hours it was necessary, without claiming overtime payments and without claiming the level of qualification that we merited.

The government had to accept, but it was convinced that it was not going to work. For our part, we got to work; we did not get the enterprises back on their feet in three months, but in four, and not in two and a half years as the authorities said. The centres have begun to produce again. We had calculated that, starting from a certain level of production, the enterprises would not only break even, but make a profit. We then proposed that the surplus was distributed among the workers. It is then that COMIBOL began to sabotage our efforts — we no longer had money to buy spare parts or necessary equipment. COMIBOL wanted to stop the miners' objectives from being realized.

We were beaten. Then, the management took advantage of the fall in international tin prices to justify the closure of certain enterprises.

When we started implementing our plan in the mining centres, a pound of tin was \$4 (this rate allowed us to envisage making a profit); today the price has fallen to \$2.5. In these conditions, with bad management and over-evaluated costs, the majority of the mines seem doomed to closure.

But we have not backed down; we have presented another economic project, more technical and more solid. We have thus proved that the miners are not only capable of working, but that they can make incursions into the administrative domain. We have obtained positive results, but the government continues its manoeuvres.

Because of the fall in production and the lowering of prices, the COMIBOL has declared the Iloco mine bankrupt. It claimed that it would turn it into a cooperative, but in reality, it turned it into a private enterprise. The workers demanded that it be turned over to their control, the management and the government ended up by accepting and the workers have hired the mine, with a contract. Production has restarted and it has even increased threefold — this enterprise has obviously made some profits.

Seeing this, COMIBOL has said: "We have leased you this enterprise and you have made it productive; but it will be for us to manage it; that is, we are going to administer the resources and the production and commercialize the minerals. We will decide the cost of them, we will set the wages, and so on". The workers replied "This is out of the question. It will be for us to hire the managers and the technicians. We have our own administrative team". COMIBOL replied "No, the constitution does not allow us to sell off the nationalized enterprises. So, we must occupy ourselves with the financial aspects".

But COMIBOL has gone still further and has begun to organize a provocation. It engaged mercenaries, under the name of "co-operators", in the mines of Catavi and of Siglio XX and transferred them to Iloco. At Iloco, there are 200 miners; the management sent 600 unemployed to expel them and there were three confrontations.

Today, the workers of Iloco demand that the contract signed with COMIBOL be respected.

■ Apart from this concrete case, have the miners worked out a more general economic proposition?

We have discussed in several general assemblies the imminent dangers of seeing the mining centres returned to private enterprise or "joint risk" — as the government calls them. We have adopted a counterplan to respond to that of the United States.

COMIBOL claims that it needs \$35mn to put all the enterprises back on their feet. The Miners' Federation obtained a

financing of \$70mn; unfortunately, this money came from the Arab countries which are now at war. Despite everything, we remain confident and we think that through work we can save the enterprises. We are asking that the mines be handed over to us in their present conditions, despite the low price of tin. We mistrust the administrative management of COMIBOL, for it is obedient to the government and it is implicitly seeking to liquidate the enterprises.

It is pointless to try and change their minds! We can surely not expect the government to act in good faith, in the sense of the interests of Bolivia.

Moreover, the relations between bosses and workers no longer exist. Very often, the workers no longer even want to see the technicians, and vice versa. It is impossible to come to an agreement with such an administration. That is why we have demanded that the mines are returned to us in a letter we have given to the government.

■ What has been the reaction of the government?

First, it has decided to put into technical unemployment the 70,000 miners still in work, as well as 30% of the employees of the civil service who are not unionized. Nearly 70,000 workers are thus going to be thrown onto the street. Faced with this, we have to fight with all our strength; we can no longer seek an agreement with the authorities.

When we sign collective agreements, the administration applies whatever suits it and the parts concerning the rights of workers are violated. In November 1990, we signed an agreement which should have lasted 30 days; it led to a lowering of 50% in the incomes of workers, because it envisaged that overtime would no longer be paid. Inflation, moreover, according to the government itself, is at 15% and petrol has gone up by around 35%. All this has had a negative impact on the wages of the workers; in one year, between August 1989 and August 1990, we have lost 80% of our purchasing power.

Moreover, the government has used the mobilizations as an excuse to annul the right to strike, whereas the constitution guarantees it. It claims that strike days are unjustified absences. Because of that, women have begun to mobilize and to organize marches — in place of their companions, threatened with dismissal if they don't go to work — to support our demands.

The coming months will be decisive. Either the government will wield the iron fist and crush the resistance of the workers, by privatizing the enterprises, and carrying through its neo-liberal project, or the Bolivian miners will succeed in their projects, taking control of the enterprises and turning the relationship of forces in their favour. ★

Revolutionary convergence in the Basque country

THE fusion conference between the Communist Movement of Euskadi (EMK) and the Revolutionary Communist League of Euskadi (LKI) — formerly the Euskadi organization of the section of the Fourth International in the Spanish State — took place on March 17-19, 1991. Over the years the two organizations have come increasingly close together, and this process accelerated in 1990. The new joint organization has a modest but real weight in Euskadi, and will without doubt reinforce the revolutionary movement in the region.

ALFONSO MORO

AFTER a discussion forum on the "new international order" and the left, attended by about 1,000 people, the conference began with a discussion on the role of the armed organizations in Euskadi [the Basque country] and the current political situation.

The EMK and LKI had prepared documents on the balance-sheet of the influence of the armed organizations in Euskadi, and notably on the political and military activities of the nationalist armed organization ETA, which was defined as "the most radical expression of the Basque national resistance"; on the limitations of such projects; on the changes in the attitude of the Spanish state and government towards this organization; the price paid for its tactical errors and the fact that in Euskadi "experience has shown...that a significant part of the population does not in principle reject armed actions".

Both the EMK and the LKI emerged from splits in ETA — essentially ETA-Berri in 1967 and ETA-VI in 1970.

The new organization must obviously take a position on the armed nationalist

movement, and this is a debate that is only just beginning.

The conference also discussed the role of the Euskera [Basque] language and the importance of linguistic identity for the Basque people, as well as the threats posed to Euskadi — one of the most developed regions of the Spanish State — by the 1992 European unification project.

There was also discussion on the efforts that Basque revolutionaries should make to reinforce the elements of national identity in the framework of a project of national liberation.

There was a fundamental discussion on the type of party that must be constructed. The need to maintain pluralism and democracy, and the question of relations with other organizations in the Spanish State and on the international level, were also addressed.

Numerous contributors insisted on the guarantees that the new party must have for discussion, while at the same time preserving the unitary framework necessary for the fusion of two different experiences.

The need for relations with different organizations in the Spanish State was underlined, with the qualification that: "for general political reasons, because we live in the same state...as well as owing to our previous links and our ideological and political affinities, we have a particular interest in encouraging the development [of relations] with the Communist Movement (MC) and the Revolutionary Communist League (LCR — section of the Fourth International in the Spanish state)".

A week later special congresses of the MC and LCR decided to enter into a unification process.

Decision on international links

As for international relations, and given that, with the fusion, the LKI is no longer a part of the Fourth International, the conference decided to "maintain and develop the contacts previously sustained by each of the two parties...The new party will not be a member of the Fourth International, but it will establish precise relations with it, as a regroupment of revolutionary organizations. The concrete forms of these contacts need to be worked out on the basis of experience."

Taking account of this and the new organization's intention not to have strictly formal relations with the FI, and given the fact that it describes itself as internationalist, the United Secretariat of the Fourth International, in a message to the congress, proposed a number of common fields of actions: in the peace movement in Europe; the campaign against the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the conquest of the Americas; and the defence of the Central American, and notably the Cuban, revolutions. Meetings to make these steps concrete were proposed.

The new organization has so far not got a name — the majority of the delegates to the congress abstained on the proposed names: *Hika* ("Revolutionary Convergence"); *Askasia* ("Grain of liberation"); and *Liberazio* ("Liberation").

The term EMK-LKI will be used in the interim.

Ideological identity discussed

Finally there was a discussion on the ideological identity of the new party, and above all on whether or not it should define itself as a Marxist organization. This was a discussion that reflects the debate going on throughout the international revolutionary left.

Despite some simplifications and dogmatism, the discussion was aimed at advancing reflection on Marxism.

Many foreign organizations were present or sent messages, including: the Saharan Polisario Front; *A Luchar* of Colombia; the Revolutionary National Union from Guatemala (URNG); the Sandinista leader Tomas Borge; Leonel Gonzalez from the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) from El Salvador; the Basque trade union, Langile Abertzale Bartzordeak (LAB); the Organization for Democratic Action of Morocco; Herri Batasuna (HB); the Lesbian Feminist Collective of Euskadi; the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR) of Portugal; the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) of Mexico; and, obviously, the LCR and MC from the Spanish state and the Fourth International. ★

LKI-EMK BATASUN
KONFERENTZIA
**LIBE
RAZIO**
GUZTIEI
BIDEAK
ZABALTZEN

The legacy of anti-colonialism

FOR the past two months, a huge campaign has been going on in France against Georges Boudarel, a lecturer at the university in Paris VII. His crime is to have joined the national liberation forces in Vietnam four decades ago and to have been, for a year, a political instructor in a Viêtminh military prison camp¹.

Much of the press, radio and television has engaged in a "media lynching" of Boudarel. Politicians have joined the hunt. The "Boudarel Affair" goes beyond the past of this one individual and can in fact only be understood in the post-Gulf war ideological context. The hour has come to rehabilitate the French army, notorious for the atrocities it committed in Indochina and Algeria. The legitimacy of any anti-colonialist commitment is being challenged.

PIERRE ROUSSET

THE whole business began on February 13, 1991, when Jean-Jacques Beucler, an ex-defence secretary of state, who had himself been a prisoner of the Viêtminh for four years, attacked Boudarel during a conference on Vietnam: "you have blood on your hands."

The far right took up the theme, with one paper carrying the front page headline: "This French Communist tortured our soldiers in Indochina". Right wing "clean-up" commandos marched around the faculty at Jussieu in Paris, shouting "Jussieu will be the Dien-Bien-Phu of the traitors".²

Politicians from the big parties of the mainstream right then got in on the act. The Republican Party (RP)³ found it "scandalous that a former deserter from our forces in Indochina, who voluntarily worked for the enemy, should be carrying on his job" as a teacher.

On March 25 the municipal assembly of the Paris Council asked "the responsible bodies of the university to bring Georges Boudarel before a disciplinary hearing for damage to the university's dignity".

Accusations of torture

Twenty UDF-RPR deputies, paying homage to the French victims of the Indochina war, accused him of "moral and physical torture". Eric Raouit, the RPR deputy for Seine-Saint Denis, where the historian lives, went so far as to demand "the removal of this sad figure from the electoral lists: can a traitor and torturer be

allowed to remain a full citizen?"⁴

The Union for the Defence of the French Army (UDAF) has decided to bring the matter before the courts on the grounds of "crimes against humanity". This is indeed the only category of charge that remains valid after the amnesty of June 18, 1966. According to them: "Georges Boudarel has denied in each individual the very notion of humanity".⁵

Two different accusations are made against the historian: of having been a "traitor" to the "French nation" and of having administered a "death camp". The sentences that are being called for are very serious; loss of citizenship, expulsion from the university; condemnation on a charge designed to deal with the Nazi genocide of Jews and Gypsies. Nonetheless they are being demanded by "responsible" politicians and it is extremely rare to find the lack of proportion criticized in the media.

Support from university administration

In the face of these attacks, the university's administrative council expressed its unanimous support for Boudarel, a "researcher whose qualities have been recognized by his colleagues and appreciated by his students" and who had been amnestied in 1966 for acts connected to "political commitment".⁶

Not all the 200 French soldiers who went over to the Viêtminh, the so-called "white soldiers of Hồ Chí Minh", did so for political reasons. Some were avoiding

charges. But Boudarel's commitment was that of a militant. Condemned to death in his absence, he spent 16 years in exile as a result of his decision in 1950.⁷

Georges Boudarel joined the French Communist Party (PCF) in 1946, at the age of 20. In 1948 he was a philosophy teacher in Saigon. He came into contact with the Marxist Cultural Group, which brought together both French and Vietnamese, including the future health minister, Pham Ngoc Thach.

In 1950, when he was 24, he joined the Viêtminh under the name Dai Dong ("Universal Brotherhood"). He stayed in the Saigon region and worked on radio propaganda through the setting up of the French language service "The free voice of Saigon-Cholon".

In 1952 the situation became difficult and he undertook the "long march of solidarity" which in six months took him to the north of the country. The following year he became a political instructor at prison camp no. 113. In 1954 he found a job again in radio propaganda, and then worked in foreign language publishing.

Profound legitimacy of anti-colonial choice

In reply to the first accusation against Boudarel — that of being a traitor to the French nation — we must restate the profound legitimacy of his decision.

In 1945-46, French forces invaded a country that had just declared its independence: their mandate was to re-establish colonial power and crush a social revolution. An instrument of imperial domination, this was an army of occupation, and it behaved in the manner proper to such armies.

Maître Varraut, the UDAF lawyer who accused Boudarel of crimes against humanity, at the same time talks about the "civilizing role of the French army". However, he demands that, in the case of an eventual trial, only Camp 113 should be taken into consideration, without the context. And there are indeed matters that the "civilizing" army of France would prefer to keep hidden.

A host of infringements of human rights

1. The Viêtminh (an anagram of Revolutionary League of Vietnam) is the name of the liberation movement led by the Vietnamese Communist Party during the French war of reconquest between 1945-54.

2. *Minute-La France* March 6, 1991. The expression "clean-up squads" ("commandos de nettoyage") was used in *Présent*, another far right journal, on March 20, 1991, in an article with the title "the vice closes around the traitor". Dien-Bien-Phu is the name of a great Vietnamese victory over the French in 1954.

3. The RPR (Rassemblement pour la République), Parti Républicain, the UDF (Union pour la Démocratie Française).

4. *Le Monde*, March 17/18, March 22, and March 27, 1991.

5. *Le Monde*, March 22, 1991.

6. *Ibid.*

7. In "The white soldiers of Hồ Chí Minh" Jacques Doyon recounted his time with the Viêtminh under the name of Boris. See also *Libération*, March 25, 1991.

were committed in the name of France in the Indochinese and Algerian wars: arbitrary repression, rapes, massacres, forced displacement of population, torture... The treatment of prisoners of war is a particularly damning file.

As an ex-French soldier, André Plancot recalled in relation to the present controversy: "I saw two officers interrogating fifteen "Niaks". One of them was shot on the spot to make the others talk. No result. The other 14 were then machine gunned".⁸

This was not an isolated incident. Confidential letters from General Beaufort, representing France at the international control commission set up as a part of the 1954 Geneva peace accords, show this: "official information leads me to think that the number of Indochinese prisoners of war who died or were executed in captivity was more than 9,000.

"They were not properly buried and only 2,080 graves can be identified. Finally, I have been informed that prison camp registers mention a great number of executions, above all in 1952 and 1953".⁹

General Beaufort judged that, if these facts were to come to light, they would place France in a "delicate if not difficult situation". He was thus opposed to an exchange of lists of those missing with Hô Chi Minh's government.

Torture as means of government

In the course of the years things got much worse. "The truth," writes Alain Ruscio, "is that during the Algerian war, torture had become, if not generalized, then at least sufficiently commonplace for it to be considered as a 'means of government'....

"With the Battle of Algiers in 1957, a threshold was crossed in the use of terror. Torture, which was already widespread, became more or less commonplace and quite banal [of 24,000 suspects who were "questioned", 3,024 disappeared]."¹⁰

There were also massacres in France itself, as on October 17, 1960, when tens of thousands of Algerians, peacefully demonstrating, in Paris against the imposition of a curfew, were attacked by the police. A hundred of them were killed by gunfire, or thrown into the Seine where they drowned. Some of the bodies were disfigured.

For the French government, denying national rights to the colonized, it was not only a question of re-establishing "the authority of the state". As Pierre Vidal-Naquet has written, Indochina at that time was the scene of "an atrocious war, all the more atrocious in that it is has never been recognized as such".

French soldiers who were taken prisoner were themselves victims of the official lies. To obtain their release or press for them to be better treated would have meant recognizing the Viêtminh as a bel-

ligerent, and this Paris and the high command refused to do.

General Carpentier wrote on February 2, 1950 that he was "formally opposed to any initiative on our part to obtain the liberation of the prisoners of war from the Viêtminh". This attitude continued almost up until Dien-Bien-Phu.¹¹

Paris also refused to send home prisoners released by the Viêtminh. The later was naturally reluctant to release men, in particular elite troops, who would be sent back into battle. From 1945 to 1954, the Viêtminh nonetheless unilaterally freed 4,744 prisoners.

Georges Boudarel has been more than once accused of physically torturing the French soldiers he was in charge of. However, *Le Monde* journalist Dominique Le Guilledoux has noted that: "none of the survivors questioned has imputed precise acts of physical violence to the Frenchman, nor, it seems, to the Viêtminh guards."¹²

According to Vidal-Naquet: "it is not true that Boudarel was a torturer...Nobody died during his indoctrination sessions, even if he was wrong to have undertaken them at the expense of compatriots suffering physiological and moral misery."

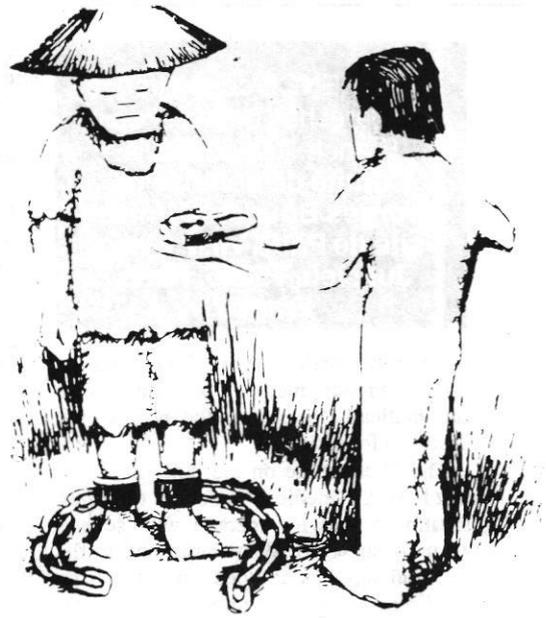
High death rate in Viêtminh camps

In contrast to the detention centres of the French army, torture and executions were not a part of the daily life of the Viêtminh camps. It is nonetheless undeniable that mortality was high in these camps, even if the figure of a 40% survival rate is false.

Figures provided by General Salan show that some 55% of the members of the French expeditionary corp were freed. This is an under-estimate however, since it is calculated as a percentage of the 15,590 "presumed prisoners or missing". It is obvious that not all those missing were prisoners.

The losses among the Indochinese soldiers in the French army were much higher — Salan gives a figure of 1,039 freed out of 13,959.¹³ But it seems impossible to establish how many of these died in captivity. In fact, the Viêtminh released many without returning them to the French authorities, considered incompetent in the matter.

Bernard Fall consecrates a chapter in successive editions of his book on the Viêtminh and the Indochina war to the "camps of the green hell." Despite his abilities as a journalist, he is remarkably uncritical of the French sources. He gives a certificate of good conduct to the colonial authorities, overlooks the thousands of victims mentioned by General Beaufort, and presents a table which implies that only 28.5% of prisoners were liberated.



However, he does not accuse the Viêtminh of having pursued an extermination policy. "There were not many deliberate massacres....From 1950 to 1953, lack of organization and means caused terrible losses among the prisoners....It seems clear that a large part of these deaths were not due to some will to genocide on the part of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam but rather to a lack of interest in the fate of the captives and an incredible meanness of spirit on the part of the Vietnamese authorities".¹⁴

The detainees were subjected to a very harsh regime, but this was to a large extent due to the conditions in the country and the struggle, which were difficult for everyone, including the Vietnamese peasants and the liberation forces.

The zones under Viêtminh control were subjected to a very strict blockade; the tropical climate — sometimes the cold — were very testing; the lack of food and medicines favoured the development of diseases such as dysentery, paludism, beriberi and amoebic hepatitis; the labour involved in gathering food could be exhausting. The French prisoners were badly prepared for such a test.

Some aspects of the Viêtminh's policies

8. *Le Monde*, March 11, 1991. "Niak" is an insulting term for Vietnamese.

9. From the study by Colonel Bonnafous Robert, "Les prisonniers de guerre du corps expéditionnaires français en Extrême-Orient dans les camps Viêtminh, 1945-1954". Doctoral thesis at Montpellier-III University, 1985. Quoted by Louis Couturier, *Rouge*, March 21, 1991.

10. See Alain Ruscio, "La décolonisation tragique, 1945-1962", Messidor/ ed. sociales, Paris 1987, pp. 134-137.

11. *Le Monde*, March 23, 1991. All quotations from Vidal-Naquet are taken from this article.

12. *Le Monde*, March 14, 1991.

13. Raoul Salan: "Mémoires. Fin d'un empire: 'Le Viêtminh, mon adversaire'", Presses de la Cité, Paris 1971, p. 433.

14. Bernard Fall, "Indochine 1946-1962. Chronique d'une guerre révolutionnaire", Laffont, Paris, 1962, pp. 302 and 306. Fall: "Le Viêtminh, La république démocratique du Viet-Nam, 1945-1960", Armand Colin, Paris 1960, p. 204.

A DEFENCE committee for Boudarel has been set up in France. Its address is **Comité de défense de Georges Boudarel, Université de Paris VII, 2 Place Jussieu, 75005, Paris, France.**

needlessly made a very bad situation worse. French medical personnel were automatically placed in the no.1 camp, reserved for officers.

The Vietnamese on the other hand did not have the medical personnel to ensure treatment, and few people with serious wounds survived. What happened to the medical supplies dropped from the air by the French to assist the prisoners is a matter of controversy. Georges Boudarel notes that they were shared between the prison camps and the liberation forces.

No comparison with Nazis

Despite the prevailing misery, the Viêt-minh camps cannot be compared with the Nazi concentration camps. The world of camps created by the Nazis in Germany on their coming to power in 1933 was aimed at physically crushing the organized workers' movement, the left and the liberals, then the resistance of the occupied countries in Europe and finally the genocide of entire Jewish and Gypsy peoples. Death was an industry, and terror a developed system. The objective was not to convert but to destroy.

The Viêt-minh camps were places of indoctrination, not of mass liquidation; the aim was to use French prisoners to assist the victory of a difficult liberation struggle, not to make them disappear.

Having said this, this indoctrination policy raises some fundamental questions. Boudarel presents it in these terms: "The Viêt-minh without doubt committed many mistakes, but they were not so stupid — and nor was I — to believe that it was possible to make communists out of soldiers who were fighting communism...."

"The Viêt-minh aimed to fight a psychological war. The idea was to demonstrate to the prisoners that they had no business in Vietnam, then to set them free to spread doubts among the rest of the expeditionary corps, and after their repatriation, among the French public".¹⁵

These were obviously legitimate objectives. But propaganda is a rigged game when it takes place under conditions where staying in detention can mean death through exhaustion or disease, and when servility can lead to freedom.

In such a situation "self-organization" by the prisoners and "criticism/self-criticism" could only mean intolerable psychological pressure and the installation of a system based on informers.

Georges Boudarel notes that: "the criticism and self-criticism took place in the evening. It was about the day's activities, the participation of each in the good running of the camp. There was nothing like what was going on inside the Vietnamese Communist Party at the time, where Chinese methods were causing such devastation".

But he says: "That said, I have long since thought that what I took part in in Camp 113 was the embryo of what would later become the re-education camps".

Many prisoners broken by experience

Many prisoners seem to have been morally broken by the experience. For one of them, the success of the method "was not shown by ideological conversion, but by the establishment of a very efficient system of mutual incrimination and collaboration which shattered us. In the struggle with death there is no more solidarity. You best friend will betray you".¹⁶

One can understand why Boudarel considers his period in camp 113 as "the blackest time of my life". Vidal-Nacquet notes that, owing to the very fact that he was French, he found himself in an "authentically infernal situation".

It was certainly easier for the soldiers of the expeditionary corps to respect a Vietnamese, whether nationalist or even Communist, than a compatriot who had gone over to the "enemy". It would also have been more difficult for Boudarel than for a VCP cadre to explain to the Vietnamese peasants, revolted by the atrocities of the colonial forces, that the crimes of the counter-revolution did not justify the injustices of the revolution.¹⁷

Georges Boudarel had no military skills and it was normal that the Viêt-minh employed him at tasks other than guerilla warfare, such as propaganda broadcasts or French language publishing. But not, as in 1953, in a job that gave him real power over his compatriot prisoners.

Boudarel did not wait for the present furor to draw the lessons of his experience. A young Communist, he was, in his own words, a Stalinist. He was happy in his life as a militant in the Saigon region, and unhappy during his time in camp 113.

It seems that 1956 represented a turning point. This was the year of Khrushchev's report on Stalin's crimes and the uprisings in Eastern Europe. In Vietnam there was an abortive ideological thaw, the crisis of the land reform and violent conflicts in the VCP.

Boudarel reduced his responsibilities and gave French lessons, then in 1964, left the country for Czechoslovakia. He worked there for the World Federation of Trade Unions and met the widow of Arthur London, the author of *The Trial*, who taught him many things about Stalinism.

Foundation of Indochina Solidarity Front

Amnestied in 1967, he returned to France. He sympathized with May 1968 and in 1969 he took part in the foundation of the Indochina Solidarity Front, a non-sectarian organization disowned by the French Communist Party, which brought together independent communist intellectuals, anti-imperialist figures and a range of far left organizations.

A historian, he published a series of studies, which remain of great interest, on Vietnamese Communism. He has centred his criticism on the functioning of the re-education camps established in Vietnam after the 1975 victory affirming that: "it is necessary to ceaselessly denounce a system... in which the psychological torment of the re-education process destroys individuals, and hounds dissenting thought....making everybody a suspect."¹⁸

In 1980 he published a very rich study of the Vietnamese "ideocracy" and "rectification campaigns", the *chinh huân* ¹⁹, in which he tries to identify the similarities and differences between the VCP and its Soviet counterpart, the influence of Maoism, the degree to which the concepts of the latter represented a break with Hồ Chí Minh's original ideas, and why they have been a success in the army but a disaster for the rest of society.

Most of his friends who still remain in Vietnam are now "dissidents" and severe critics of the regime. As Daniel Hémerly and Pierre Brocheux have written: "at the very moment when Boudarel has become one of the most serious experts on Vietnamese dissidence, his former Stalinism is being demonized. Unlike his accusers

15. *Libération*, March 25, 1991. Unless otherwise indicated, the other quotes from Boudarel are taken from this article. The argument is convincing, even though sometimes Hanoi's propaganda seems so stupid that it tends to make you think that the aim must have been "conversion". One example is a brochure from 1985, which reproduces the "testimonies" of French soldiers, declaring before being set free that "sons of a people blinded by lying propaganda, we are susceptible to being re-educated, set on the right road and becoming a part of the cause of peace". "De la reconquête française à Dien-Bien-Phu (témoignages et récits)", quoted by Couturier, *Rouge*, March 21, 1991.

17. Boudarel has been frequently reproached — and has reproached himself — for, under pressure from a village, having sent a French soldier back to detention and possibly therefore to his death. The soldier had stolen an egg from a peasant during a "long march" southwards, where he was to be freed.

18. *Le Monde*, November 15, 1980.

19. "Rectification campaigns" take place inside the CP, the army and the mass organizations. They are not the same as the "re-education" of counter-revolutionaries.

20. *Le Monde*, March 14, 1980. On some questions, Georges Boudarel's ideas have developed in a direction which would be better described as social democratic than communist. It is also worth pointing out that he was one of the first signatories on the petition demanding the rehabilitation of Thủ Thu Tau, the Vietnamese Trotskyist leader assassinated by CP militants in Vietnam in 1945.

21. Gabriel-Xavier Culioli, *Rouge*, March 21, 1991.

22. Intervention at the Club de la Presse d'Europe, March 17, 1991. Quoted in *Le Monde* on March 19, 1991.

Boudarel has never stopped questioning and reviewing his former commitments".²⁰

So what is behind the anti-Boudarel campaign? At its origin there is clearly the desire of former soldiers detained by the Việtminh for vengeance and the efforts of the proto-fascist National Front (NF) to regain the political initiative. The NF has got itself into hot water with its own electorate over its opposition to French involvement in the Gulf war and its "understanding" attitude to Saddam Hussein's demands. By mobilizing today against this historian, it dreams of once again appearing as the best defender of the army and the "honour of the nation".

Other interests at work

But other interests are also at work, which give this "affair" its resonance in the media and the political world. A part of the "respectable" right is bidding for the NF's electorate.

Others want to put pressure on the universities to speed up their "normalization". Others are developing the enterprise of "historical revisionism", yesterday with regard to the genocide of Jews during the second world war, today with regard to colonialism. This enterprise wants to banalize the notions of Nazism and crimes against humanity, and to efface the memory of atrocities committed by French armies in the name of the French who died in the Việtminh camps.²¹ All agree, in the post-Gulf war ideological atmosphere, that revolutionary commitment should be made a crime.

The governmental left has been keeping quiet, or has been playing the hypocrite, like Lionel Jospin, the education minister. He recognizes that Boudarel's status as a university teacher is a matter for his colleagues, but at the same time he characterizes him, in passing, as a "kapo", and the Việtminh camps as "concentration camps", thus summoning up the vision of Nazism.

He affirms that "the anti-colonialist choice was justified" but that nonetheless the Vietnamese were the "adversary of our country". Make of that what you can! He suggests that Boudarel should be left "to face his own conscience". But he omits to suggest that his own Socialist Party examine its own conscience insofar as its pursuit of colonial wars and its multiple uses and abuses of state terrorism are concerned.²²

In his letter to his colleagues of February 25, Georges Boudarel noted that the campaign against him was intended to discredit him and "all those who, out of political conviction, have taken a radical stance for the independence of the colonies, notably in Indochina and Algeria. And indeed the issue here is the right to oppose criminal actions undertaken in the name of one's own country, a vital right in the present climate". ★

Australia: the collapse of "designer capitalism"

ALMOST eight years ago the Australian Labor Party (ALP) was swept into government in this country's Federal parliament. Many people saw Incoming prime minister Bob Hawke, who had been president of the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), as a radical antidote to the Toryism of Malcolm Fraser, the Liberal "born-to-ruler" who had been installed by the "Kerr coup" of November 11, 1975.¹

JOHN TULLY

THEIR hopes were cruelly dashed. The Hawke government is often described ironically as the "best ever Liberal government". It has broken strikes and unions; sold out the oppressed Aboriginal population; slashed millions of dollars from the "social wage"; and betrayed those environmentalists who looked to it for a way to stop the rape of the earth. It has robbed the poor to swell the bloated purses of its super-rich "Mates"².

The government has pursued vigorous "free market" policies, pressing ahead to privatize state-owned enterprises, slash public spending and end state subsidies to manufacturing industry. This "level playing field" approach by Treasurer [finance minister] Paul Keating differs little from the policies associated with Britain's Margaret Thatcher. Today, as the winds of recession and trade war bite into the fragile Australian economy, it is obvious that "the World's Greatest Treasurer" has engineered a disaster.

A country racked by crisis

Hawke and Keating preside over a country racked by accelerating economic crisis. One index of this is the level of unemployment. Officially around 750,000, it may really be as high as 1.5 to 2 million and the downward trend shows no sign of bottoming out. In contrast there were just 26,900 job vacancies in February 1991, a slump of 52% over the past year. Only 16,000 of these vacancies were in the private sector.

Small and not so small businesses, squeezed by high interest rates, are going bankrupt all over Australia. Rural Australia is in the throes of the deepest depression since the 1930s, with many thousands of small farmers being forced off the land. Rural misery is leading,

indeed, to the growth of sinister fascist-style movements in the countryside. In January many thousands of rural demonstrators came to the city of Melbourne to hear right wing bigots denounce socialists, feminists, gays and blacks as the cause of their plight.

Treasurer Keating's "designer capitalism" is a dismal ruin. Australian industry last year invested the lowest share of its output since 1975 in new plant, machinery and equipment, despite the government's incessant rhetoric about a "smart" Australia with a "high-tech" manufacturing base. The inflationary bubble of the 1980s, which saw the rise of speculative entrepreneurs like Alan Bond, has been pricked.

Australia's national debt is the world's fourth largest. This was incurred partly as a result of overseas borrowing for minerals and energy development projects. But it also resulted from the speculative activities of the "Order of Mates". By 1989 the Australian dollar was the world's sixth most traded currency as speculators shunted currency around on world markets in search of quick profits. The Mates also borrowed heavily overseas in order to

1. The ALP is a social democratic party affiliated to the Socialist International. Formed in the 1890s depression following the defeat of union struggles it has since enjoyed close ties with the union movement. The Liberal Party, which is usually in coalition with the reactionary agrarians of the National Party, is a conservative party in the mould of Britain's Tories. The "Kerr coup" refers to the removal [in 1975] of former Labor prime minister Gough Whitlam by the Governor-General Sir John Kerr. Kerr, an unelected figure nominated by Whitlam himself, was the representative of Australia's Head-of-State, the English queen. The situation is a hangover of Australia's former status as a British colony.

2. In Australian parlance "mate" is a close friend. The word is part of the male working class ethos and is exploited by Hawke. Unfortunately for him, his use of the term to describe his friendships with the mega-rich has rebounded and is now a term of derision.

finance an orgy of takeover bids, property speculation and other unproductive ventures. The now-failed entrepreneur Alan Bond ran up 10% of the foreign debt financing a conglomerate business empire that encompassed everything from television to brewing, mining and brokerage.

From Mates to spivs

Many of the Mates' business empires have collapsed as a result of over-extension and inability to repay their massive loans. A number of them, including Alan Bond, Christopher Skase and Laurie Connell, are facing charges of criminal financial malpractice. Overnight, many were dubbed "spivs" as Hawke and Keating tried desperately to distance themselves from their former Mates.

Meanwhile the taxpayers have been left with the bill. The government has consistently preached the sermon of hard work and increased productivity to working people, claiming that "wage restraint" and sacrifice of hard-won conditions (abolition of "restrictive practices" in Hawkespeak) would be rewarded. Keating said he would "bring home the bacon" and that "the light was at the end of the tunnel".

The clichés masked the truth. Whilst Bond and his ilk have come and gone, the more prudent or lucky super-rich are still wallowing in the profit trough. Meanwhile at least two million Australians — out of a population of 17 million — live below the poverty line. Despite Hawke's 1988 election promise that no child would live in poverty by 1990, 17.5% of Australia's children were in that condition in 1990 compared with 7.2% in 1973. Tens of thousands live in the streets, prey to pimps, drug dealers and the police.

That this "socialist" government has repeatedly refused calls by church groups for an inquiry into wealth should come as no surprise, for it has been Hawke's deliberate policy, in alliance with his cronies in the ACTU, to try to rejuvenate Australian capitalism at the expense of the working class.

Under a series of "accords" between the federal government and the ACTU there has been a massive transfer of wealth away from the working people to the capitalists. Between March 1983 and September 1988, for instance, the real value of wages fell by 9.45% for car workers; 12.34% for meat workers; 9.12% for shop assistants and 9.34% for wharfies.

Between 1982-83 and 1987 the share of wages in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) declined from 58.3% to 51.6%, while that of profits rose from 10.8% to 13.9%. The wealth of the very rich increased by 250% whilst the country's overall wealth rose by only 20%. Between 1983 and 1990 real wages fell by 8%. Put another way, between 1982-83 and 1988-89, real unit labour costs fell by 15%, whilst the corporate gross operating sur-

plus as a percentage of non-farm GDP increased from 11.3% to 16.5%.

The rhetoric of the accord also included promises to increase spending on the social wage. The reality is that the poor and the "new poor" created by the government's policies have overwhelmed a welfare system weakened by government spending cuts. By 1990 the government had turned a A\$5.7bn budget deficit into a A\$5.5bn surplus, largely at the expense of the social wage and without any inroads into the perks dished out to big business. In fact the amount of company tax paid has been steadily declining compared with that amount collected from ordinary PAYE [Pay As You Earn — tax deducted directly from the wage packet] taxpayers.

Government moves to crush resistance

At the same time the government moved to crush any resistance to its policies by militant working class organizations. Any trade union which tried to break the accord and fulfill its traditional role of defending the members' wages and conditions has been attacked by the full force of the state with the consent of the ACTU.

Despite Australia being a signatory to the ILO (International Labour Organization) Charter which supposedly guarantees union rights for Australia's working people, it is extremely doubtful whether the right to strike exists in this country. Employer groups linked with what is called the "New Right" have taken civil action for damages against striking meat, mining and confectionery workers and have been awarded enormous sums of money. Other unions have backed off

when faced with similar action.

In addition amendments to the Federal Trade Practices Act made by the former Fraser government have not been repealed. These outlaw so-called "secondary boycotts", that is sympathetic industrial action to support other workers in struggle.

Now the Federal government is belatedly introducing right to strike legislation in parliament. This has been prompted by the sabre-rattling of the opposition Liberal Party's leaders who are stating that, if elected as the next government, they would use the military to "clean up" the waterfront unions, an alleged hotbed of "restrictive practices."

But Hawke cannot place the blame for the erosion of union rights solely on the New Right, loathsome though they may be. The Hawke government is guilty of gross hypocrisy in its new found concern for workers' rights, and is obviously trying to placate disgruntled voters.

It was Labor Federal and State [provincial] governments which crushed the Maoist-led Builders' Labourers' Association and the industrially militant Australian Federation of Airline Pilots.

Both unions have virtually ceased to exist in the face of an unholy alliance of government, state and employer bodies, together with "yellow" unions and the ACTU leadership. In the case of the pilots, Hawke, acting directly in the interests of his long-time Mates in Ansett airlines, used the Royal Australian Air Force as scabs to break the union.

Reactionary foreign policy pursued

This dismal record is repeated in almost

**(Three of)
Labor's broken promises**

✦ *The Aborigines* are the indigenous people of Australia. They were dispossessed of their land by the white settlers after 1788 and by the 1920s were considered a "dying race". Over the past 25 years in particular they have struggled hard for land rights and social justice. Hawke pledged support but backed off under pressure from white mining corporations and pastoral interests. The Aboriginal people, despite gains won by their own struggles, still suffer Third World conditions in a First World country.

✦ *Ecology*: Australia is a huge continent, but it has a fragile environment which has been catastrophically affected by white settlement. It is estimated for example, that 30% of the continent's topsoil has been lost since 1788. Two thirds of trees in the state of Victoria have been cut down since 1830 and some tributaries of the Murray River are three times as salty as the ocean. Despite an earlier alliance with a section of the environmental movement, Hawke is now pressing ahead with "National Resources Legislation" which will guarantee developers access to scarce timber and to the subsoil. This will result in further environmental deterioration.

✦ *East Timor*, until 1975 a Portuguese colony, lies just to the north of Australia. It was invaded by Indonesia in that year, with the compliance of the US and Whitlam Labor government in Australia. The Hawke government has continued to support Indonesia's illegal occupation of the territory and has turned a blind eye to the killing of between 100,000 and 200,000 East Timorese. ★

every area, from foreign policy to ecology. Portugal is taking Australia to the World Court after the shameful carve-up of East Timor's oil by the Australian and Indonesian governments.

And in the pattern of reactionary Australian premiers from the Boer War onwards, Hawke didn't even wait to be asked by George Bush before dispatching frigates to assist the US-dominated coalition in the Persian Gulf. In this he rivalled the arch-Tory Robert Menzies, who in 1965 sent troops to aid the US and its puppet regime in Saigon before even being asked.

Small wonder that the government is "on the nose" to working class people. Recent opinion polls have shown support for the ALP at around 30% as opposed to 54% for the Liberal/National coalition. ALP members are leaving the party in droves, disgusted by the Thatcherite policies of their leaders and the inability of the rank-and-file to make their voices heard. Some senior Labor figures have been heard wondering who will do the "shit" work for them in elections.

Those elections will be a disaster for the ALP. Unless Hawke can perform a miracle by 1993 the Liberals will be elected on a landslide.

Already the Thatcherite Liberal leader John Hewson is flexing his political muscles, signalling that he is hell-bent on a showdown with the trade union movement and a roll-back of those conditions which have escaped the effects of the accord.

Hewson's party has steadily moved to the right as a result of Hawke's usurpation of its traditional place on the political spectrum and would act against the organized working class, women and minority groups.

Whilst working people should shed no tears for the coming political demise of the ALP government, they also have to prepare for a Liberal onslaught.

Unfortunately eight years of the corporatist accord has gutted the union movement. Over the last five years the proportion of the workforce in unions has fallen from 46% to 41%, with the most marked decline in the private sector.

Put another way, the accord cost the union movement 437,000 members between 1983 and 1989. Whilst the decline is partly due to unemployment and changes in the nature of work, the main cause is worker disillusion with organizations which seem little more than arms of government.

"Super unions" are paper tigers

The ACTU bureaucrats are in the process of "rationalizing" the union movement into "super-unions"; huge conglomerates which bear no resemblance to industrial unions.

These will be even further removed from control by the membership. They will be true "paper tigers" when confronted by the victorious Liberals after the next election.

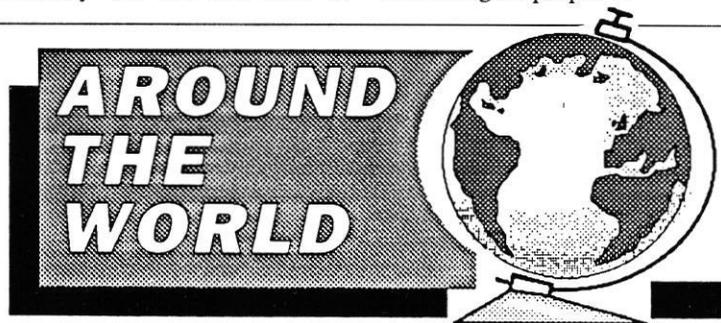
A Liberal victory will end the cosy corporatist relationship which the ACTU leaders have enjoyed with the ALP government.

It will also leave the working people of this country with a weakened trade union movement led by bureaucrats who could not even spell the word struggle, let alone wage one in defence of workers' rights and conditions.

Paradoxically the left has been in

decline at the same time as the government falters and the economy crashes. The Communist Party of Australia and its newspaper *Tribune* have collapsed and other organizations have fallen on hard times — undoubtedly a spinoff from the disintegration of Stalinism in eastern Europe and the USSR.

Yet more than ever, militants of the left need to put aside hair-splitting questions of doctrine and come together to form a class struggle left wing to fight for the advancement of all progressive social causes, including those of peace, women, lesbians and gays, the environment and the Aboriginal people. ★



GERMANY

An unreconstructed Stalinist

A LOCAL court in Frankfurt has ordered the ISP-Verlag publishing house which is based there to cease distribution of a book produced by them, or at least to suppress certain passages of it.

The work in question is Hans Schafranek's "Between the NKVD and the Gestapo" which deals with the handing over by the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany of German and Austrian anti-fascists between 1937 and 1941. Some 858 of these people were taken from the Stalinist Gulag; many of them died in the Nazi camps.

Behind this case lies an unrepentant 78-year old Stalinist, Emil Carlebach, who had previously showed his colours in 1949 at the time of the appearance of a book by Margarete Buber-Neumann, "A prisoner of Hitler and Stalin".

At that time he had expressed the view that the victims of Stalinism got what they deserved and that Buber-Neumann was a Gestapo agent.

The latter took Carlebach to court and he was found guilty of slander. During the trial, evidence was given notably by Benedikt Kautsky, son of the social democratic theoretician, who had been detained with Carlebach in the Jewish barracks no. 22 in Buchenwald.

Author of a reference work on Buchenwald and the Nazi camps, "Teufel und Verdammte", Kautsky declared that Carlebach, as the head of Block 22, belonged to the camp "aristocracy" and did not hesitate to act ruthlessly against his political opponents — including of course Trotskyists — or other detainees

who displeased him. By way of example Kautsky accused Carlebach of being responsible for the assassinations of two Polish Jews beaten to death at his behest.

Another former inmate, August Cohn, has depicted Carlebach as an unscrupulous apparatchik and accused him of having tried to have an Austrian politician from a different current transferred to Block 46, reserved for human guinea pigs.

This evidence, given under oath by Kautsky and Cohn in the 1951 trial, is faithfully reproduced in Schafranek's book and is the reason why Carlebach wants the book suppressed.

Exorbitant damages are being demanded from the author and the editor with the evident intention of ruining this modest Trotskyist publishing house.

Austrian historians and the press have protested against the proceedings initiated by Carlebach and praised Schafranek's research. ★

AUSTRIA

Memorial

SET up in spring 1990, this movement pursues two aims. In the first place it intends to support the efforts of Memorial in the Soviet Union to establish the whole historical truth about the Stalinist terror and obtain the complete rehabilitation of the victims of Stalinism.

At the same time it wants to make an inventory of all the Austrian victims of Stalinism, notably those anti-fascists who fled to the Soviet Union, where they suffered repression and/or were handed over to the Gestapo after the Hitler-Stalin pact.

A petition has been sent to the Soviet authorities calling on them to open the rel-

evant archives. Among its many signatures are those of prominent personalities including of the former Austrian chancellor, Bruno Kreisky.

As a first contribution to this research, a small book was published in October 1990 by Junius-Verlag which gave some examples of militants who went into the Gulag or died in Stalin's jails.

A typical case was that of a founder member and leader of the Austrian Communist Party, Franz Koritshoner (1892-1941). He was a friend of Bukharin, who he got to know during the latter's time in Vienna between 1911 and 1913.

He was a delegate to the Kienthal conference in April 1916, where he met Lenin and Radek and aligned himself with the Bolsheviks. Starting in 1930 he worked for the Red International of Trade Unions in Moscow before falling victim to the purges in 1936.

Sentenced to three years in prison and then ten years exile, he was handed over to the Gestapo at Lublin in April 1941 with 40 other prisoners. He died in Auschwitz on June 8, 1941. After the 20th Congress of the CPSU in 1956 he was rehabilitated.

★

CONGO

Death of democratic leader

THE "democratization process" in the Congo is one of the most spectacular of the developments of this kind now underway in many countries in Black Africa. Dozens of parties and associations are coming into existence and putting forward their point of view.

The regime, weakened by the economic crisis and social pressures, is also under pressure from the dominant imperialist power in the Congo, France, which is pushing for a controlled democratization here as in most other African countries.

The various cliques that have succeeded each other in power over the past 20 years fitted out in "Marxist-Leninist" language a regime built on corruption, tribalism and in the end submission to imperialism and the oil companies.

The whole system is in crisis and a period of uncertainty has set in, which promises to be prolonged and difficult. There is no guarantee that this type of process will give rise to a new independent workers and popular movement.

Some indication of the state of play was provided by the national all-party conference held at the start of March, at which all the various political forces were able to show what they had to offer and confront the regime.

Among these forces *La Cause* ("association for social control and the emancipation of the people by themselves") appeared as the most radical current, particularly concerned that the process of democratization be indepen-

dent of bourgeois and neo-colonial forces. Unfortunately on the eve of the national conference, the main inspiration behind *La Cause*, Grégoire Mavounia, died. When his death was announced, students requested that classes be stopped for a week and more than a thousand people attended the funeral.

Young people of both sexes wanted to carry the coffin after demonstrating in Mavounia's honour on the campus where he taught. Trade unionists and religious figures also took part in the homage.

Mavounia's funeral was a sign of the immense hopes aroused in the population and the support that exists for the construction in the country, more than thirty years after independence, of a popular, radical and socialist movement free from the scourge of corruption.

★

BELGIUM

Conference on Third World debt

THE Belgian committees for the cancellation of the Third World debt organized a conference on the theme "Third World debt: a timebomb" in Brussels on March 16, 1991, with around a thousand attending.

Among the speakers were: Gilles Perreault, one of the initial signatories of the appeal against the debt; Susan George, a United Nations and UNESCO expert on Africa; the agronomist René Dumont and Ernest Mandel.

According to UNICEF, 40,000 children die each day of malnutrition and curable diseases. Nine months of the Gulf War cost the coalition nearly \$100bn. It would cost an estimated \$2.5bn each year to save these children.

This Brussels initiative will be followed up by an international mobilization against the summit of the seven richest countries to take place in London on July 13, 1991 and by the organization in Paris on June 8, 1991 of an assembly around the theme "six hours for the cancellation of the debt." ★

EAST EUROPE / SOUTH AFRICA

Where are they now?

"WESTERN radio has announced that South Africa has given permanent residence to former police and secret service agents from eastern Europe. Is this true?" asks one K. Klimov in a letter to the mass circulation Soviet weekly *Argumenty i*

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Fakty (no. 10 (543), March, 1991).

The journal's S. Youriev replies:

"In the recent period a significant number of former secret service, army, intelligence and police officers from Poland, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and the ex-GDR have received permission to go and live permanently in South Africa. Relieved of their former functions, they are being recruited there by police, army and intelligence units.

"According to the South African press, the 'eastern European officers' are more hardworking in their field than their white South African colleagues, they have a good professional experience and are even more 'resolute' when it comes to restoring order in the black areas.

"One should not overlook the material advantages of their new career. When they go to work for the South African state they receive a good house and a car; and after six months of irreproachable service they can become South African citizens." ★

ALGERIA

General strike

A general strike in protest against price rises was called by the principal Algerian trade union, the General Union of Algerian Workers (UGTA), on March 13 and 14 1991. The strike was widely supported and placed the Islamic trade union, which had not supported the strike call, in a difficult situation. Many workers observed the strike in enterprises where the Islamic union was dominant.

The success of this strike, going well beyond the base of the UGTA, has given a new confidence to the Algerian working class and marked a defeat for the fundamentalist Islamic Salvation Front, only a few months before Algeria's scheduled general elections. ★