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The new Arab Order



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and the Israeli obstacle

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The New Arab Order and the Israeli obstacle

OPERATION "Desert Storm" was conceived as a decisive step towards a political re-ordering of the Arab East under American tutelage. The American war is to be succeeded by a *pax americana* the first elements of which have begun to be assembled since the end of the fighting. The cornerstone of the edifice is the alliance of the six monarchies¹ who make up the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with Syria and Egypt the main Arab members of the anti-Iraqi coalition. Paradoxically, the main obstacle to the regional *pax americana* is now the State of Israel; the intransigence of Yitzhak Shamir's right-wing Zionist government is presenting US secretary of state James Baker with considerable difficulties in his efforts to achieve an Arab-Israeli peace under US auspices.

SALAH JABER

THE representatives of the eight Arab allies, meeting in the Syrian capital on March 5 and 6, 1991, adopted the "Damascus Declaration", proclaiming the establishment of a "New Arab Order" whose name is evidence enough of its relation to Bush's "New World Order". The Declaration's two main aspects are military and economic. In the aftermath of the joint action against Iraq, the Egyptian and Syrian troops — 35,000 and 20,000 respectively — currently in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait are to remain there or be deployed in other Gulf states, and may even be reinforced (Syria is envisaging doubling its contingent).

According to the Declaration, these troops are "the core of an Arab peace force set up to guarantee the security and integrity of the Arab states of the Gulf Region." Although this military alliance claims that it is not "directed against any party", it is clear that in reality the security and integrity of the Gulf monarchies can only be threatened by the two pretenders to hegemony in the region, recently-defeated Iraq and Iran, which has found its position strengthened by the crushing of its adversary.

These two states have long counter-balanced each other with regard to the imperialist and reactionary order in the Gulf. When Iraq was a source of nationalist subversion, Iran under the Shah held it in check. Then, when Iran became a source of Khomeinite subversion after February 1979, Iraq elevated itself into

the "defender of the eastern gate of the Arab nation", undertaking its devastating eight year war against its neighbour with the financial backing of the Arab oil monarchies.

The Iraqi attack on Kuwait and the redirection of Saddam Hussein's ambitions towards his Arab neighbours, have meant that, for the first time in the existence of these states, both are in the camp of enemies of the traditional imperialist order in the Gulf. This unprecedented situ-

ation required the reorganization of the defence of the local pillars of that order. An external counterweight to the twofold Iranian and Iraqi threat had to be found.

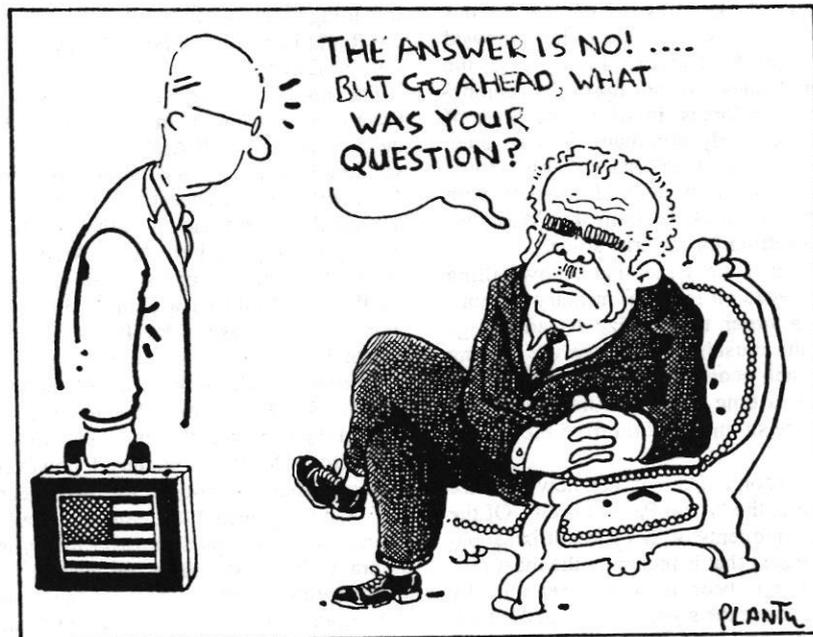
The massive intervention by the imperialist — above all US — troops was needed to destroy Iraqi military potential, a task beyond the strength of any local force. It was also intended to create the political, and even psychological, conditions for the desired reorganization. But, for reasons both political and religious, the prolonged stationing of massive western forces in Saudi Arabia was not a likely option. Their continued presence on soil which, by religious decree (*fatwa*), is considered to form a gigantic mosque, might make them a running sore inflaming the anti-western nationalist or religious resentments of the Arab masses.

Three-tier security system

In consequence the US and its rich Gulf protégés have devised a new security system adapted to realities both new and old. This system has three levels, with direct American military intervention the last resort. The first level is the Gulf monarchies' own armed forces, which are going to be considerably reinforced. The size of the Saudi army is to be doubled or tripled to 100,000 or 150,000 men, very likely backed up by Egyptian, Pakistani and perhaps Moroccan mercenaries. Kuwait's small army is similarly to be increased.

And, of course, there is a big guaranteed market for the US' military industry, after the live demonstration of its products' efficiency in Desert Storm. The sales already negotiated with Saudi Arabia alone by Washington have reached

1. Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman and Qatar.



the round sum of \$10bn. A deal of the same order will probably be reached with Kuwait, whose arsenal has to be more or less restocked from scratch. Bush, meanwhile, answers those who, from pacifist naivety or devotion to the Israeli cause, question these arms' sales and recall the Bush administration's own declarations about arms control in the region, by referring hypocritically to the need to establish an equilibrium of forces among the region's Arab countries, (rather than between them and Israel):

"The official (of the Defence department) stated that the administration is determined to increase the arsenals of the friendly Arab states in the Gulf — countries which, he added, are individually less powerful than Iraq. It is only in the context of the reinforcement of the weakest states, he said, that the administration would consider regional limitations on arms."²

No freeze on arms exports

In sum, far from promoting regional disarmament including of the Zionist state, Washington would not "consider" a freeze on arms' exports to the region before it had raised the military potential of each of its most reliable allies individually to a level that could deter a potential enemy comparable to Iraq (meaning Iran).

The only arms of which the Bush administration intends to halt further deliveries to the Arab countries are the NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) weapons, as well as ballistic missiles with a range of more than 150 km³. Washington will continue to sell other weapons, including highly sophisticated ones to its Arab allies.

Apart from the commercial angle, there is a real will in the US to strengthen their protégés ability to withstand external and internal shocks, drawing out the lessons of the great vulnerability they showed during the Gulf crisis. In any case, the planned sales will not upset the regional balance of forces, in which the State of Israel is clearly dominant. It is an open secret that the latter has a sizeable arsenal of NBC weapons and of missiles with ranges ten times the limit that Washington is setting for its Arab allies.

Ironically it is Israel that is now calling for a freeze on regional military capabilities in order to stabilize its advantage after the crushing of Iraq, while sparing the Israeli economy the cost of an arms' race, at a time when it is having to deal with Jewish immigration from the USSR.

The second level of the new defence system is the "Arab Peace Force". Of the two components of this force it is Mubarak's Egypt that is presently the most reliable. It has been massively rearmed by the US since the signing of the peace treaty with Israel in 1979, the object being to

replace the structural dependence of the Egyptian army on the USSR with integration into the American military system, involving joint annual manoeuvres ("Bright Star") as well as comprehensive re-equipment.⁴ The latest consignment of this re-armament programme, submitted this year to the US Congress, involves 46 of the latest F-16 planes with stocks of bombs and missiles.

Syrian army dependent on Moscow

The Syrian army remains closely dependent on Moscow for its material, and its "Americanization" is not on the cards for the foreseeable future. That would require a Syrian-Israeli peace treaty on Camp David lines and an assurance, by this and other means, of the irreversibility of Syrian allegiance to Washington. For the moment Damascus is an ally under strict surveillance from Washington, which nonetheless hopes that Syria's economic interests will, at a time of Soviet bankruptcy, dictate to that adept of *realpolitik* Hafez-el-Assad a firm anchorage in the American camp.

The third level, and the last recourse, is direct intervention by the American army, and in particular the direct use of its troops on the ground. Before Iraq invaded Kuwait, American military plans for the region largely rested on Israel and the Saudi and Egyptian armies integrated into the Pentagon's regional system. At the top of this is the CentCom (Central Command) whose HQ is at Tampa in Florida and whose chief is none other than Norman Schwarzkopf.

The CentCom could also count on Turkey, but it also had its own intervention forces: the American bases in Turkey, Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, the American fleet in the Gulf with facilities at Bahrain, and the surrounding fleets, including in the Mediterranean, as well as the Rapid Deployment Force based in the US and Europe.

The operation against Iraq showed a certain sluggishness in the American deployment in Saudi Arabia and its great vulnerability in its first phase. Military commentaries retrospectively underline the fact that if Iraq had taken the initiative in August to push into Saudi Arabia to forestall the buildup of the coalition forces, the US would have confronted a far more difficult task. The Pentagon has drawn the lessons of that experience.

Certainly, Schwarzkopf confirmed on March 24 that his army did not plan to leave a big permanent ground force in the Gulf area. He also announced however that an advance post of the American command, connected to CentCom, would be set up in the region, most probably in Bahrain. This post will be responsible for coordinating allied regional strategy and the organization of joint Arab-American land, sea and air manoeuvres, which pre-

supposes the, if not permanent, then at least frequent presence of US troops.⁵ At the same time, the permanent American fleet cruising the Gulf waters, will be reinforced.

And, above all, the direct deployment of American troops on the ground in an emergency, will be greatly facilitated by the "pre-positioning" of American equipment. Two stores are planned: in Turkey, and, of course, in Saudi Arabia. In both of these countries arms for a strongly equipped division will be stored in a way that permits the troops to be ready for combat in a few days on the spot. This improved capacity for rapid deployment, added to the capacity for medium-term deployment shown by the remarkable effort undertaken between August 1990 and January 1991 — the only genuine American exploit in this war — should, in the Pentagon's view, be sufficient to intimidate potential threats.

The three-tier defence system has, as with any security system, both a deterrent, and a defensive and repressive function. However, the masters of the imperialist order know that, nonetheless, this is not enough to assure the desired stability. They are perfectly well aware of the need to finish the structure off with preventive action, especially as the first two tiers are not wholly secure.

The armed forces of the Gulf monarchies are not renowned for their efficiency. Egypt and Syria, furthermore, independently of the reliability of their governments in Washington's eyes, are constantly exposed to the risks of a popular uprising that could spread to the armed forces. Their relative political fragility is a function of their precarious socio-economic situation. Unlike in the Gulf oil monarchies (which rank among the richest countries in the world), the populations of Syria, and especially Egypt, have been seeing a sharp drop in their living standards⁶, a source of chronic political and social tensions.

It was under the pressure of similar problems that Iraq's dictator decided to invade Kuwait, despairing of further funding by his "rich brothers." Saddam Hussein reacted to the refusal of the Kuwaitis to continue to underwrite his regime, and developed for the occasion a nationalist rhetoric calling for an equitable apportioning of the wealth of the Arab nation between all its components. Syria, for its part, has regularly milked the Gulf oil monarchies for funds using politico-terrorist blackmail in the name of the confrontation with the Zionist state.

Military protection rackets

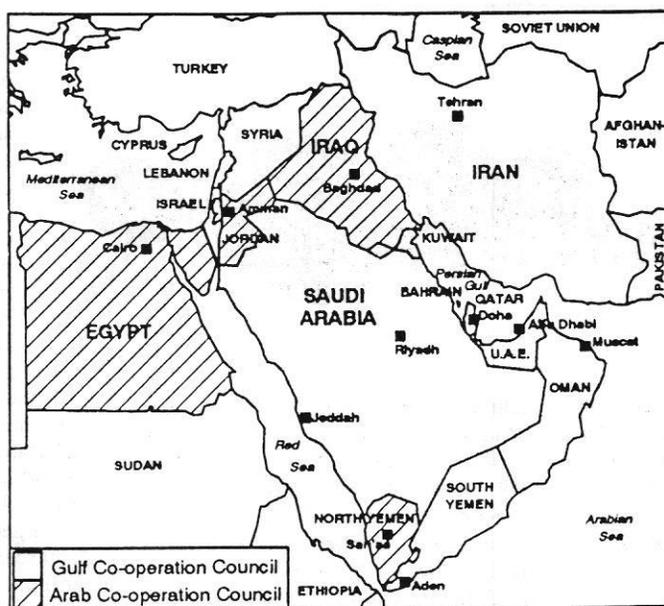
Desert Storm has radically changed the context where rich, but vulnerable, states, gave way to pressure from poor, but militarily powerful, states determined to operate a protection racket. The energetic US intervention on the side of their rich pro-

tégés has given the oil monarchies, now confident of American protection, a feeling of freedom from any regional threat. They have been making their sense of emancipation plain, but have also been pushed by Washington to continue to provide aid to those Arab states that accept the *pax americana*. The protection racket run by states who did not shrink from subversion has been replaced by a system of contributions for the consolidation of the reactionary order, notably to states that offer their services as mercenaries.

The Damascus Declaration deals with this aspect. It is founded on the one hand on "the respect for the principle of the sovereignty of each Arab state over its own natural and economic resources", and on the other on "the reinforcement of economic cooperation" between the signatories, with a view to extending it to other Arab countries. The innovation here is that aid from the rich states will henceforth be accompanied by conditions similar to those that regulate the financing of eastern Europe by the imperialist countries. The finality of the "economic cooperation" is defined in the Declaration: "to encourage the private sector...to participate in the development process...and allow small and medium sized enterprises to profit from the fruits of cooperation..."

Concrete measures have already been taken or are on the way in the general spirit of the Declaration: special recompense for Egypt and Syria for their good and loyal services and a mechanism for regional financing. Syria has received \$2bn — welcome aid for a Ba'athist regime close to bankruptcy. Egypt's needs are far greater. The country has 55 million inhabitants and great poverty, and has also suffered directly from the Gulf crisis, since some two million of its people were working in Kuwait and Iraq, while tourism, a major source of hard currency, has been hit.

The Arab oil monarchies and the US are making a special effort to damp down the Egyptian powder barrel and thus safeguard their most docile ally. The oil monarchies have cancelled more than \$7bn worth of debts owed them by Egypt, and Washington has cancelled that the same amount of the country's military debt. The Bush administration and its oil allies, furthermore, are putting pressure on the IMF and other imperialist creditors for favourable treatment for Egypt under the aegis of the Fund. More than 30% of Egypt's \$40bn government debts are to be cancelled and the rest re-scheduled. Two new loans of \$300m each are to be granted to Cairo by the IMF and the World Bank.



This favourable treatment, following on from the generosity shown by the Club of Paris (cancelling 50%) and Washington (cancelling 70%) to Walesa's Poland, will surely incite the governments of the most indebted countries, including the Latin American trio (Brazil, Mexico and Argentina), to demand similar facilities. David Mulford, under-secretary at the US treasury, has answered them in advance, saying that Poland and Egypt are "politically and economically unique"⁷ That is to say, both the cancellation of the debt and the provision of new financing are more than ever to be subject to "good behaviour".

Price rises planned for Egypt

The political conditions fulfilled by Egypt are clear enough. The economic conditions are to be laid down by the IMF. As usual they include the suppression of subsidies on basic goods and services. The Mubarak government is already warning the population to expect high rises in the price of electricity, petrol and other oil products, and thus in transport, as well as on basic foodstuffs, including bread and meat. Every previous attempt to implement such instructions in Egypt has led to popular riots, as in most Third World countries subjected to the same diktats.

To soften the shock, the Gulf oil monarchies are already giving priority to Egyptian immigrant workers to the detriment of Palestinians, Yemenis and others from countries that did not support the anti-Iraqi coalition. More than two million such workers have already been expelled from the oil monarchies. The number of Egyptians working in Saudi Arabia has risen by almost 50% in three months, going from 684,000 in December 1990 to over a million now.

The Egyptian ambassador in Riyadh

has declared that the Saudi authorities are now reserving half of the work visas to be granted for Egyptians⁸. This is the main benefit for Cairo of its political attitude; immigration to the Gulf soaks up a portion of the unemployment and is the main source of hard currency for many countries via remittances.

Egypt and Syria, furthermore, will be the main beneficiaries of the Development Programme currently being got underway by the six oil monarchies of the GCC, which will dispose of a fund of \$15bn, of which a third will be available soon. This programme, in the spirit of the Damascus Declaration, will be regulated by methods inspired at once by those being employed in eastern Europe,

given the similar structures of the economies, with a dominant state sector. The accent is on the expansion of the private sector, aiming to consolidate a "New Arab Order" based on free enterprise and the combination of Gulf capital, the labour power of their Arab allies and imperialist capital and technology, all under American patronage.

This idyllic project is almost utopian, however, given the extraordinary complexities of the region's social and political problems, as is well illustrated by the evolution of the situation in Iraq. The main hidden rock on which the *pax americana* may founder in the short term is, of course, the Israel-Arab conflict. This latter has been the main factor of political instability in the Arab region for decades and the main catalyst for the anti-American feeling of the Arab masses. The United States has had to deal with the permanent embarrassment of the political opposition between its Arab clients and allies on the one hand and its privileged military partner, the Zionist state, on the other.

The Damascus Declaration could not get away with not mentioning this conflict. Pretending to repeat the official Arab stance — "an international peace conference under the UN flag" — and the settlement of the conflict on the basis of UN resolutions to "put an end to the Israeli occupation of Arab territories and guarantee the national rights of the Palestinian

2. *International Herald Tribune*, March 8, 1991.

3. *IHT*, April 29, 1991.

4. The Soviet material that has been replaced has been sold or given by Egypt to allies such as the Afghan Mujahedin or the US itself, who use Soviet arms for target practice.

5. This also assumes that the allied armies have American equipment.

6. The Egyptian population is growing by a million every nine months.

7. *IHT*, April 11, 1991.

8. *IHT*, April 6, 1991.



people”, the Declaration introduced two clear concessions to Washington. On the one hand, the “international conference” is no longer a requirement, but merely an “adequate framework”, on the other, there is no longer any mention of an independent Palestinian state, but only of Palestinian “national rights”.

The post-Gulf war keynote speech by Bush to Congress on March 6, a few hours after the publication of the Damascus Declaration, echoed these preoccupations. He reaffirmed his administration’s adherence to UN Security Council resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of a territory-for-peace swap, that is, the withdrawal of Israel from territories occupied in 1967 in exchange for the recognition of the Zionist state and its frontiers by the Arab states, and a guarantee of its security. He also undertook to respect “legitimate Palestinian rights”.

Bush’s speech gave the signal for a new series of Kissinger-style regional tours by his secretary of state, James Baker, the difference being that the strategy of “small steps” dear to the former, aimed at achieving separate settlements between each Arab state and Israel, is no longer on the order of the day. In fact, the front of Arab states bordering on Israel is now under American hegemony, Syria having rejoined this camp bag and baggage. Desert Storm has created an exceptionally favourable political climate for Washington’s plans in the Middle East at a moment when, for a fistful of dollars, Moscow has abdicated any pretence of challenging its traditional rival.

Soviet participation accepted

Under these conditions, the former American opposition to a global settlement with Soviet participation has been dropped. On the contrary, it is now the Bush administration that wishes for a *package deal* with all the concerned Arab parties and with the agreement of the Kremlin. The area of agreement between Washington and the Arab partners, with Moscow’s blessing, is greater than ever. These partners, which include Syria and the PLO leadership, have ceased to outbid one another in nationalist rhetoric.

6 The moderate faction of the Zionist establishment — Labour and other supporters,

including ruling Likud members — of a partial withdrawal from the occupied territories in exchange for a peace treaty with guarantees — also situates itself on the same terrain.

Four key issues mark it out: two fundamental issues — the question of the Syrian Golan Heights occupied and annexed by Israel in 1981 and that of the occupied Palestinian territories, including annexed East Jerusalem; and two more trival points — the framework for the negotiations and the problem of Palestinian representation. The Egyptian-Israeli conflict has been resolved and the fact that Egypt is taking part nevertheless bears witness to the solution of the fifth, and for a long time the most thorny, problem.

Recognition of Israel

Indeed, the problem of the recognition of the State of Israel, the guarantee of its frontiers and the “normalization” of relations with it, has already been resolved by Cairo according to the wishes of the Zionist government. The full reintegration of Egypt into the Arab fold, and its close alliance with the Arab members of the anti-Iraqi coalition, without any change in its “normalized” relations with Israel, underline the fact that these relations, which led to the boycott of Egypt by other Arab countries, are now accepted, including by Syria, which has made this fact known to James Baker.

Hafez-al-Assad has always shown himself ready to face down the nationalist sentiments of the Syrian population, when his own interests have required it. From his intervention in support of the reactionary Christian camp in Lebanon in 1976 to his recent involvement on the American side against Iraq, the dictator of Damascus has made it clear to Washington that he will keep his side of any bargain even if it means clashing with his own people. His attitude to the US has never been arbitrary, but always adapted to the modulations in American regional policy, which is more versatile than his own.

Every attempt by the US administration to seek solutions outside of a broad regional settlement — firstly between Israel and Egypt, then in 1983 between

Israel and Lebanon, and in the plans for a “Jordanian solution” of the Palestinian issue — has been opposed by Damascus, which would be isolated by such settlements. On the other hand, each time that Washington has come out in favour of a global Israeli-Arab solution, in the spirit of the Geneva conference after the October 1973 war, the Syrian regime has offered to cooperate. In each case the state of Syrian-American relations has had an effect inside Lebanon.

All the political and economic factors, both on a regional and world scale, now lead Hafez al-Assad into the camp of the US and its rich Arab protégés. This is the only intelligent option for the bureaucratic-bourgeois dictatorship that he heads. Damascus’ tacit acceptance of the Egyptian-Israeli peace also indicates its inclination to be satisfied with an arrangement for the Syrian Golan Heights of the same kind as the one that led Israel to return the Sinai to Egypt, that is, demilitarization of the territory under American guarantee, including a control system.

Withdrawal from Golan

And it is along these lines that America is now thinking⁹: an Israeli withdrawal and demilitarization of the Golan, extension of the mandate of the United Nations’ forces to the whole of the Syrian territory currently under Israeli occupation, with eavesdropping posts, probably under US control (Israel will ask that these be under their control, but this would be hard for Syria to accept). The principle of some such compromise over the Golan has recently been defended by the Israeli foreign affairs minister, David Levy, the health minister, Ehud Olmert, and the armed forces chief of staff, General Dan Shomron, who issued a controversial statement a month before his retirement.

These figures, none of them in any way “doves”, believe that the strategic benefits of a peace with Syria are greater than those accruing from a continued Israeli military presence on the Golan. They know that the ten thousand or so Israeli settlers installed on the Syrian plateau are not deeply attached to this barren territory and would willingly accept leaving in exchange for adequate financial compensation of the kind that the US gave to the ex-settlers in the Sinai. They also think that an agreement on the Golan Heights would spare them the need for one on the occupied west bank of the Jordan.¹⁰ The Israeli “rejection front”, led by the sinister figure of Ariel Sharon, at present the housing minister, and the defence minister Moshé Arens, have nonetheless protested vociferously against any notion of a compromise over the Golan Heights, pulling the prime minister Shamir along

behind them. Labor deputies have also lined up with the "refuseniks" from the governing Likud party, but their opposition will not be so hard to overcome.

Inversely, on the issue of the Palestinian territories on the West Bank and Gaza, the majority of the Israeli Labor Party are amenable to the compromise plans of Washington. The solution officially being promoted by the Republican administration, since the time of the "Reagan Plan" of September 1982, is that of "Palestinian self-government of the West Bank and Gaza in association with Jordan." This found an echo in the Amman agreement in February 1985 between Jordan's King Hussein and PLO leader Yasser Arafat proposing a Jordanian-Palestinian confederation and a joint delegation to the negotiations with Israel.¹¹

The US remains inclined to this kind of settlement, which, in their eyes, offers the best guarantee of control over the Pales-

tinian territories, and is rendered all the more credible in that the PLO leadership has already accepted the principle. This is why King Hussein continues to be a key element of the regional *pax americana* for Washington. The tension between Jordan and the US due to the former's condemnation of the aggression against Iraq could not last long. In any case, the Bush administration knows full well that King Hussein was merely adapting, against his own inclinations, to the feeling among "his subjects" in order to keep his throne. Indeed, the King's increased popularity both with Jordanians and Palestinians as a result of his stance in the war will be of assistance in the implementation of Washington's plans.¹²

This explains the irritation of the administration when Congress voted through last March a motion stopping American economic and military aid

(\$35m and \$20m respectively) to Jordan. Bush and his men had to explain to Congress that they had made a mistake in their understanding of the Jordanian attitude. Congress ended up giving the president the power to restore aid, if he judged this to be in the interests of a peaceful regional settlement¹³.

The other key to this process is, of course, the Palestine Liberation Organization. It is true that, well before the Gulf crisis, the US had broken off its official contacts with this organization. Since then they have not been keen to re-establish them, and, indeed, have been trying to get their Arab allies to boycott the PLO and cut off its funding.

Attempt to restore French prestige

From this point of view, the recent meeting between the French foreign affairs minister and Yasser Arafat — a feeble attempt to restore the Mitterrand government's prestige with the Arab populations, and notably with those of North Africa and the immigrants in France itself, and ensure Paris' participation in the Washington-led regional process — could only futher irritate the Bush administration.

The latter knows perfectly well that the PLO, and more precisely the Arafat leadership, which is hegemonic in its institutions, is still the most "moderate" of the Palestinian leaderships. No other (for Washington) more politically acceptable leadership with at least a minimum of representativeness has emerged, despite years of effort, notably by King Hussein. He himself now recognizes this, repeating on every occasion that he does not want to substitute himself for the PLO, but rather work with it.

He has all the more need of the PLO's collaboration in that his kingdom has to deal with the radicalization of the Palestinians who live there, and indeed make up the majority of its population. The radicalization has been further stimulated by the serious problem of the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who have had to leave the Gulf states without resources for themselves or for the families in Jordan who lived off their remittances. The precarious stability of Hussein's kingdom is yet another reason why Washington cannot ignore the PLO.

For all these reasons, the Bush administration intends to make sure, as much as

From one trap to another

THE myth of Israel as a safe haven for the world's Jews continues to have some currency, even amongst those who are otherwise critical of Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. In fact, the primary concern of the Zionist movement has always been the immigration of Jews into Palestine, rather than their physical safety or personal freedom. Prior to 1939, the main Zionist bodies opposed all attempts to open the gates of western countries to Jewish refugees from the Nazi terror, fearing it would endanger the project of colonizing Palestine. After 1945, the Jewish Agency employed blackmail and open terror in the Displaced Persons' camps to force Jewish refugees to go to Palestine rather than the United States.

Recent articles in the Israeli daily *Ha'aretz* have highlighted the mechanisms used to force Soviet Jews to go to Israel, and then keep them there against their will. As Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union began to swell in early 1990, the Israeli government brought pressure on the US and other western governments not to increase their quotas of immigrants from the USSR. The travel routes of immigrants were changed and the transit camps in Rome and Vienna replaced by ones in Warsaw and Budapest. Recently, Israel has reacted angrily to Germany's decision to accept as immigrants Jews who apply directly from the Soviet Union. Israeli foreign minister David Levy has demanded that Germany should not encourage the immigration of Soviet Jews, and has received a pledge from Chancellor Helmut Kohl that they will not be granted "refugee status".

Israel is incapable of providing adequate employment, housing and support for the flood of Soviet immigrants. But it is nonetheless placing almost insurmountable obstacles in the way of those who wish to leave. Although new immigrants receive Israeli citizenship upon arrival in the country, they are prevented from receiving passports. Even the acquisition of a *laissez passer* is made virtually impossible, applications only being granted to new immigrants if they have reimbursed the Jewish Agency for the costs involved in moving them and their families to Israel. Any immigrant wishing to leave Israel for a limited period must obtain guarantees on all these moneys.

Soviet immigrants with *laissez passers* face great difficulty in even getting a tourist visa from many countries. Moreover, they cannot use tourist visas to apply for refugee status in other countries; once Soviet emigrants have reached Israel and become citizens there, they cease to be thought of as refugees. Even if they make direct applications to immigrate, many countries will not accept them if they have become Israeli citizens. Meanwhile, the debate continues in the Israeli press as to how many of the Soviet immigrants are actually Jewish, or have merely claimed to be in order to get out of the Soviet Union; on some estimates, up to a third of the new immigrants fall into the latter category (information compiled from *News From Within*). ★

9. *Newsweek*, April 1, 1991.

10. *The Other Front*, (A.I.C., Jerusalem), March 6, 1991.

11. *International Viewpoint*, no. 156, February 6, 1989.

12. *Newsweek*, February 18, 1991.

13. *IV* no. 203, April 1, 1991.

14. Faisal al-Hussaini is, incidentally, from the same aristocratic family to which Haj Amin al-Hussaini, the Mufti of Jerusalem and the commander of the Palestinian contingent in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948 belonged.

possible, of the support of the Arafat leadership for the deal that it wants to sponsor. James Baker's meetings with Palestinian bourgeois notables in the territories occupied in 1967, headed by Faisal al-Hussaini¹⁴, who has close political and financial links with the Arafat leadership, show that he considers the latter's support indispensable, despite the desire of the Shamir government to simply ignore the Palestinians.

Inversely, the green light given these same notables by the Arafat leadership for the meeting with Baker, a few days after the cessation of the terrible massacre of Iraqis by the American army, and remembering that, in happier times, the Unified Patriotic Leadership of the *Intifada* ordered a boycott of Baker's predecessor George Schulz¹⁵, shows clearly that the right wing that controls the PLO's leading bodies has decided to pursue its policy of permanent concessions to Washington to the end. The Arafat leadership hopes that the latter will in return assert the PLO's place in the regional *pax americana*. This is why Arafat did not hesitate to declare George Bush's speech of March 6 "positive".

The left of the PLO — the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) led by George Habash and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), led by Nayef Hawatmeh, have consistently denounced this policy and in particular the permission given to the notables to meet Baker.

They have opposed Arafat's decisions in the PLO's leading bodies to no avail. The branches of these organizations in the occupied territories have violently denounced the meeting with the American secretary of state, explaining that the latter's efforts are aimed at establishing a settlement between the Zionist state and the Arab reactionaries at the expense of the elementary rights of the Palestinian people.¹⁶

A communiqué from the "State of Palestine" branch of the DFLP, dated March 12, 1991, states that: "the acceptance by certain Palestinian personalities of Baker's invitation to meet him amounts to collaboration with the Israeli-American plan which aims to push aside the PLO and sow confusion among the Palestinian masses, which continue with all their might to defend Iraq against the American aggression, all the more so insofar as the forces of this aggression continue to occupy a part of Iraq and exercise blackmail on its people."

Fundamentalists may reap rewards

However, there is a great risk that the main beneficiary of the Arafat leadership's never-ending compromises will, as in 1989 and 1990, be the Palestinian Islamic fundamentalist current, particularly *Hamas* (Movement of Islamic Resis-

tance). This current goes in for nationalist, anti-western and anti-Jewish outbidding, which makes it appear as the only "radical" alternative to the PLO, in a situation where the left is handicapped by the contradiction between its radical, anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist talk and the constant compromises by its exiled leaders with the Arafat leadership.¹⁷

The factors which make for the radicalization of the Palestinian population under Israeli occupation are working more strongly than ever, with the combination of the abrupt fall in remittances by immigrant workers in the Gulf and the reduction of the number of Palestinian workers in Israel by more than a half decided on by the Shamir government. The Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza are today experiencing deep social and economic distress, further aggravated by the fall in remittances from the PLO, which is no longer receiving funds from the Gulf monarchies.

The economic persecution of the Palestinians by the Shamir government, which has reached its height in the quasi-permanent curfew imposed on the West Bank and Gaza during the war against Iraq, is clearly meant to compel them to emigrate.

Low-intensity expulsions prepared

The ministerial reshuffle during the war which brought into the Zionist governmental far right a declared supporter of "transfer" — the favoured euphemism for the mass expulsion of Palestinians from their lands — is a clear sign that such an outcome is not an imaginary catastrophist scenario, but a real and immediate plan, already embarked on in the form of what one might call "low-intensity expulsion".

There is a double counterpart to this operation: on the one hand, of course, there is the mass immigration of Jews from the Soviet Union. With the collusion of Moscow, Washington and American Jewish organizations, the Zionist regime is literally obliging Jews who want to leave the USSR to go to Israel, despite the wishes of the overwhelming majority of them, who want to go to North America. By using these methods, the Shamir government envisages Soviet immigration rising from 185,000 persons in 1990 to 400,000 this year, and a total of a million in the coming few years.

The other concomitant is the colonization of the occupied territories. This goes hand-in-hand with the first, which is creating in Israel a socio-economic pressure that tends to incite a growing number of Israelis to accept the many privileges offered to candidates for colonization. The housing minister Ariel Sharon is applying himself to his job with enthusiasm: under the name Project Immigration, he foresees the construction

of more than 10,000 housing units for settlers in the territories occupied in 1967, of which more than 7,000 are to be on the west bank of the Jordan, 2,000 in East Jerusalem and one thousand on the Golan Heights. Sharon is not just planning to expand existing settlements: he is creating new ones, in violation of previous promises to Washington.

In comparison with these deeds by the Shamir government, his intransigence on the procedural questions concerning the "international conference", now rebaptized as the "regional conference", and on the participation in the conference of Palestinians from annexed East Jerusalem¹⁸, is only a trivial expression of a basic opposition to any restitution of the Arab territories occupied in 1967.

James Baker has made plain his irritation and that of the administration to which he belongs at the Zionist right's attitude.

Privileged and cosseted ally

This is a bitter acknowledgement: as we affirmed at the start of this article, it is the state of Israel, the United States' privileged and cosseted ally, which is now the main obstacle to the *pax americana* in the Middle East. Washington is not however ready to throw in the towel: its interests in this part of the world are too important for that. The Bush administration will do its best to surmount Israeli obstruction by putting economic pressure on the Zionist regime. The latter, meanwhile, in its characteristic fashion, is pursuing a policy well beyond its means.

The absorption of the Soviet immigrants presents enormous economic problems which has meant a lowering by 200 to 300,000 of planned immigration for this year. The Israeli economy and the living standards of the population are in marked decline. The Central Bank of Israel has sounded the alarm: unemployment could rapidly reach 20% of the active population and provoke massive emigration that cancels out the effects of the immigration from the USSR.¹⁹

The US therefore has good reasons to believe that it can bring its spoiled child in the Middle East to heel. Washington will probably seek to provoke a split in the Shamir government and create the conditions for the return of a more "moderate" coalition, including their docile allies in the Labor Party.

In any case the *pax americana* is not for tomorrow, and if it ever sees the light of day will be very fragile. ★

15. *IV* no. 158, March 6, 1989.

16. Communiqué of the PFLP-interior at the beginning of March.

17. *IV* no. 157, February 20, 1989.

18. The US would like to solve this problem by declaring East Jerusalem an "open city" under international control, a project that has the support of the Vatican.

19. *Financial Times*, April 24, 1991.

Libya in the New World Order

THE American attack on Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986, and the 1988 air raid in the "Gulf of Defiance", as the Libyan regime has called the Gulf of Syrta since then, were meant as warnings to a regime whose "unpredictability" had for a long time been an embarrassment to imperialism. Imperialism was particularly perturbed by Qadhafi's military build up and his support for various nationalist or anti-imperialist groups. The Reaganite assaults can now be seen to have prefigured the anti-Iraqi crusade.

In fact, however, the Libyan regime pursued a cautious line over the Gulf conflict (denouncing the annexation of Kuwait, offering mediation in the framework of an "Arab solution") to the extent that demonstrators in Southern Tunisia were to be heard chanting "Bush, Mitterrand, murderers; Gorbachev, Qadhafi, traitors!" At the same time the media of the neighboring countries did not spare their praise for "Qadhafi's return to reason."

LUIZA MARIA

UNTIL 1980 Libya enjoyed prosperity based on an exceptional oil income. This income was redistributed in a way unusual in a bourgeois state, aiming for egalitarianism based on a traditional culture. This ensured the regime a type of social cohesion called *jamahiriyya*¹ and social peace, baptized as "revolution". Another part of this income was directed towards supporting a variety of liberation movements, with a view to making these instruments of Libyan policy. Libya's exhibitionist displays of aid were a way of putting pressure on imperialism.

The oil recession shook the Libyan edifice to its roots and resulted in the brutal expulsion in 1985 of the immigrant workers who had been attracted to the country during the boom of the 70s. There was a big disproportion between the oil income and locally available labour power; Libyans, traditionally cultivators, moved massively into administration. The country called in 20,000 Koreans, 12,000 Thais and 8,000 Filipinos for public works; 50,000 Turks for public transport; 17,000 Pakistanis and 18,000 Indians for work on state farms, while Tunisians did most of the work in commerce and industry and Egyptians maintained national education and worked in administration.²

Monetary reserves fell from \$13bn in 1980 to \$500m in 1986. Money owed to foreign firms has gone up to \$4bn and the Soviet Union is owed some \$5bn (according to the *Journal de l'Economie africaine*, no. 77).

The crisis forced the regime onto the road of economic and democratic reforms and a reorientation of its foreign policy. In the first phase, development and installation projects, as well as the volume of imports, were cut back. Propaganda had exhorted the people to work, and suppressed small businesses and the land register since "the land does not belong to anybody."

The drop in trade with the imperialist countries, the isolation of Libya, which knew it could not rely on Arab solidarity given the reduction of the Arab share of the world oil market, and the divisions in the Arab camp after the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel, prepared the ground for a series of American aggressions, including an embargo on crude oil, an economic blockade, the freezing of Libyan assets in American and Italian banks, the Rabta affair³ and, allegedly, bacteriological warfare. In 1990 alone, the red fly, which Qadhafi claims was introduced into Libya by the US, has been responsible for the deaths of 12 people and 12,000 sheep.

The regime found its room for manoeuvre reduced. Internally, the fall in oil revenue posed the problem of the diversification of sources of income and the maintenance of social peace. There was the beginning of a relative economic liberalization, including the opening of the frontiers, free circulation of people and goods, the re-establishment of small businesses and a review of import policy.

Furthermore, an ambitious agricultural

programme was relaunched thanks to the "people of Daewoo" (a South Korean public works enterprise). Previously, the dry climate only permitted the traditional system of oasis agriculture; now self-sufficiency was set as the objective, using up-to-date techniques. A policy of "key" fields⁴ was followed by the irrigation of the Jaffara and Djebel Akhdar plains by an artificial river which, by pumping up the available water table, was to double the country's cultivatable area, assure self-sufficiency and make Libya the region's leader in cereal production.

The status of "wage worker" was abolished and state enterprises, including farms and businesses, turned into cooperatives, although, of course, the "abolition of wage work" does not affect immigrant workers.

However these undertakings have turned out to be less rewarding than anticipated. The state coffers have remained empty, so that Libya has had to fall back on barter and make payments in oil. The agricultural benefits are still awaited, notably owing to the blockade on imports needed for carrying out the irrigation and the cost of the operation against the "red fly". Social discontent, temporarily dampened down by the opening of well stocked shops, has begun to show itself, under the instigation of the clandestine opposition.

The Libyan "restructuring" is something rather different from the Algerian and Tunisian *Inifitah* (opening), however. Whereas in neighbouring countries, where fundamentalist pressure is strong, these policies have been imposed by strikes and riots, in Libya the fundamentalists do not present a danger to the regime.

Prisons empty — then fill up again

In 1988, Qadhafi himself took the initiative, announcing liberty; with great media fanfare, prisons were demolished; all foreign and hundreds of Libyan prisoners were freed; the hunting down of opponents living abroad was curtailed, and their police files were destroyed in public; the death penalty and special courts were abolished; as a part of a new "Green Charter of Human Rights" the "Qadhafi Peace Prize" was created, Nelson Mandela being the 1989 recipient; and this year a very timid relaxation of control of the press was authorized.

1. Literally, the "Republic of the Masses". There are no political parties in Libya; a decision of the regime. "The world will become a *Jamahiriyya*" prophesied Qadhafi on French radio after the Gulf war.

2. 1984 figures.

3. The Pharma-150 factory at Rabta, presented by the Libyan government as a pharmaceuticals plant, was used as a pretext for the American assault in 1988. Reagan insisted that it was really a chemical weapons' factory.

4. In 1979, an agreement with the French SATEC company introduced irrigation through the tapping of 50,000 hectares.

The limits of this democratization quickly became clear. No sooner were the prisons emptied than they began to fill up again with thousands of oppositionists, for the most part Wahabite fundamentalists or supporters of the Party of the Islamic Revolution, who had been exploiting the discontent of the families of the 2,200 Libyan prisoners in Chad.

The difficulties in Libya are due to two external factors — the fall in oil prices and the cut in production intended to stem it, and imperialist policy, including the economic blockade and the bombings — but also to Libyan foreign policy, which squanders the country's resources in regional conflicts in Chad, Uganda and elsewhere.

Cutback in foreign commitments

After Qadhafi's defeat in Chad's Aozou Strip — his Kuwait — at the hands of the International Court of Justice, and his reversals in Benin and Sierra Leone, he cut back on his foreign commitments. Freeing foreign trade also involved the suppression of the "artificial ports" at the frontier posts. Libya has joined the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), which brings together Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, and Qadhafi has been its president since January this year. He has made peace with the "conquered one" of Camp David (Egypt)⁵, and offered a million jobs, to avoid the transfer of foreign currency and the indemnities due to immigrant workers expelled in 1985. He has played a role in the freeing of the Valente children held by the Abu Nidal groups, and, as a result of the Soviet retreat, was a part of the concert of Arab bourgeoisies (apart from Syria) which existed prior to the Gulf conflict.

Qadhafi has benefited from the latter event. On the one hand the rises in the oil price brought unexpected income, even if it was reduced by the American sanctions, which were re-imposed for the sixth year running in 1991. However as a result of this Libya has been unable to benefit from the increase in output decided on by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) during the crisis.

On the other hand, his fundamentalist opponents have been embarrassed by their links with Saudi Arabia and were obliged to be discreet over the Gulf. Qadhafi took the opportunity to solidify national unity and organize carefully prepared monster demonstrations — including one of a million on January 21, 1991 (the population of Tripoli is one million). The slogans ranged from "the right of Kuwaitis to decide their own fate" to "Colonel, do not leave Saddam alone".

The region's masses, above all in Tunisia, tended to view Qadhafi's position as camouflage. Qadhafi had well understood the import of Washington's threats dissuading him from military involvement in the conflict; he wished to play a role via

the AMU; and he had long-standing conflicts with Iraq.

For the past four years, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Iraq, with French agreement and the backing of the former president of Chad, Hissène Habré, had been involved in an armed destabilization operation against Libya. An armed force recruited from among Libyan prisoners in Chad was trained. Iraqi participation is revenge for Libya's material support for Iran during the first Gulf War. Iraq delivered arms to Hissène Habré and took part in training these Libyan *Contras*.

Recently, however, the leader of the opposition to Hissène Habré, Idriss Deby, backed by Libya, came to power in Chad, this time with the blessing of France, which dreams of replacing an insolvent Iraq with a newly respectable Libya as its client.

Deby was to send back the Libyan prisoners of war to Chad. But France and the United States, (in complete contravention of the Geneva Convention on prisoners of war), spirited them away from under the nose of the head of the Libyan secret services to Nigeria, Zaire and Kenya. This latter country was repaid for its cooperation by the cancellation of a \$40.4m debt with the prospect of the cancellation of another \$38 m debt in 1991.

Meanwhile, the Sudanese junta, also a client and ally of Qadhafi, has been denounced as pro-Iraqi by imperialism. The latter is applying economic pressures (at a time when there is the prospect of a terrible famine in that country) which Egypt and Saudi Arabia are supporting, and funding the struggle of the People's Army for the Liberation of Sudan of John Garang against a regime which has recently introduced Islamic law (*sharia*).

At the end of the Gulf conflict, imperialist counsels have been divided. The Valente and Deby affairs, and Libya's support for a negotiated resolution to the crisis, make Libya appear as a possible client of a France desperate for markets. However the US is attempting to limit exports of certain technologies to "certain" Third World countries. Bush is repeating the Reagan line: Libya represents "an extraordinary threat to national security and the US' vital interests."

The European Economic Community (EEC), has close links to all the Mediterranean countries through cooperation agreements, passed in 1972, which exclude Albania and Libya from possible funding. The Europeans, especially the British, are under strong pressure from Washington and are no longer exporting to Libya, leading to a shortage of spare parts for industry.

Thus, contrary to what Qadhafi stated at the end of the Gulf war, Libya will not escape the consequences of the "New World Order." ★

5. In Arabic, Cairo means "the victorious". Qadhafi took to calling it Makhoura — "the conquered".

Kurdistan: a history of betrayal

FOUR million Iraqi Kurds have left everything to flee Saddam Hussein's killing machine. A million people have reached the Turkish and Iranian frontiers; each day hundreds die of hunger, cold and disease.¹

The war took place in the Gulf, but its bitter fruits are reaped in Kurdistan. Now the allies have entered northern Iraq to set up refugee camps.

FUAT ORÇUN

KURDISTAN appears on the first maps of the region drawn by the imperialists at the end of the First World War. But their realization that a powerful Turkey would be more profitable for them, combined with Britain's insistence on keeping control of northern Iraq, and, finally, the absence of an independent Kurdish leadership, capable of proposing its own alternatives, led to the Kurdish question dropping off the agenda.

After a series of unsuccessful attempts at uprisings, the end of the Second World War saw the beginnings of change in Kurdistan — not in the more politicized Iraq and Turkish parts, but in Iran. The Soviet Union was in control of the north of this country and its presence speeded up the development of national consciousness among the Azeris and Kurds. After the Soviet withdrawal at the end of the war, these two peoples took advantage of the political void left behind and formed their own political organizations. In 1946, the Kurdish republic of Mahabad came into being, before being crushed within a year by the regular Iranian army.

The leader of the Mahabad republic's main military force was an Iraqi Kurd, Barzani. He drew an important lesson from the defeat: "In fact, the Kurds were not crushed by the Iranian army; it was the English and the Americans who



forced the Soviets to withdraw.”

Thus, according to Barzani, the Kurdish national liberation movement could not be considered as an independent factor, but only in strict subordination to external forces. This analysis has been preponderant over the decades, insofar as the traditional leaderships, based on the tribal system, have been in control. The international situation is for them more than just one factor in the political struggle; it is its dominant element.

In 1945 the dominant imperialist power in the region was Britain. But the United States, which held the Israeli card ready, was challenging Britain's supremacy. An important factor for the Kurdish national movement, even if it only weighed indirectly, was Soviet influence in the region; starting in the 1950s, the USSR linked up with the radical Arab nationalists who were in opposition to the West owing to the latter's support for Israel.

After the overthrow of Iraq's King Faisal in July 1958, the Kurdish movement, under Barzani's leadership, went on the offensive. The new regime in Baghdad saw itself as one of the pioneers of the “non-capitalist road of development” so dear to Soviet policy-makers. Iraq got substantial Soviet aid, while Turkey and Iran were openly pro-American. The US, Israel and Iran supported the Kurdish movement in order to put pressure on the Ba'athist regime in Iraq, and the Kurds were able to take advantage of a period of relative weakness of the Iraqi army and establish autonomy in 1970 — the main success in the recent history of the Kurdish movement.

But this autonomy came to an end in 1974 when Baghdad obtained in its turn international support allowing it to change the balance of forces. Persuaded that there was no future for his struggle without a powerful backer, Barzani laid down arms in 1975, at the behest of the Shah of Iran, although the Iraqi army had not militarily defeated the Kurds. Iran took advantage of the situation to seize territories in the Gulf, thus providing the pretext for the unleashing by Iraq of the Iran-Iraq war in 1980.

The Kurdish movement began to undergo internal changes, in Iraq in 1976, and

in 1979 in Iran, with the downfall of the Shah. There were bloody inter-Kurdish clashes due to the pro-Iranian (pro-Khomeini rather than pro-Shah) attitude of the Iranian-based Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK). During the Iran-Iraq war, DPK militants found themselves on opposing sides, divided among themselves and allied with their respective enemies. At the end of that war *Le Monde* ran a headline: “The Kurds are the losers from the peace.”

From then on the Kurdish leaderships in Iran and Iraq devoted their efforts to finding diplomatic support. Jalal Talabani, the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), was in the forefront of the scramble owing to his links with the CIA. His organization had been involved in clashes with the DPK — in 1978 for example, 150 PUK militants were massacred by the DPK.

Furthermore, Barzani accused Talabani's followers of connivance with the Iraqi Ba'athists. Subsequently, with the massacres of Kurds by Saddam in Iraq and by Khomeini in Iran, the traditional leaders of the Kurdish movement began to look towards Turkey for support. But Turkey means the US, without forgetting Israel.

The Turkish president and the Kurdish “terrorist”

In June 1988, before the ceasefire in the Iran-Iraq war, Talabani travelled to the US to discuss with responsible American officials. At that time he accused the Turkish president Ozal of complicity with the Iraqi dictator, while Turkey accused the US of talking to a “terrorist”. Talabani explained the reasons for his approach: “I explained that the Kurdish people were facing the danger of genocide. I asked the American administration to stop Saddam. And I said to them that if Saddam had not got the green light from the United States, he would never have dared attack Kurdish towns. It is American support that allowed him to act in this way....All the lands occupied by Iran and Iraq are under Kurdish control by virtue of the agreement made with Iran”.²

After the Halabja massacre and his military expulsion from the area in August 1988, the same Talabani declared that “a democratic and federal Turkey could form a central base for all Kurds”.³

The PUK took further steps in their diplomatic ballet during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. On his return from a new visit to the US before the outbreak of the Gulf war, Talabani declared: “we do not want to use our fighters (*peshmergas*) at a moment when Iraq is threatened by outside aggression.” This attitude was the result of the balance of forces on the ground.

Turkey had lined up unconditionally with the US from the start of the Gulf crisis, one of the reasons being the desire to

forestall the development of any scenario involving the creation of an independent Kurdistan. Furthermore, although it was never openly stated, Turkey hoped to regain control of the former Ottoman territories of Mosul and Kirkuk where there is a Turkmen minority. Indeed such a possibility had been underlined by some Iraqi Kurdish leaders during the Iran-Iraq war, in the eventuality of the integrity of the latter state being threatened.

Were the consequences of the Gulf war predictable? Let us recall a number of facts. Saddam had given back the territory conquered from Iran in the Iran-Iraq war. Saddam had to pay a high price for his invasion of Kuwait, while Özal, who placed all his money on the US, found himself on the winning side. Even so, in some ways Turkey may turn out to have been one of the losers in the war: the Kurdish leaderships are now negotiating with Saddam himself to gain an autonomy that at their best moment in 1970 they had already conquered.

Which all goes to show that in a region of the world ruled by corrupt regimes, these latter often find themselves falling into their own traps. The imperialist intervention has certainly modified the course of events but it has not meant a fundamental change in the rules.

The various leaders in the region zig-zagged around the Kurdish question. During the Gulf conflict, the Turkish government set about reorganizing the political system, in the face of the weakening of the traditional parties and of the regime. This judicial and political reorganization is directly connected to the Kurdish question. Thus the only country that has hitherto denied even the existence of the Kurds has suddenly decided to step forward as their protector. President Özal has lifted the ban brought in by the military regime on speaking Kurdish, and has initiated ill-defined discussions of the Kurdish question. To do this he had first of all to overcome the reservations of his own party.

Secret meetings to discuss federal Iraq

At the end of February, Özal launched his scheme for a “federal state” in Iraq with Kurdish participation. Talabani then proposed a meeting with Özal. At the start of March, at the beginning of the Kurdish uprising, Özal stated that such a meeting had indeed taken place in secret in Turkey. Turkish support for a federal Iraq, in which the Turkmens would also participate, could not have come about without the agreement of the US, and was indeed among the scenarios envisaged by the latter.

1. See *International Viewpoint* no. 205, April 29, 1991.
2. *Inprecor*, no. 316, October 12, 1990.
3. *Cumhuriyet*, June 6, 1988.
4. *Ikibine Dogru*, September 18, 1988.

Özal's attitude was greeted favorably by the Kurdish leaderships at their conference in Stockholm⁴. Özal has set in motion a process in which he is to play the role of "protector of the Kurdish cause", passing in silence over the Kurdish question in Turkey itself, at the price of a few cosmetic reforms. Talabani meanwhile has undertaken a diplomatic manoeuvre without radically changing his point of view. He has underlined that, while existing frontiers cannot for the moment be changed, the states of the region should be democratic federations. Despite pressure from the Turkish government, Talabani has refused to define the Kurdish Workers Party (PKK), which leads the Kurdish struggle in Turkey, as a terrorist movement, describing it, on the contrary as a "revolutionary patriotic" group.⁵

Özal, whose project for the Turkish Kurds involves nothing more than the recognition of their cultural rights, is prepared to become the guarantor of an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq, without regard for how this might complicate relations with Iran. Özal's policy has been criticized by the ultra-nationalist and religious forces inside his own organization. Besides, the opposition parties both of right and left have talked darkly of the consequences that the president's policy may have within Turkey.

Problems conjunctural and permanent

But it is the US that has given the signal for the new orientation: Saddam is a conjunctural problem, the Kurds a permanent one. This is the only explanation for the negotiations with the representatives of an uprising that was soon to be crushed, negotiations unprecedented in the history of the Turkish Republic.

The uprising, however, redistributed the cards. Nobody seems to have foreseen the Shi'ite rebellion in southern Iraq. According to General Schwarzkopf, Saddam could have been finished off in two days. However, at the start of the uprising the American military chief expressed his confusion: "What is the best way to handle the situation? I honestly don't know." He was not the only one to feel this way. Bush, Özal, even the Kurdish leaders themselves were taken by surprise by the revolts in the north and south of Iraq. Even Saddam did not seem to be expecting this rather likely development, since he himself had armed the Kurds to combat a possible Turkish military attack in the north. The speed of the rebellion's development and the surrender of his troops without resistance testify to the lack of readiness.

But order continued to reign in Baghdad, and, despite the allied bombing, the army remained intact; and it is this essential element that thwarted the Kurds. Unable to keep control of Kurdistan's

towns, conquered by irregular forces, the Kurdish leaders also proved unable to organize their defence or even use the weapons that had fallen into their hands. To organize raids in the mountains, fight the army and defend the cities required very different structures to those now at the Kurds' disposition. Thus millions of people were forced to flee in panic from Saddam's advancing army. The Turkish government also found itself in a panic at the prospect of a forced union of the Kurds of Iraq with those of Turkey. Özal thought he had played the Kurdish card in the name of the US, but in fact Saddam ironically handed it back, pushing hundreds of thousands of Kurds towards the Turkish frontiers.

The Kurds' tragedy, in the full glare of the media, has forced the US into a change of line, and the Kurds have now been placed under military protection in an enclave on the frontier.

A new dramatic turn: on April 20, 1991, it was learned that a Kurdish delegation headed by Talabani and composed of representatives of the PUK, the DKP, the Kurdish People's Democratic Party and the Socialist Party of Kurdistan had gone to Baghdad to negotiate over the proposition for the creation of "a pluralist, democratic and constitutional regime and the provision of an enlarged autonomy for the Kurds in the framework of a federal Iraqi regime." The Kurdish leaders had underlined, with the declaration of March 11, 1991, that they were going to insist on all the autonomy rights previously won.

Thus the attempts to resolve the region's problems in the framework of the existing regimes continues to produce new surprises. This search for compromise on the national question in the framework of the existing regimes also shows the thinking of the traditional Kurdish leaderships. They ask themselves: how can we resolve the national problem through the intervention of imperialism, the Turkish government or Saddam Hussein?

Democratization of whole region needed

We should not under-estimate the likely consequences of the negotiations between Saddam and the Kurdish leaderships. But it is also clear that the Kurdish question cannot be resolved in the given relation of forces, at least without the emergence of an independent political current. Even autonomy in the regional framework will be too narrow for the Kurds. We are only at the beginning of the process of recomposition and reconstruction for the Kurdish nation.

Meanwhile the idea that this is but one aspect of the whole process of a comprehensive democratization of the region will find a growing audience. ★

5. *Milliyet*, March 23, 1991.

The Middle East: a history of carve-ups

THE following article, which first appeared in the March 30, 1991 edition of the Bombay magazine *Economic and Political Weekly*, examines the historical background to imperialist involvement in the Arab East. The article has been shortened substantially for space reasons.

SUKUMAR MURALIDHARAN

IN THE colourful rhetoric of Arab nationalism, Israel is a dagger that the West has plunged into the heart of the Arab world. To imagine that this description is inspired solely by the peculiar geographical contours of the state of Israel, would be a mistake. It reflects a very deep sense of historical grievance.

The creation of the autonomous state of Kuwait is again an integral element of colonial politics. Kuwait was in the first instance an enclave carved out of the head of the Persian Gulf to pre-empt the growing German-Ottoman alliance of the late 19th century from encroaching on the sea lanes to India. When empire ceased to be the overriding concern of British policy, oil took over as the *raison d'être* of Kuwaiti nationhood.

The denial of the rights of the Palestinian people and the raising of Kuwait to the status of an autonomous nation, are linked in the Arab political consciousness, as ramifications of the Pax Anglo-Americana. Saddam Hussein's advocacy of the rights of the Palestinian people has been derided as a pathetic effort to distract attention from his aggression against a neighbouring state. Aggression and annexation were the only designs he had, or so this argument runs — the advocacy of Palestinian rights was only an afterthought.

From this viewpoint, it is easy to forget that the annexation of Kuwait was itself



an afterthought. There had, in fact, been some signs of an Iraqi withdrawal shortly after the invasion. But the Western military buildup in Saudi Arabia prompted a reversal of position, and a raising of the stakes.¹ Saddam Hussein's later announcement of the "linkage" asserted very simply that the Pax Anglo-Americana in Kuwait would be respected, provided its greatest abuse — the plight of the Palestinians — was redressed. It at once captured the Arab political imagination. For the first time since Palestine was lost to the Anglo-Zionist conspiracy, here was an Arab leader who had actually taken the military high ground and was seeking to force the West to come to a political bargain. It was heady stuff for the Arabs who have for decades been dealing with the West from a position of weakness.

West misled by abject loyalty of oil Emirs

Largely because of the abject loyalty of the "emirs of oil" the West has deluded itself into believing that memories of colonial manipulation are short and transient. But the asymmetry between the Western positions on resolutions 242 (1967) and 660 (1990) is only the latest of many signals that the Arab world has learned through bitter experience to recognize. They have not forgotten yet how Palestine was partitioned in 1948, and how they were driven out of their lands by the Haganah and the terrorist gangs of Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir. They well remember how the UN mediator, Count Bernadotte, who demanded a revision of the partition plan and the return of the Palestinian refugees to their land, was murdered by Zionist thugs with no more than few murmurs of protest by the UN.²

Memories of struggle against the West are deeply embedded in the political consciousness of the Arab people. And much of this struggle has been in the cause of Palestine. It is ironic that the current assault on Iraq should come in the 50th anniversary year of the last, and that the US-led axis should today identify itself, in a conscious evocation of World War II as the "allies". In 1941, Iraq had risen up in revolt against virtually the same lineup of "allies". And the factor that had precipitated the rising was the continuing Jewish colonization of Palestine under the benign guardianship of Britain.³

In the event, the uprising was crushed by the British Indian Army. But it succeeded in adding another potent weapon to the Western ideological armoury. The chief instigator of the rising was Haj Amin al-Hussaini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, who was later to meet — and win a commitment of support from — the German Führer at a private audience on November 28, 1941.⁴ The Arabs are therefore easily portrayed as the natural

1. In an interview with Saeed Naqvi telecast over the national channel on February 2, 1991, Hassan ibn Talal, Crown Prince of Jordan, spoke of the unavailing efforts made by his country to get the western powers to refrain from building up their military forces in the Gulf region, so that the Iraqi military could withdraw from Kuwait in accordance with a commitment that they had given in the immediate aftermath of the invasion.

It is curious that these points have either been suppressed or been very shoddily covered by the Western-dominated news agencies and media.

The James Baker-Tariq Aziz meeting in Geneva on January 9 went on for six hours. Yet few newspapers or agencies thought it worthwhile to report what the bargaining positions had been on either side. Similarly UN secretary-general Perez de Cuellar's meeting with Saddam Hussein has gone largely unreported on the substantive issues.

An Indian news agency managed to get a copy of the confidential report of the secretary-general, which indicated a greater willingness to compromise on the part of the Iraqi president than he has been credited with. See the Press Trust of India's New York date-

legatees of the Nazi programme of extermination against the Jews.

For Indians, who have learnt to look at Subash Chandra Bose's Nazi links⁵ with greater understanding than embarrassment, this case may seem rather overstated. Bose's Nazi connections represent a major moral dilemma, but do not diminish greatly from his standing as a nationalistic figure. There are objective and identifiable reasons why Bose's characterization of the British as "super-Nazis" struck a responsive chord amongst the subject populations of "His Majesty's colonies". Haj Amin's Nazi links, similarly, could easily be read as a damning indictment of British colonial policy. Whatever the historical judgements from the vantage point of today, the contemporary view then was that British liberalism and German

fascism were different only in degree not kind: that capitalism could sustain the liberal ideological facade only when given the kind of elbow space that Britain's vast colonial possessions afforded her; and that when constricted within narrow territorial boundaries, as with post-World War I Germany, liberalism is all too apt to lapse into the kind of revanchist nationalism that the Nazis represented.

History repeating itself as farce

From the Arab point of view, the Mufti's meeting with the Führer was a case of history repeating itself as farce, having earlier played itself out as tragedy. The groundwork for the meeting had been prepared through a correspondence between the two, at which the German side had committed itself to recognizing the "independence and freedom" of the Arab people. Precisely such a compact had been concluded between an Arab political leader and Britain in 1915, when

lined story: "Saddam had offered to talk it out". *The Hindu* (New Delhi), January 23, 1991, p. 6; and "Saddam was willing to discuss package deal," *The Statesman* (New Delhi), January 23, 1991, p. 9.

2. Maxime Rodinson, *Israel and the Arabs*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Great Britain, pp. 204-5.

3. The historical material on colonial policies in the Arab world is derived in essence from the following works: John Bagot Glubb, *Britain and the Arabs*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1959; Anthony Nutting, *The Arabs, a Narrative History from Mohammad to the Present*, Hollis and Carter, London, 1964; and George Antonius, *The Arab Awakening*, Hamish Hamilton, London, 1938. Maxime Rodinson, op. cit., also has important insights. The documentation on the Hussain-McMahon correspondence, the Sykes-Picot agreement, and the declarations and statements of the "allied powers", have been reproduced in the annexes to Antonius' book.

4. Walter Laquer (ed): *The Israel-Arab Reader*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London 1969, p. 82.

5. Chandra Bose was an Indian nationalist leader who sought an anti-British alliance with Germany and Japan.

the first of the major imperial conflagrations of this century was raging. Victorious Britain in 1918 was in a position to honour its commitments, but chose not to. Defeated and divided Germany in 1945 was, contrariwise, in no position to demonstrate whether it had equivalent tendencies to play fast and loose with wartime pledges.

A further throwback to July 1920 and the nature of the "linkage" in the received political consciousness of the Arab world would become clearer. Palestine that year echoed with militant slogans against the British mandate. Amman witnessed a mobilization of Bedouin tribesmen intent on marching on Damascus and ejecting the French. And Iraq exploded in insurrection against the occupying army of British India.

For much of August 1920, all of Iraq with the exception of the major towns, was held by the rebels. The uprising was not crushed until October, and even then the British had to hand out various concessions to buy peace. But from the position of strength that they had acquired through various dubious deals since 1915, Britain could afford to make concessions, without significantly compromising its geopolitical interests in the area.

First stirrings of Arab nationalism

After centuries under the Ottoman yoke, stirrings of Arab nationalism were beginning to emerge by the early years of the century. Baghdad, Beirut and Damascus were the main centres of Arab nationalist groupings. And as the focus of their aspirations, these groups turned to the Hashemite dynasty, represented by Hussain, the Sharif of Mecca, and two of his sons, the Emirs Faisal and Abdullah.

When the Turks entered World War I on the side of Germany, the British-French axis began seriously exploring means of undermining their enemy from within, by playing upon Arab nationalist sentiments. The British agent in Cairo, Lord Kitchener, had established contact with Sharif Hussain by October 1914, seeking to open a front against the Turks from within.

The Sharif's counsels were divided. Abdullah favoured the conclusion of an alliance with the British without any delay. But Faisal saw little point in exchanging Turkish domination for the British or the French. His contacts with the Arab nationalist bodies of Iraq and Syria (the al-Ahad and the al-Fatah) had convinced him that there was little to choose between the Turks and the "allies". Firm commitments to independence should be won, he argued, before the "allies" were to be favoured with the support of the Arab population.

A memorandum was drafted jointly by al-Ahad and al-Fatah, which Hussain forwarded to Kitchener's successor in Cairo,

Lord McMahon. It required that, as a precondition for Arab support, the British should recognize the independence of Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and the Arabian peninsula except for Aden.

McMahon's reply was evasive. He was prepared to "confirm" Britain's "desire for the independence of the Arab countries", but could not go so far as to specify the boundaries of the future Arab state. Such an exercise, he suggested, would be "premature and a waste of time", when hostilities were underway on several fronts.

Flattery and florid platitudes fail

But Sharif Hussain was insistent. This was not the usual "Eastern potentate", who could be deflected with the flatteries and florid platitudes that the British were accustomed by policy to. The "proposed frontiers and boundaries", he told McMahon in a letter written in September 1915, were the "demands of our people", who "believed that these were the minimum necessary for the establishment of the new order for which they are striving." Politely rebuffing McMahon's flattery, Hussain reminded him that the aim was "to ensure that the conditions which are essential to our future shall be secured on a foundation of reality and not on highly-decorated phrases and titles."

In October 1915, McMahon finally relented, committing Britain to recognizing Arab sovereignty over the entire area mentioned by Hussain. He only pleaded for exempting those areas that were not "purely Arab" such as "the districts of Damascus, Homs, Hama and Aleppo." Another quite distinct arrangement was conceived of in respect of the two *vilayets* (provinces) of Baghdad and Basra, where Britain had an established position and certain special interests. McMahon also reaffirmed that these commitments would not prejudice treaties already concluded between Britain and "certain Arab chiefs".

Though there remained areas of ambiguity, Sharif Hussain was greatly encouraged by this letter. He was willing to renounce the Arab claim to the predominantly Turkish districts of Mersin and Alexandretta (now Iskenderun), but insisted that the *vilayets* of Aleppo (now Naleb) and Beirut, and their "Western maritime coasts" were "purely Arab provinces, in which the Muslim is indistinguishable from the Christian." He also rejected the suggestion that the British could maintain their sovereignty over the provinces of Baghdad and Basra, since these were integral to the Arab people's appreciation of their civilization. However, he said, the parts of southern Iraq that had been occupied by British troops could remain so "for a period of time to be determined by negotiation" and the "agreements in force with certain chiefs

in those parts (would) be respected."

Certain features of this compact with the Sharif of Mecca are of special significance to understanding the crisis in the Arab world today. Britain had at various points in the 19th century concluded treaties with the Arab chieftains of Oman, Qatar, and all the other states which today comprise the United Arab Emirates. These treaties were crucial to the safety of the maritime traffic to the East, which then flowed mainly through the Suez Canal. Tucked away at the head of the Persian Gulf, Kuwait was not of great significance in this scheme of things.

In 1896, Mubarak al-Sabah acquired the chieftancy of Kuwait after murdering two of his half-brothers.⁶ The murdered man's sons fled to Basra and placed themselves under the protection of the Turkish Sultan. To ward off the threat from Basra, which then maintained a jurisdiction over Kuwait, Mubarak thought it prudent to seek an alliance with the British.

Britain's interest had meanwhile been aroused by a German cartel's plan to extend the Berlin-Baghdad railway towards the Persian Gulf, and directly access the sea routes to the east. The project naturally conceived of Kuwait as a railway terminus, considering the well-known deficiencies of Basra. A treaty with the al-Sabah's was now seen by Britain to serve the important function of frustrating the German bid to gain access to the Persian Gulf.

British apply coercive diplomacy

By a treaty of 1899, Kuwait was placed under the protection of Britain. Some coercive diplomacy with the Turkish Sultan enabled Britain to gain recognition of Kuwait as an autonomous *caza* (minor district) of the *vilayet* of Basra. Another treaty, drawn up in 1913, sought to define the boundaries of Kuwait, but significantly remained unratified from the Ottoman side. When World War I broke out, diplomacy was rendered entirely redundant.

Hussain's last note to McMahon committed the Arabs to honouring the special arrangements concluded by Britain in the vicinity of Basra. It would be reasonable to assume that this meant Kuwait. However, Hussain remained silent on treaties concluded with other chiefs of the Gulf region. The Hussain-McMahon negotiation thus remained inconclusive on several matters of detail, though the issues of principle had been stated with great clarity.

In October 1915, Emir Faisal raised the banner of revolt against the Turks and began his march on Damascus with an Arab Bedouin army. In May 1916, Mark Sykes for Britain and Georges Picot for France, put their signatures to a secret document partitioning the Ottoman Empire between the two "allies". Because

of its interests in the northern Ottoman Empire, Tsarist Russia was also allowed in on the anticipated division of the spoils.

The Sykes-Picot agreement is a watershed in the Arab world's relations with the West. As an instance of colonial duplicity, it is perhaps unparalleled; in violation of the Hussain-McMahon compact, it drastically curtailed the territory that would be under Arab sovereignty in the postwar dispensation. To begin with, it excluded the entirety of the Arabian peninsula, Lebanon, Palestine, the provinces of Baghdad and Basra, and that portion of Syria that fell west of a line drawn from Aleppo to Damascus. The sovereign Arab state was to be confined within a rough quadrilateral, bounded by Aleppo, Aqaba, Mosul, and the holy cities of Karbala and Najaf. And even this supposedly autonomous state was divided into two

zones in each of which the British and the French would enjoy exclusive rights of finance and enterprise.

The proposed Arab state was to be completely landlocked, except for the very narrow access to the straits of Aqaba. It was to have been sparsely settled and predominantly arid. The entire Mediterranean coast and the Tigris-Euphrates delta — areas of rich historical association for the Arabs — were to be placed under Anglo-French tutelage.

Palestine under "international control"

The Mediterranean coast north of Tyre, was to be the exclusive preserve of the French, while the British retained Baghdad and Basra. Palestine was to be retained under "international control" — in other words, it would be run by a cabal of the "allied powers", rather than by any single one of them. The French had been keen on keeping Palestine, which would have given them control over the entire eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean. But Tsarist Russia too had its ambitions, cloaked under the religious garb of protecting the holy sites of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Britain, moreover, was averse to having any other European power in close proximity to the Suez Canal zone. Given these irreconcilable claims, "international control" seemed a reasonable compromise.

It is again significant that the pretence of Kuwaiti autonomy had no place within the secret councils of the colonial powers. British ambitions had been expanded to take in all of Southern Iraq, on the assumption that the term covered the tiny enclave of Kuwait also.

When the Bolshevik revolutionaries seized power in Russia, they publicly tore up the Sykes-Picot agreement, in token of

their repudiation of imperialist politics. News of the agreement filtered through to the Sharif Hussain, who was aghast at the magnitude of the deception. Early in 1918, the British foreign secretary, A. J. Balfour, sought to assuage Arab anxieties with the plea that the Sykes-Picot agreement incorporated various "stipulations" regarding "the consent of the populations and the safeguarding of their interests."

Nothing could have been further from the truth. Sykes-Picot did not merely disregard Arab interests, it sought to override them. That this patent deception should have come from the author of the programme to establish a "Jewish National Home" in Palestine and that this concession to Zionism had already been made while Arab nationalists were being fobbed off in a variety of ways, showed which way the wind was blowing.

The Emir Faisal was by now suspicious of Anglo-French intentions, and saw sufficient cause to accelerate his march towards Damascus. He reached the city on October 1, 1918, to a rapturous reception by its people. He was many days ahead of the British troops under Field Marshal Allenby. Shortly afterwards, the Ottomans surrendered. On November 7, Britain and France issued a joint declaration that their aim for the land that had been "liberated" from the Turks, was the institution of "national governments and administrations" that would "derive their authority from the free exercise of the initiative and the choice of the indigenous populations."

All through 1919, Faisal travelled around the imperial capitals of Europe, seeking to win concrete commitments that embodied this abstract principle. The French were openly hostile to his proposals, while the British were uneasy and ambivalent.

While all this was underway, the al-

Fatah and the al-Ahad had reconstituted themselves into popular representative bodies that claimed to represent the people of Syria and Iraq. In July 1919, the General Syrian Congress passed a resolution declaring its intention to establish a constitutional monarchy in Syria, with Damascus as capital. Developments in Baghdad followed virtually the same course.

General Syrian Congress proclaims Independence

The "allies" continued to be ambivalent. On March 8, 1920, the General Syrian Congress proclaimed the independence of Syria with Emir Faisal as monarch. The territory covered by the independent state took in all of present-day Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Jordan. At the same time, a similar gathering in Baghdad proclaimed the independence of Iraq, with Emir Abdullah as the constitutional head.

The "allies" would have none of it. They signalled their rejection of the Syrian Congress' action, and proceeded to another of their infamous cabals at San Remo in April 1920. The San Remo cabal did away with even the marginal concessions to Arab sovereignty embodied in the Sykes-Picot agreement. It resolved upon placing the whole of the Arab country under mandatory rule, from the Mediterranean to the Persian frontier. Syria was broken up into three fragments — Christian Lebanon and Palestine were hived off, and the residual portion became the truncated "Syria" that is

6. Historical details on the formation of the Kuwaiti state can be had from J. B. Kelly, *Arabia, the Gulf and the West*, Wiedenfeld and Nicolson, 1980 — a work written from a British Foreign Office perspective. Molly Izard, *The Gulf: Arabia's Western Approaches*, John Murray, London 1979, is also useful, though written in the vein of a travelogue.



known by that name to this day.

Syria and Lebanon were placed under the French mandate, while Britain was given the mandates for Iraq and Palestine. The Palestine mandate carried with it the proviso that the Balfour declaration on the "Jewish National Home" would be energetically implemented. And the mandate for Iraq took in the entirety of the provinces of Baghdad, Basra and Mosul — it was not thought necessary to separately mention Kuwait, since the autonomy of that tiny enclave was not a pretence that the imperial powers thought it necessary to maintain among themselves.

On July 1920, the French military commander for the Eastern Mediterranean sent an ultimatum to the newly enthroned King Faisal of Syria.

French expeditionary force takes Damascus

Five days later, a French expeditionary force marched on Damascus, overcame the resistance of small Arab bands, and took the city. Faisal was forced to leave Damascus on July 28. Iraq exploded in insurrection; Palestine seethed with resentment; the Emir Abdullah began mobilizing his Bedouin tribesmen for an assault on Damascus; and Syrian Druze militiamen launched the first of the guerrilla campaigns which were to harass the French colonial administration over the next five years.

Perhaps 5,000 Iraqi lives were lost in the insurrection before it was crushed in October 1920. Britain then launched a desperate fire-fighting operation to establish a modicum of civil order. Faisal was received in Baghdad, and after a quick referendum, recognized as King of Iraq. At the same time, his brother Abdullah was proclaimed King of Trans-Jordan, with its capital at Amman.

The designs of the Sykes-Picot agreement were carried through to their fruition in the creation of these two states. Both states were almost entirely landlocked. Iraq was fortunate enough to be given the provinces of Basra and Baghdad, which were rich in associations with the mediaeval Arab civilization. But when the east bank of the Jordan river was constituted into an autonomous state with the rather improbable name of Trans-Jordan, it was forced to sever its historical ties with the Mediterranean coast and the cities of Damascus, Beirut and Jerusalem. What remained was a state whose name reflected an uncertain territoriality, and an unformed historicity. It had a ruling Bedouin military class and a settled Palestinian population.

Kuwaiti autonomy was resurrected when the frontiers of Iraq and Jordan were thus defined. The British Conservative government of the time had come to view control over the Persian Gulf as the key to the defence of empire in India. And they were most disinclined to surren-

der their strategic enclave at the head of the Gulf to the mercies of a nationalist-minded monarch in Baghdad.

Arab nationalism was a movement that was throttled at birth. A comparison with India would heighten some of the contrasts between the relatively enlightened imperial policy practised in the sub-continent, and its most bigoted manifestation in the Arab countries.

The constitutional reforms that began in India with the Royal Proclamation of 1919, enabled the incipient Indian bourgeoisie to incrementally occupy the political space that was being vacated by the imperial power. At the same time, the growth of indigenous industry and commerce that began with the fiscal reforms of the mid-1920s strengthened the internal solidarity of at least a section of the bourgeoisie, enabling them to emerge as a class capable of administering a modern nation state.

The Arab world witnessed contrary tendencies. While the forces of national integration grew in the sub-continent, disintegration was encouraged in the Arab world. Arbitrary divisions were super-imposed on an area of great cultural homogeneity, causing enormous disruptions to the growth of bourgeois solidarity.

Damaging severance of regional unity

Much of the land in Palestine, for instance, had been owned by the Damascus and Beirut based bourgeoisie. But the severance of the connection between Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, destroyed all the growth potentialities of this small Arab elite. Most of the land-owners in Palestine had no choice but to sell their landholdings. And into this vacuum stepped — not other Arabs — but Jewish immigrants who embodied the European ethos of capital and enterprise.

David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, and the architect of that state's aggressive policy towards its neighbours, was one of the Zionist pioneers in Palestine. He has described the ideology underlying the growth of Jewish settlements in the most noble terms: "the return of the Jews to their Land was bound up with the lofty mission to make the Middle East bloom again and to establish friendly co-operation between the Semitic peoples." Much colonial conquest has been rationalized in precisely such terms, and the "friendly cooperation" between colonizers and subject populations has never been more than a euphemism for a relationship of dominance and mutual exclusion. There is a subtle suggestion of this in Ben Gurion's affirmation that Jewish immigrants were "independent in economy, culture and speech" and "able to defend themselves."⁷

As Arab resentment grew at their dis-

possession from the land, the Jewish Trade Union Congress (the Histadrut) thought it necessary to insist that Jewish enterprise should employ only Jewish labour. And through the organization of the Jewish Defence Force (the Haganah) Ben Gurion sought to impress upon the Arabs that "the presence of Jews in Palestine was not a feeble or fleeting factor, but a decisive one, a historical reality."⁸

Cultural identity of Palestinians denied

Less than two decades after Palestine had been torn from its centuries-long association with Damascus and Beirut, the Royal Commission on Palestine found it easy to deny the cultural identity of the Palestinian Arabs. "In the twelve centuries and more since the Arab conquest, Palestine had virtually dropped out of history."

And a decade later, the Jewish Agency for Palestine was able to win its case for Israel with the preposterous claim that "Palestine cannot be described as an Arab country either by historical significance or in respect of the forces which now shape its political and social character."⁹ Indeed, the decapitated and divided Palestine was easily portrayed as an area that owed its "lustre in the history of mankind to its Jewish connections."¹⁰

In 1948, the state of Israel was proclaimed with the backing of a big power cabal at the UN: united in their opposition to Israel, the Arabs were divided in every other respect, and went down to the first of their many military defeats. But the iron had entered the soul. Filled with bitterness and rancour, they refused to accept the imperial *fait accompli* that had planted a European outpost in their midst, and merely decided to bide their time until the opportunity to strike back came their way.

With the end of World War II, the mantle of enforcing colonial law passed on to the former white settler colony of the United States. The task of preserving the state of permanent instability in the Arab world had now to be performed by the US. Pax Britannica was transformed into the Pax Anglo-Americana. And each effort to repair some trivial damage to the Pax was followed by a breach that the upholders of the peace never foresaw. Characteristically obtuse, the Anglo-American clique has failed to comprehend that its every intervention in the Arab world has invariably proved expensive in terms of its different political ramifications. ★

7. David Ben Gurion, *Israel, Years of Challenge*, Anthony Blond, London, 1964, p. 13.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

9. Cited in the Jewish Agency for Palestine, *The Jewish Plan for Palestine*, Jerusalem, 1947, p. 105.

10. *Ibid.*

Isolating the extremes

WE reproduce below extracts from an article on Joaquin Villalobos, a member of the Revolutionary Army of the People (ERP)¹ and of the leadership of El Salvador's Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), which first appeared in the *New York Times* in March 1991, together with a comment by Mexican revolutionary Marxist Sergio Rodriguez. The Salvadoran leader has made no attempt to disassociate himself from the quotations attributed to him in the article, which has been retranslated from the French.

DOCUMENT

IN the course of his first public declarations since the collapse of the Soviet bloc, comandante Joaquin Villalobos said that his coalition would not achieve its objectives through armed struggle, but through participating, as an unarmed political movement, in a pluralist democracy.

Speaking of what he called an important transformation in the thinking of the rebels after recent international events, Mr. Villalobos said that the guerilla coalition has gone beyond Marxism, which he characterized as "a political theory like any other, no more". He said that the military objectives of the FMLN had changed, its goal being no longer to impose a defeat or a reform on the Salvadoran army, but to seek on the contrary to obtain the permanent disarmament of the two parties, under the supervision of the United Nations.

Presenting orthodox Communism as an extremist position, comparable to that of the Salvadoran right, Villalobos said that the FMLN now thinks that the future of El Salvador must be based on the model of major capitalist countries like Germany, Japan or Costa Rica — this latter having no army and enjoying close relations with the United States economy.

"In El Salvador, it is necessary to isolate or cut off the extremes", said Mr. Villalobos.

1. In 1972 the Party of the Socialist Revolution (PRS) was formed, along with its armed wing, the ERP, out of radicalized Christian milieus. In 1974, the ERP experienced a split from which emerged the National Resistance (RN) and its armed wing, the Armed Forces of National Liberation (FARC), led by, amongst others, the poet Roque Dalton — who was assassinated during internal struggles between the FARC and the ERP.

The ERP and the FARC have been part of the front of Salvadoran politico-military organizations, the FMLN, since its creation in 1980.

The ERP has always claimed allegiance to Marxism-Leninism and the Cuban and Vietnamese revolutions.

bos. "In our case, it is dogmatic Stalinism and classical traditional Communism. At the other extreme, it is the orthodox right which, in El Salvador, is worthy of the Stone Age."

The comments made by Mr. Villalobos in the last few days, in an unusual series of interviews, took place as news arrived of guerilla attacks and military confrontations in El Salvador, on the eve of the legislative and municipal elections. The guerillas occupied for a short period of time a part of the residential quarter of El Escalon, in San Salvador, and they attacked the principal hydro-electric plant of the country, in the province of Chalatenango, causing 23 deaths.

The content of his declarations and the period in which they have been made give the impression that their goal was to calm international criticism of the guerillas, and to present a moderate image on the eve of the elections, which the rebels have promised not to disrupt.

Comments far from traditional positions

The comments are nonetheless astonishing, for they are very far from the traditional revolutionary positions of Mr. Villalobos' coalition, which, for a very long time, has fiercely defended such doctrines (...)

These declarations seem also to clarify what the guerilla leader has described as the "new political reality" which his movement must face, after the dramatic political convulsions which have dealt a blow to its principal international supporters.

Amongst these events one could cite the fundamental changes in the Socialist International, in the countries of the Eastern Bloc, in Nicaragua and the deepening of the crisis in Cuba which, for a long

time, has been the principal ally of the cause of the Salvadoran guerillas.

Mr. Villalobos must be about 40 years old; he rarely gives interviews and has spent a good part of the last decade in clandestinity, abroad or in the mountains of El Salvador, leading important struggles against the Salvadoran army and its US military advisors.

Villalobos, like other members of the guerilla high command, has lately tried hard to enter into negotiations with the Salvadoran government (...)

" (...) We do not seek the reform of the armed forces of El Salvador, but their dismantling and the demilitarization of the country, for it is the best means of guaranteeing democracy and economic development" said Mr. Villalobos in closing. ★

Theory and reality

WITHOUT attempting to give an overall picture of the evolution of the Salvadoran revolutionary process, or to draw definitive conclusions on the remarks attributed to comandante Joaquin Villalobos in the *New York Times*, it is necessary to deal with certain questions which are raised by the new propositions of some Salvadoran leaders.

SERGIO RODRIGUEZ

AFTER the events in Eastern Europe, no one can doubt the necessity of a critical review of certain strategic hypotheses. The wind of democratic sentiments is blowing today through all the organizations of the left, putting in question the traditional schema of vanguards, single parties, of "national leadership, command!" and so on¹. These are laudable developments and reflexes which, with the disappearance of what many considered the "vanguard of the anti-imperialist revolution" (the Soviet bloc), illustrate the transformation of certain essential points of our strategy.

But there are many who wish to throw the baby out with the bath water; responding to the democratic aspirations of the

people should not mean making concessions to imperialism's ideological offensive. This phenomenon of distancing from Marxism, explained by its loss of credibility after the events in eastern Europe, is evident inside key sectors of the Latin American revolutionary left. In the process, all the nuances are jumbled together, in the name of generalities which do not particularly contribute to an understanding of the very complex political situation which the revolutionary process in El Salvador is going through.

We do not know if, as Joaquin Villalobos claims, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) has gone beyond Marxism, and we know still less by what new theory it claims to replace it. But, on the other hand, we know that the FMLN has shown political qualities that have inspired a whole generation of revolutionaries; it has been capable of making the link between Marxist theory and national reality, which is different from what Marx had analyzed in the 19th century.

Struggle against Marxist "orthodoxy"

This challenge had already been taken up, a long time ago, by another great Marxist, the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui². The struggle against a certain Marxist "orthodoxy" was essential for the elaboration of a specific vision based on the fundamental idea that, if the future of Latin America is obviously linked to that of the capitalist world — because of the pillage exercised by the latter — history cannot repeat itself in the same manner in our countries as in Europe or the United States. These national particularities have led us to attempt to build a system of thought which seeks a fusion between Marxism and national identity; in this domain, the FMLN has made an inestimable contribution.

There is a gulf, however, between echoing this and adopting an anti-Marxist ideology — very fashionable in recent times. From all the evidence, the self-styled "new modernity" has already wreaked some damage inside the revolutionary organizations. Behind the slogan of "modernize or die" an important part of the Latin American left seeks to break its supposed links with an authoritarian past. But such efforts risk abandoning the very essence of revolutionary thought, that is its emancipatory, subversive, egalitarian and popular character, and its political and moral opposition to capitalism. The tragedy, for those who wish to renew the left, is that imperialism and its allies are not modernizing themselves at all and are continuing their old policy of the "big stick", "manifest destiny", and so on. The US intervention in Panama in December 1989, and more recently still, in Iraq, show how far they will go to attain their objectives, which are far from being

"modern".

Some say that it is precisely an analysis of the current imperialist offensive that has led a significant part of the Latin American left to revise some of its schemas; the imperialist offensive puts all the revolutionary currents in a very unfavorable position (it is terribly pathetic to hear Fidel Castro say that the Cuban revolution is not isolated; he seems tempted to wish away a very worrying reality, an approach that will be totally counter-productive in the long term). The pressure exerted on organizations like the FMLN is very much more grave than that suffered by other types of forces. When the Sandinista comandante Victor Tirado Lopez explained that the cycle of anti-imperialist revolutions had reached its end³, we were far from imagining the extent to which these declarations reflected a more general sentiment of the revolutionary left. Even if the anti-imperialist revolution is not on the order of the day, our peoples cannot build democratic and just nations unless they maintain the long-term perspective of such a revolution. Any intermediary conception will turn out to be false and tragically utopian.

One is struck by comandante Villalobos' idea according to which the future of El Salvador could follow the model of capitalist countries like Germany, Japan, or Costa Rica. East Germany also believed that it had the possibility of becoming like the Federal Republic of Germany; today it is waking up from this dream. Actually, the worst thing that could happen to El Salvador would be to become like Japan or Germany, imperialist countries which subject, exploit and pillage others and which moreover finance immoral wars like that in the Gulf.

Imperialist partition cannot be modified

But such a danger does not exist for El Salvador. After the agreement made by the imperialist states on the sharing out of the world, there is no chance of modifying this partition — in other words, El Salvador will never be Germany or Japan. It could, on the other hand, resemble Costa Rica — which, true enough, has no army, but has an extremely efficient police force for the purposes of repression, crushing strikes and nipping in the bud revolutionary organizations, and whose government has always obeyed the orders of Washington.

Today, the debate is over whether countries like ours have the chance of an independent development, in the context of contemporary capitalism. We do not think so. But while we know also that the revolution is not for tomorrow, and that the relation of forces between capital and the working class, between imperialism and the oppressed nations, is rather favourable to the former, we cannot base our strate-

gic perspective on conjunctural elements of this type. Imperialism talks about a "new world order" which, as Noam Chomsky says, has existed for over 400 years; it is far, however, from attaining a cycle of long term stability. We are perhaps on the eve of important working class struggles in the big imperialist countries — industrial restructuring and the formation of new productive blocs will not fail to push the working class to resist and to fight.

Absence of victorious battles

One of the big weaknesses of the last cycle of struggles in the Third World has been the absence of significant victorious battles in the imperialist countries. The governments of these countries have thus been able to act in all impunity; international social democracy being the central factor which has blocked the radicalization of the workers. But all this is beginning to change. We must break with a vision of dependence, which translates itself by a sort of "third worldism" in our political action; the only possibility of transforming the relation of forces at the international level resides in the struggle of the workers in the imperialist countries. This does not at all mean that our countries are condemned to paralysis; on the contrary, our struggles are fundamental in the accumulation of forces which will change the existing relations between capital and labour, between imperialism and the Third World.

Our divergences with the comments of comrade Villalobos do not hinge then on the fact that the FMLN seeks to transform itself eventually into a unarmed political force; arms are not and have never been the key element differentiating reformists and revolutionaries. The armed struggle in El Salvador has been and remains the expression of a population which, faced with the closed attitude of the oligarchy, has found no other road. Nobody knows better than the FMLN if the moment has come to make such a transformation. We are no more in disagreement with the negotiations that the FMLN is undertaking with the government of El Salvador; nor, still less, with what seems to us an excellent proposition, the demilitarization of society. The repercussions of the

1. This was a slogan much used in Nicaragua, at the time of the Sandinista government. The national leadership comprised the nine comandantes of the FSLN.

2. José Carlos Mariátegui (1895-1930), Peruvian writer and revolutionary militant. Author notably of "Seven essays of interpretation of Peruvian reality" (1928), the first great theoretical work which applied Marxism-Leninism to Latin America, he also published the continental review *Amauta*. Mariátegui founded the Communist Party of Peru and the Confederation of Workers of Peru.

3. In an interview in the Uruguayan newspaper *Brecha* on March 30, 1990, the Sandinista comandante Victor Tirado Lopez said, amongst other things: "I think that the cycle of anti-imperialist revolutions, in the sense of a total response, military and economic, to imperialism, is in the process of closing. It is necessary to seek other options..."

speeches of a revolutionary leader like Joaquín Villalobos could go very far. In the spirit of the revolutionary pluralism that we have always applied in our relations with comrades of the FMLN, we launch an appeal for reflection and debate.

A generation of Latin American revolutionaries could draw erroneous conclusions from the current situation, which is certainly difficult, giving ground to the

"obstacles to utopia", to use the formula employed by the Guatemalan revolutionary Manuel Payeras to characterize the current period.

The defence of this utopia passes through the fusion of what is best in social thought — Marxism — with our Indo-American identity, as Mariátegui said; this is our essential objective. The rest is no more than tactical adaptation, which, however important, is not everything. ★

February 1990.

The FSLN is paying heavily for the lack of democratic internal debate during the 11 years it exercised power.

Leadership from the top down, summed up in the slogan "National leadership, command!", was the basis of the relations between the FSLN leadership and the Sandinista assembly (120 members, reinforced by some newcomers for the El Crucero meeting); between the national leadership and the leaderships of Sandinista mass organizations and the youth organization; and with the intermediary and base structures. This command structure was justified by reference to the state of war.

Another vicious element of this way of operating was the intimate link between the state and the party.

Finally, the incapacity or the refusal to adopt a clear Marxist platform and to educate its cadres and militants in this sense (those who claim to be Marxist are actually not very numerous in the FSLN) has also exercised a negative pressure.

Failure to correct errors in time

All this prevented the FSLN from avoiding or correcting in time the grave errors committed in the course of its years in power.

Among these errors were: the bad understanding of the peasant question; the errors committed in relation to the indigenous minorities on the Atlantic Coast; the links with the mass organizations, often conceived as transmission belts; the incapacity and refusal to develop workers and popular control, while giving too much weight to technocrats and administrators; the exaggerated development of the military apparatus and of its material privileges; the International Monetary Fund (IMF) type measures starting from 1986, and stepped up in 1988, and the social strains and the recession that they accentuated; the reduction of support for the democratic model to its bourgeois variant (national assembly, presidential power, refusal of the revocability of deputies, suppression of the Council of State, where the mass organizations were represented); the step backward taken in relation to the problems of religion and the church (whereas at the beginning, the Front had an acute understanding of the question); and the triumphalism of the 1990 electoral campaign.

During the public debate, Gioconda Belli, writer and Sandinista militant, has wondered out loud if the FSLN was a front, a party, or a combination of the two; "For some, the FSLN is or was an organization structured around a left ideology with a Marxist base; for others, the FSLN is a party where all the Nicaraguans who love their country have their place, without distinction between landowners, Christians, evangelists or poor peasants.

FSLN: front or party?

WHILE the revolutionary tradition of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) remains a living force, it is being strongly questioned by some of its leaders, those who initiated the austerity policy implemented by the Sandinistas from 1988. This policy was based on the search for a consensus with the bourgeoisie, to the detriment of the interests of the popular sectors.

These leaders are developing a moderate reformist approach which does not take into account the poverty of Nicaraguans, who are subject to a capitalism which, for its part, has not moderated at all; some even advocate co-government with the National Union of the Opposition (UNO), or, in any case, with its most moderate sectors. Those militants who defend the revolutionary traditions of the Front base themselves on an important social mobilization which they are leading. But it seems that they do not have the same coherence and offensive spirit as the advocates of the moderate line.

ERIC TOUSSAINT

THE main exponents of the moderate line are former Sandinista minister Alejandro Martínez Cuenca, Edmundo Jarquín (vice-president of the Sandinista parliamentary group), Rafael Solís (former secretary of the National Assembly), Herty Lewites (former Minister of Tourism), supported by two former members of the Sandinista national leadership, Sergio Ramírez (Sandinista vice-president of the Republic and currently president of the parliamentary group, close to Humberto Ortega) and comandante Víctor Tirado.

They are developing a policy in contradiction as much with the historic programme of the FSLN in 1969, which they now consider obsolete, as with the El Crucero declaration adopted by the Sandinista assembly after the electoral defeat in June 1990.

Over a period of some months, their positions have been disavowed neither by the leadership of the Front as a whole nor

by any of its members. This situation is worrying and has led to repeated criticisms by very many militants who deplore the absence of clear positions on the part of their leadership.

The radical declaration made by Daniel Ortega on April 10, 1991 (which we will reproduce in a future edition of *International Viewpoint*) seems to indicate a left inflection.

But does it mark a real turning point? Or does it seek to put the government under pressure, and to head off the discontent of the base and a number of cadres in the run-up to the FSLN's July congress?

The public, critical and polemical character of the debate which is developing inside the FSLN as its first congress approaches bears witness to the vitality of a party which has led an authentic popular revolution, which has exercised power in conditions of great adversity, and which has been tested by the electoral defeat of

"These two positions have been endorsed by the national leadership although, in fact, they represent very different optics which, in practice, should lead to distinct organizational forms.

"According to the Marxist-Leninist conception, the community of ideological views inside the party is a condition *sine qua non*, which gives the possibility of structuring a determined programme which, historically, leads to the taking of power by the workers... The other position, on the contrary, corresponds more to a front or electoral party structure; all can recognize themselves in the flag of Sandinism and both the landowners and the wage earners will expect the party to represent their antagonistic interests"¹.

Belli leans visibly towards the "revolutionary party" model, one capable of forming a front, notably in an election period.

Moreover, she indicates the undesirable effects of the party/front confusion; "Party discipline is an illusion, precisely to the extent that there exists no ideological community, since the conscious base of discipline is not understood in the same manner by all. ... The appeal for discipline ... becomes a lever of power, a mechanism of repression in which the line of the party becomes a dogma respected out of fear and not by conviction. Instead of being enriched, the line becomes a strait-jacket of force".

"Deideologization" of education

Gioconda Belli also exposes the consequences of this in the area of political education; "this problem of the double structure — front and vanguard party — expressed itself already at the beginning of the 1980s when... education was "de-ideologized", becoming the mechanical and poor study of the immediate situation, which led to an empirical practice..."

She shows the contradiction in the fact that the FSLN, starting from 1984, adopted an essentially electoral programme, addressing itself to all the sectors of voting age, without renouncing its socialist orientation, according to which the workers should be hegemonic.

She concludes by an appeal to the militants: "Without denying what could be valid and retrievable, it is necessary to also see the negative effects and advance towards a synthesis, for today the schizophrenia between party and front, does not allow the FSLN to be either a party with a social project in the service of the workers, or a broad front which, while conserving a project of profound social transformations, could appeal to the votes of vast sectors of the population."

Taking up the same theme as Gioconda

Belli, Rosario Murillo, directress of the cultural supplement of *Barricada*, poet and former companion of Daniel Ortega, has mounted a constant attack on the state of the FSLN: "Inside the Front, you can find Sandinistas as well as non-Sandinistas. Millionaires and the poor"². Followers of God and followers of the devil ... Yes, gentlemen, the Sandinista Front is currently a front, and as a front, where it is possible to find everybody, it is, at the moment, a pile of shit"³.

Murillo underlines the necessity of the revolutionary project and practice; "To be revolutionary, red, communist, a comrade, to aspire to the revolution in the



Third (and the whole) World is a question of soul, of life and of heart".

Attack on FSLN moderates

She then attacks the moderate wing of the Front, which uses the crisis of the so-called socialist camp as a pretext for indefinitely postponing the revolutionary perspective: "There are those who consider that [the revolution] is cheap snobbery. There are the "moderns", who have passed now onto anti-radical chic. Via the centre, they say. To arrive more rapidly..... But do we know where?

"The world has changed, it is true. The Soviets repudiate their own lies or truths, they no longer wish to be called either soviets, or socialists, or reds. But the revolution is not the extension throughout the world of the Soviet model, and this, Nicaragua has well understood.... Communism has fallen in the countries of the East? Very well! But has Nicaragua ever been in the east? Has Communism ever reigned there?"

Murillo then indicates with more precision who she is denouncing, "We have spoken of the Sandinista Front and of its broad spectrum, what some call its ideological diversity. Inside it, the millionaires aspire to make their millions, to help the others, they say (as bosses, to be sure)⁴. Inside it, there are some politicians... who desire, with the help of old methods (which they now call modern) to fool the others".

She concludes on the stakes of the congress: "This year we must decide if this front will be a front of Sandinistas or of "confusionists", of pragmatists or of parasites, of chameleons or of truths, of millionaires or of workers.... Who could maintain this Sandinista Front? Only those who know the pragmatism of physical survival — or who have made this choice — and human dignity, of the raw and naked truth, which is paradoxically also that of hope and of dreams. Our revolutionary hope at the congress resides in the impoverished majority being fully represented, by itself and by those who assume its defence."

What direction for the FSLN corresponds to the will, expressed above, to see the Sandinistas adopt a clearer profile and class practice ?

To answer this question it is necessary to return to the social conflicts which have broken out since the accession of the UNO to the government.

The workers of the towns and of the countryside, organized in the National Front of Workers (FNT) have tried to stem the governmental attacks through several strikes; the movements of May and June 1990 shook the Sandinista leadership and the agreement which put an end to them was negotiated, in part, under the table; the representatives of the workers did not participate at all the discussions.

Trinchera, the weekly of the Sandinista trade unions, strongly criticized this. At

1. All the quotations from G. Belli are from *Barricada*, February 14, 1991.
 2. The draft statutes of the FSLN to be submitted to the congress for discussion, confirm the possibility of being a member of the Front, whatever one's class position. "Article 4: All citizens of Nicaragua, without distinction of religion or economic position, who accept its programmatic platform and statutes, can be members of the FSLN." *Barricada Internacional*, April 1991. This has been criticized in the press by several militants.
 3. *Barricada*, as translated in the *Bulletin Amérique centrale*, March 1991, Brussels.
 4. Herty Lewites, former Sandinista minister of tourism, is one of these millionaires. In 1988-89, he set in motion a programme of privatizations of a part of the tourist infrastructure. Here is what he said: "When we lost [the elections] I felt shocked. Then I said to myself: I am going to show that I am a Sandinista who could become a millionaire. Because the challenge that now faces us, without being in government, to make money, and this is a good challenge for the Front's militants. The Front has not defined, at the level of its national leadership, what it is really looking for...What I ask of the Front is: each to their work. If I succeed in achieving personal economic development, I won't feel bad about it." *El Semanario*, March 7, 1991.

the Sandinista Assembly of El Crucero in June 1990 the national leadership, confronted with the criticisms of militants engaged in the struggles, proposed a radical text renewing the line of "governing from below".

Nonetheless, this text listed neither the nationalized sector, nor the arming of the masses amongst the inviolable revolutionary conquests. The first compromise with the government in June 1990 was soon called into question by new antisocial measures and the July strikes saw a mounting fear of confrontation between the UNO regime and the Sandinista trade unions.

New compromise struck

The FSLN took the side of the strikers while preaching reconciliation. A new compromise was then struck; but some weeks later, the government showed that it was not intending to apply these accords, and privatizations were begun.

In September, in a climate of renewed social tension, the government entered into talks about talks so as to agree a pact; this was signed on October 26, 1990 with the Sandinista and pro-UNO trade unions, and some employers federations but without the main one, the Superior Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP).

These accords, explicitly destined to give confidence to the IMF, the World Bank, certain European governments and above all the United States, sanctioned a major concession on the part of the Sandinistas: "The government, in privatizing the state enterprises, takes into account the rights gained by the workers, such as their right to participate in the ownership of the enterprises; [it] will authorize the functioning of private financial institutions... [it] will concede export licenses to associations of producers and to private individuals"⁵.

Three important gains of the revolution were thus put in question; the existence of the Area of People's Property (the nationalized sector); the nationalization of the financial and credit system, and the state monopoly of foreign trade.

These concessions by the Sandinistas have been the object of strong criticisms on the part of a left sector of the Front: "Even if the FNT has signed the 'accords of concertation', it is obvious that the workers at the base of the popular sectors are not in agreement with the privatizations ...

"This gesture of conciliation [by the Front] implies a concession on principles and on the fundamental conceptions of the revolution... Obviously, the collapse of the socio-economic model of the countries of the East constitutes for some [Sandinistas] a handicap to claiming the progressive character of social, collective ownership of the means of production — and for others, a magnificent occasion to rid themselves of a concept with which

The Calvary of the Nicaraguan people

THE right had promised during the electoral campaign that once in power it would in 100 days be able to significantly reduce the rate of inflation, reduce unemployment and relaunch the economy. It has used the classical methods of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), aggravating the austerity measures applied by the Sandinistas from 1988.

In 1990, public expenditure was sharply reduced, as well as credit for businesses — the government tried thus to reduce the amount of money in circulation in order to reduce inflation. The consequences were disastrous; a deepening of the recession; an increasing number of bankruptcies of firms; redundancy for tens of thousand of workers in the public and private sector (30,000 according to the trade unions); and a sharp decline in the quality of the health and education systems. For the sixth consecutive year, the Gross Domestic Product has fallen; inflation, far from being conquered, reached around 14,000% in 1990 (against 1,600% in 1989), despite the recession.

The introduction of a new currency, the cordoba-oro, introduced progressively into circulation for certain operations, was the shock weapon against inflation; the old cordoba (identified with Sandinism) was allowed to devalue itself to the extreme to be then replaced by the cordoba-oro (identified with the new regime), which, because it would have the confidence of the public, would allow hyperinflation to be arrested — the cordoba-oro would be exchanged in parity with the US dollar. This operation has met complete defeat. Some months after being put into circulation, the new currency exchanged on the black market at a rate of 5-1 against the US dollar.

Moreover, the government reduced import duties; the national market was thus flooded by the products of the neighboring countries and the crisis of the productive sector supplying the interior market deepened — the importation of consumer goods grew by 74% in 1990 whereas that of goods of production fell by 25% — without improving the purchasing power of the immense majority of the population. On the contrary, Nicaragua has become the most expensive country in Latin America (*Envio*, February 1991).

To measure the depth of the recession, it is sufficient to cite some figures; in 1990, industrial production fell by 8.4%, construction by 36%, and agriculture for the internal market has nosedived (a decline of 40% for corn, 74 and 30% for the two varieties of rice, and 12% for beans). The minister responsible for the 100 day plan, Francisco Mayorga, resigned in autumn 1990. The failure of his plan (like the austerity plan of 1988) stemmed particularly from an error of analysis; hyperinflation is not primarily caused by an excess of liquidity or solvent demand (contrary to the dogmas of the IMF, according to which the people dispose of an excessive purchasing power in relation to the quantity of available goods) — between May and December 1990, the real mass of means of payment in circulation fell by 60%, but this formidable contraction of demand has not stopped inflation reaching 5,900% during the same period, according to an article by Pedro A. Rodriguez which appeared in *El Nuevo Diario*. The succession of devaluations and the sluggish rhythm of inflation impelled traders and producers to integrate the expected devaluations in their sales prices; that is, they preferred to sell less products at a superior price than to sell more for a lesser reward.

On March 1, 1991, a new shock austerity plan (the third since 1988) was applied with a new maxi-devaluation. The old cordoba, which exchanged at 25,000,000-1 against the US dollar in February 1990, was replaced by the cordoba-oro with parity with the dollar abandoned. Wages are only partially indexed; 420 state enterprises are for sale to the highest bidder, and to foreigners, so as to allow Nicaragua to redeem its foreign debt. Minister Antonio Lacayo has said "we have no money but we have planes, hotels and buildings to sell".

This last plan, directly designed by the World Bank and the IMF, has once more failed; inflation reached 285% in March 1991 and the cordoba is still overvalued — exchanging at 12-1 against the US dollar. Meanwhile the people plunge deeper into misery. ★

they had never fully identified.

"But it is not the concept which has been invalidated in these countries, but the form adopted and, in any case, nobody can deny that, in our situation, the APP represents a potential axis for the socio-economic development of the country"⁶.

The authors of the article go on to develop their criticisms of the policy of the Sandinistas in power: "It was perhaps the errors committed in the matter of management and the type of relations supported by the Sandinista government, in the APP enterprises, which limited the development of the consciousness of the workers as social owners of the enterprises; it is perhaps this which facilitated their failure to defend their preservation".

Finally, the consequences of accepting the privatizations for the programme of the FSLN are underlined: "In the last instance, it is necessary to ask what the position of the FSLN is in relation to social property. The response was implicit until now in the idea [that it was necessary] to preserve the APP.

"Now, the facts take another new turn. One could discuss them at the time of the congress, but it would perhaps be too late, above all because of facts: changes have already been made, in the direction of substituting for the demand for...the social ownership of the means of production — of which the embryonic form is the APP — that of private property".

Whatever position the FSLN congress adopts, what is sure is that the workers and the FNT (supported by the FSLN) are trying to cut their losses by demanding that certain privatizations are done in their favour⁷.

Besides the fact that, in most cases, they have not won, it is certain that the private ownership by the workers of all or a part of an enterprise will resolve nothing.

If the APP is dismantled and if the recession persists, the workers' collectives will have to manage the enterprises in a totally hostile environment; they must proceed to dismissals, and indeed to the closure of enterprises.

Accords followed by right wing offensive

Although seeking social peace, the signing of the October 1990 accords has been followed by two offensives from the right; the "rebellion of the mayors" in November, and that of the UNO parliamentary group in December⁸.

The Sandinistas have had to make new concessions concerning the army. This has not stopped the parliamentary Sandinista group from linking up with a part of the UNO parliamentary group to get Alfredo César elected as President of the National Assembly — despite the fact that this latter, a former Contra chief and close to Violeta Chamorro, allied himself, some days earlier, with the right wing of UNO against the compromise passed between

the leadership of the army and the presidency on the defence budget.

César had only broken this alliance with the extremists on the strong assurance of being elected thanks to the support of the Sandinistas.

To extract a compromise solution, the Sandinistas had to accept a supplementary reduction of the military budget, which was finally adopted by 69 votes (36 FSLN deputies and 33 UNO of the César group) against 21 (from the wing of vice-president Godoy).

Some days later, César was elected; the presidency of the Assembly was thus constituted by 4 members of UNO, close to César, and two of the FSLN.

This parliamentary tactic has reinforced, to the great annoyance of the militant Sandinista base, the thesis of co-government supported by the moderate wing of the Front.

Rafael Solís, one of its spokespersons, wrote concerning the attitude of the FSLN during the rebellion of the mayors: "For the first time, the FSLN has had an intelligent policy and has not directly confronted the rebels, supporting — discreetly — the government; it has contributed to a peaceful solution of the problem, and has built this co-government of which we have spoken before. Co-government is not evil and must not be rejected by the Sandinistas"⁹.

A "constructive" attitude

R. Solís contrasted this "constructive" attitude to that adopted before: "The FSLN, profiting from the errors committed by the government and under pressure... embarked on the July riot [the general strike] which, in my opinion, has had negative repercussions not only for the country but for Sandinism itself".

For Solís, it was necessary to convince the workers to continue to make sacrifices by telling them that the Sandinista trade unions, the Association of Field Workers (ATC) and the Sandinista Workers Central (CST) had advanced exaggerated demands.

Sergio Ramirez, head of the Sandinista parliamentary group, is more prudent; "What exists today between the FSLN and the government is a global political understanding, and the search for common points on the subjects linked to national stability"¹⁰.

Ramirez said that the support of the parliamentary Sandinista group to the candidature of Alfredo César was "a subject clearly negotiated between the Front and the government".

Edmundo Jarquin, vice-president of the FSLN parliamentary group, said, some months later, that it was necessary to support, against the opinion of the FNT, the government's March 1991 shock plan (see box).

He added "I believe, moreover, that if we were in government, we would be

doing something similar..."¹¹.

Moderates hope for success of UNO plan

In March 1991, Jarquin and the rest of the moderate wing placed their hopes in the success of the UNO economic plan: "If, by July [1991] the economic situation is better, the debate inside the FSLN will be less complicated. We will be less tempted by extreme positions".

It is this current which is pushing the Front to convince the FNT to give the government two months respite (an accord of this kind was signed on March 19, 1991); it hoped that the IMF and the World Bank would at last free up important lines of credit.

Five weeks later, the defeat of the plan¹² certainly had much to do with the more radical tone of Daniel Ortega: "The policy of structural adjustments will determine the future of the country. Either we will have the known oligarchic capitalist model, imposing a neo-Somozaism, a neo-capitalism, or else this country will continue to advance towards new forms of economic and social development, which preserve the conquests of the revolution... The government is under the influence of the policy of the United States which believes in its right to govern Nicaragua by this method. The forces of the far right sense also that this is their government, that it seeks to eliminate Sandinism without respecting truly democratic rules..."

"The counter-revolution is seeking to gain some ground. The armed counter-revolution is no longer the armed one, now it calls out for the government itself to advance in the dismantling of the revolution"¹³. ★

5. *Nicaragua en concertación*, official Nicaraguan government publication, Managua, 1990.

6. *Nicaragua Desde Adentro*, Managua, December 30, 1990.

7. "Our proposal is privatization that will benefit the workers; but other forces are in movement aiming to get their hands on the properties. This will be decisive for the FSLN, the revolutionary future and the stability of the country." Daniel Ortega in *Barricada*, April 11, 1991.

8. See *International Viewpoint*, no. 203, April 1, 1991, and no. 205, April 29, 1991.

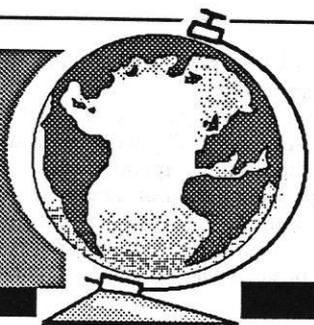
9. *Barricada*, December 26, 1991.

10. *Barricada*, January 22, 1991.

11. *El Semanario*, March 7, 1991.

12. Another factor which had an impact was the discovery by the Front of a letter from the World Bank, declaring "the government is on the way to carrying out total privatization", *Barricada*, April 1, 1991. This document also points out the peculiar nature of the state that Chamorro heads: "there exists a worry...with regard to the nature of the present political difficulties and the fact that the partisans of the previous regime control the legal administrations, including the police, making the imposition of property rights difficult." If these capitalist circles have reason to be worried, they also have consolations, since, as A. Lacayo says: "in Nicaragua, territory equivalent to a tenth of the Salvadoran land area has been returned to its former owners" *La Prensa*, February 4, 1991. At the time, what worried Lacayo was that the level of US aid was far lower than "the aid received [before 1990] from the socialist bloc and the Soviet Union in particular."

13. *Barricada*, April 11, 1991.

AROUND
THE
WORLD

AUSTRIA

Immigration from the east

THE growing number of foreigners arriving in Austria, above all from eastern Europe, has put the question of immigration at the centre of political debate. At the end of July 1990 some 17,500 requests for asylum had been filed, more than half from Romania and a little less than 10% from Bulgaria. This is more than double the number for the equivalent period in 1989. There are estimated to be more than 100,000 immigrants working illegally in Austria, particularly Poles.

Visa requirements have now been re-established for Bulgarians, Romanians and Poles, and voices have been heard calling for increased restrictions. The FPO, the "liberal" opposition party, has called for visas for all those coming from these countries, while two leading officials of the ruling Socialist Party have stated that "the boat is full".

1,500 soldiers have been sent to the Hungarian border to prevent clandestine immigration, and the legislation concerning the right of immigrants to work is to be tightened up — with the support of the OGB trade union confederation. (From *IRES Chronique Internationale*, September 1990). ★

CZECHO-
SLOVAKIA**Left meets**

THE second all-Czechoslovak meeting of the "Left Grouping" — an informal network of left and Communist Party groups and platforms — took place in Bratislava on April 13. The grouping meets once a month, and aims to be a forum for discussion and a means of producing a minimum common programme.

There was a striking contrast between the optimism of the Slovak groups, able increasingly to relate to a public identifying the market reforms as against Slovak national interests, and the Czechs,

seemingly isolated amid growing right wing sentiments and a general retreat from politics. Parts of the Czech left remain reluctant to depart from the relative consensus of all Civic Forum offshoots on the economic reform, and oppose the attacks on the working popu-

lation directly. They are also reluctant to work together with platforms inside the CP.

A consensus declaration denied the Federal government the right to introduce a new constitution, saying that the political spectrum in parliament no longer represented the broad movement the population originally voted for.

The meeting was unable to overcome deep differences on the national question. Though relations were friendly, Slovaks supported "their" bureaucracy's demands for a loose confederation based on two national republics, while Czechs supported a conception based on the self-managed community as the basic unit. Slovaks said this blurs the national distinction and makes the Prague-based federation the highest political authority.

BRITAIN: Matt Lee — poll tax prisoner

THE hated poll tax, Thatcher's "flagship", whereby everyone was required to pay high bills for local government finance irrespective of their income, is to be withdrawn. However, non-payers will continue to be pursued for money owed, and the tax will not be finally replaced until 1993, despite a centrally-funded reduction in the size of the bills.

Its defeat was the result of a massive campaign for non-payment; some 12 million have not paid their poll tax.

Although the anti-poll tax movement was opposed by the Labour Party leadership, some MPs refused to pay their tax. In some cases the Labour Party has expelled and is still expelling members who advocate non-payment, including two supporters of the revolutionary Marxist journal *Socialist Outlook* in Lambeth, South London, who have been suspended as Labour councillors.

A crowning moment of the campaign was the demonstration of a quarter of a million people in London on March 30, 1990, which was savagely attacked by the police.

At the end of the day over 300 demonstrators had been injured and scores arrested. Over one hundred people have received prison sentences; around thirty remain in jail.

One of those arrested at the "Battle of Trafalgar Square" was Matt Lee, a *Socialist Outlook* supporter. Matt is the Chair of the Birmingham Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions. Like many on the demonstrations, in the face of the police attacks, Matt defended himself along with his fellow protesters.

On March 25, 1991, Matt was imprisoned for two and a half years for "violent disorder". The conviction was solely based on three minutes of video evidence and falsified police statements. UNEDITED videos clearly show the brutality of the police, with charging mounted police officers beating demonstrators to the ground.

Harsh sentences handed down to demonstrators show that the government, courts and police are willing to go to great lengths to enforce the poll tax and silence opposition.

On March 26, 1991, the Birmingham Poll Tax Prisoners Supporters Group was reformed in response to the sentencing of Matt and other poll tax prisoners. It aims to provide material assistance to those imprisoned, press for an independent public inquiry into police behaviour, and campaign for the release of the poll tax prisoners.

Internationally the group is calling for the following:

- Publicity for Matt and other poll tax prisoners.
- Material support (books, papers etc).
- Campaigning for the release of all poll tax prisoners.
- Support for the call for a public/ labour movement inquiry into the events of March 31, 1990.

Donations and messages of support can be sent to:

Birmingham Poll Tax Prisoners Support Group,
c/o 5, Exton Gardens, Blackpatch, Smethwick, West Midlands, England, B66 2LT.

Anybody wanting further information and copies of our petition can contact the group at the above address. ★

The largest groups present were the Slovak Party of the Democratic Left (SDL — the old CP), and the Czech Democratic Forum of Communists, a platform in the Czech CP. Other groups include Slovakia's Workers' Forum, Union of Socialists, and Social Democracy, and the Czech groups Left Alternative, part of the Democratic Forum and the Green Platform in the CP.

Although the grouping bridges the major divide of left politics, current or recent membership in the Communist Party, many groups, including the Czech Social Democratic Party, refuse participation while hard-line CP groups are present.

Left Alternative accepts only observer status for the same reason. The anarchist groups, the major current with any youth support, consider most of the above groups Stalinist.

The association is supported by the publishers of Left Alternative's *Polarita*, the hard-line CP *Nase Pravda* and the Trotskyist Fourth International's review *Inprekor*.

Breaking into the bureaucratic-capitalist media, especially in the Czech Republic, remains very difficult, and the groups pledged to exchange information and articles regularly.

The next meeting will be in Prague on May 18, sponsored by the Democratic Forum of Communists — Adam Novak. ★

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Far right demonstration

THE far right Republican Party held a 4,000 strong march through Prague on Saturday April 13, the culmination of a national week of action. Their supporters — skinheads, workers facing redundancy, political prisoners from the 1950s and students — chanted slogans and applauded Miroslav Sladek, their charismatic leader, and an employee of the censorship office until November 1989.

Sladek's constant megaphone diatribe illustrated the confused, populist base of the movement. He claimed that "all those in power are communists and STB (secret police) people", "we are becoming foreigners in our own land", "They won't make us speak Slovak, German or Hungarian!", "Three governments? [federal, Czech, Slovak] — I'd need 7 ministers!"

All the Czech Republic's problems are blamed on a mysterious mafia of communists, ex-communists, Charter 77 police informers, Jewish intellectuals, ungrateful Slovaks and foreign monopolies.

Sladek exploits many of the realities of the Czech situation.

The Communist bureaucracy was not swept from power; indeed the present elite represents a compromise between sections of them and an intelligentsia

elite of Charter 77 activists (almost none of them Jewish!).

There is undeniably a strong Chartist "jobs for the boys" phenomenon in state and economic appointments. Mafia groupings in the bureaucracy are making deals with foreign companies to rip off state property in speculative or short term projects that will not strengthen the economy.

Reform programme bogged down

The government seems paralyzed. Parliament is cut off from the people and bogged down in a series of 40 economic reform laws which nobody understands. The standard of living of the workers has fallen over 30% over the last year, and the economy is weaker than before. Inflation and unemployment are rising.

The Republican Party's strategy for dealing with all this is a series of conflicting slogans. Decisive purges and expulsion of all ex-CP members from leading positions would free over half a million jobs.

"Firm government" would allegedly stop corruption and ensure a fair deal from foreign investors. To this the Republicans have attached the slogans of self-management and worker-share ownership, stolen from the left.

Impressions from a number of left friends support my own impression that the Republicans have not grown since their last major demonstration, on the occasion of George Bush's visit last November.

Their support is constantly turning over, and Sladek has not yet built either an organizational structure, or a respectable facade, or a milieu of skinhead thugs to do the Party's dirty work. This week of action has, however, certainly advanced all three aims a little further.

The organized far right is less a feature of Slovak politics, though virulent racist and nationalist sentiments are a common part of political life there. Anti-communism is not so strong, in part because the Stalinists industrialized Slovakia within 30 years, and brought its standard of living up to Czech levels, and in part because the "normalization" after 1968 was not as severe in Slovakia.

Whilst several extreme nationalist groupings celebrate the Nazi-puppet Slovak state of 1939-45, and its various unsavory leaders, the centre parties have monopolized the nationalist mantle with their chauvinist language law (discriminating against the 10% Hungarian minority) and their anti-Prague rhetoric. The left is the only current with an anti-bureaucratic propaganda.

We have not heard the last of the far right in Czechoslovakia, nor is there yet much sign of a force that can squash them before they grow — Adam Novak. ★

On the EEC drip-feed

FIVE YEARS after joining the European Economic Community (EEC), and the stabilization, for the first time since the anti-dictatorial revolution of April 25, 1974, of a rightwing government, Portugal is again in turmoil. The changes are visible in the economy and in social and political life.

FRANCISCO LOUÇA

BEFORE the fall of the dictatorship, Portugal was characterized by semi-subsistence agriculture which was unable to supply the home market. The industrial structure was based on the advantages offered by cheap labour and by the creation and strengthening of industrial and financial conglomerates, more or less protected from foreign competition; and by a poorly developed service sector, which was at the beck and call of the strategic decisions of the main national financial groups. Fifteen years later, Portugal having joined the EEC, this is still to a large extent an accurate picture of the country. However, after five years of EEC membership, new elements of dependence have accentuated the submission of Portugal capitalism.

Community policy has organized this dependence by casting Portugal in the role of provider of cheap and poorly qualified labour, along with some raw materials and industrial products with a low level of value added for the home market. Brussels has in fact worked to maintain the basic factors which have crippled Portugal's economy since the demise of the colonial empire. What some have called "the discovery of the sea route to Europe" has become an inevitability for Portugal.

This policy has caused a series of social crises. One of the most significant aspects of the situation is what has happened to agriculture. A large part of the forests and cultivatable land have been replaced by plantations of eucalyptus, a tree of Australian origin which grows very fast and absorbs large amounts of

water, and which is used for the production of paper pulp for export. This industry, which is conducted along the whole Portuguese coastline, is highly polluting.

Protests by farmers against this scourge have had little effect. It has not been possible to halt the extension of the cultivation of eucalyptus, which is protected by an array of subsidies and incentives, and when necessary by the police when demonstrations are held on the issue.

Portugal's economic opening to the outside world has gone ahead apace — during the past decade foreign trade has grown by an annual rate of 4.8%. Exports represent between a third and a quarter of total domestic product.

The fragility of this economic structure is shown by the fact that, during the whole period of EEC membership, the main Portuguese exports have remained the same — clothes and shoes, wood, paper and cork, skins, leather and textiles. At the same time the same three areas of dependence — mechanical equipment,

transport equipment and food products — remain.

All these figures point up the place of Portugal in the international division of labour: it is an economy that is intensively based on the use of labour power in sectors with low capitalization and thus with low rates of productivity.

Influx of European capital

At the same time, joining the EEC has increased the rulers' room for manoeuvre, insofar as the balance of payments has been clearly favourable thanks to the arrival of capital — "structural" assistance and other sorts of aid — which has been provided in the framework of the "structural convergence programme". The sums involved do not weigh for much in the European context, but they have been more than enough to render the country service in terms of liquid capital. Over the past five years, the government has been given blank cheques to administer sums of money, promotions, and promises.

One of the most significant effects of this policy has been its consequences for young people. In the first three years of EEC membership, more than 600,000 youth, out of an active population of a little more than four million, have taken part each year in training courses paid for by the EEC, with a grant higher than the national minimum wage. It has, furthermore, been possible to do more than one course at a time. Thus the problems of the national education system — the bad management, low quality of secondary education and the restrictions on university entrance — have been covered up insofar as many of the young are on courses which are useless but individually remunerative in the short term.

During the same period, the political landscape has significantly changed. The right has won back some of the influence in the state apparatus that it enjoyed under the dictatorship. The Portuguese right has traditionally been divided into a minority Christian democratic current, the Democratic-Social Centre (CDS) and a so-called "social democratic" current, the PDS, which brings together most of

30 years for the killers of Zé

AT the end of March 1991, the criminal court in Lisbon sentenced four skinheads to a total of 30 years in jail. These were the most visible members of the group that, on October 18, 1989, assassinated José Carvalho (known as Zé) outside the office of the Revolutionary Socialist Party (PSR — Portuguese section of the Fourth International) of which he was a prominent member. Other members of this fascist group were sentenced to a total of four years suspended. Another was referred to a juvenile court and two were found not guilty.

This is the end of a trial rendered extremely complex both by virtue of its political implications — the fact that this was a neo-Nazi group with a policy of racial and criminal violence was emphasized by the three judges, who unanimously agreed the sentence — and by virtue of procedural difficulties. More than ten lawyers and hundreds of witnesses, a month and a half of continuous session, and thousands of pages made it one of the biggest criminal trials in Portugal in recent years and certainly the one that drew the most media attention. The case will now go to the supreme court in Lisbon, which will give the final verdict within three or four months. ★

the more modern employers and technocrats and who have been the main beneficiaries of the changes after the 1987 elections¹. At that time the equilibrium was shaken, the PDS winning an absolute majority and the CDS retaining a mere four deputies with less than 5% of the vote.

The effects of this change, after the first right-wing government had concluded its normal four-year term, have also made themselves felt on the left. With the election of Mario Soares to the presidency in 1986, his Socialist Party (PS) finally had the opportunity to renew its leadership team. A bitter internal struggle between the frankly "Soarist" currents and a new majority, has paralyzed the PS for years, a situation all the more serious in that the prospect of a prolonged period out of power sapped the loyalty of some of its traditional clientèle. Vitor Constancio, elected general secretary, was forced to resign because he criticized the obvious interference of Mario Soares in the party's life and notably its financing. The

1. In the 1987 Portuguese elections, the right obtained the majority of votes cast for the first time since the fall of the dictatorship. The PDS, led by Prime Minister Cavaco Silva, obtained 50.5% of the vote. The Socialist Party scored 22% and the Communist Party's share of the vote fell from 15% to 12%.

The Portuguese economy

THE Portuguese rate of growth continues to be much higher than that of the other countries of the European Economic Community (EEC); the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased by 4.4% in 1990. Investment grew by 8.7% (more than 60% of it foreign capital) to a value of \$3.6bn. Officially, less than 5% of the active population (Portugal has 10.3 million inhabitants) are unemployed. But the figures hide a more sombre reality; inflation reached 13.4% in 1990, more than double the EEC average. The government hopes it will be below 11% in 1991.

Between 1989 and 1990, imports have grown very much more quickly (31.5%) than exports (25.2%). The budget deficit, around 7% of GDP (\$61m), has led to the maintenance of prohibitively high interest rates (between 21 and 23% for the big companies, and 24 and 26% for small) which penalize industry, particularly the traditional sectors like agriculture and textiles (the two biggest fields of activity) which are experiencing the most severe crisis of their history.

Agriculture employs around 19% of the active population but accounts for only 6% of GDP; the country depends on imports for more than half of its food consumption. Productivity is amongst the lowest in the EEC and most farmers are reliant on state aid. Most Portuguese firms are not prepared for the inevitable sharpening of competition which will follow 1992 and the single European market. Weak industrial productivity and the poor quality of Portuguese manufactured products are compensated for by the lowest labour costs in the EEC, Portugal's principal market; but competition from third world countries is significant. In 1992, many small and medium enterprises will have to modernize or close — the latter being most likely for the majority.

The educational system is in a very bad state; teachers are underpaid and the infrastructure very basic. Illiteracy, which affects 15-20% of the population, continues to grow. ★

new leader of the PS, Jorge Sampaio, was, for a brief period after the revolution, a leader of a far left organization, the Movement of the Socialist Left (MES).

The party most profoundly affected, however, has been the Communist Party of Portugal (PCP), after the introduction of *perestroika* in the Soviet Union, always presented by the party as a model. The impact of the denunciation of the Brezhnev era and the disintegration of Stalinist power in eastern Europe, and now in the USSR itself, resulted in confusion and discouragement among the PCP cadres. The party has not made any balance sheet, nor repudiated in a clearcut fashion positions such as its support for the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.

The 11th Congress of the PCP witnessed the appearance of several dissident voices in the regimented hall, but the critical currents ended up by splitting, with some of their leaders, notably the leaders of the main union confederation (the CGTP — General Confederation of Portuguese Workers), moving closer to the PS.

In this context the effects of the right's political offensive have also made themselves felt in the social domain: clearly defensive popular struggles take place ever more rarely and are less generalized than before. Union assemblies have disappeared; factory meetings are rare and it has become much more difficult to win demands.

Intensive exploitation of labour

Accompanied by a slight rise in unemployment, there has been a real economic expansion (encouraged by EEC funds) in the last five years. The basis for intensive exploitation of labour has been consolidated (women's piece work, the farming out of work by the big firms and also in certain state sectors, child labour in the north) without any union protection.

A new phenomenon, racist violence and organized attacks by neo-Nazi groups — including the assassination of José Carvalho, a militant of the PSR (Revolutionary Socialist Party — Portuguese section of the Fourth International) — have also been a feature of recent years.

1991 will see new parliamentary elections, after the re-election of Mario Soares to the presidency. The governing PSD will not have an easy ride, given the wearing away of support caused by the chaos it has brought to the education system, and its unfulfilled demagogic promises.

There have also been revelations about corruption, leading to the sacking of ministers. At the same time, and for the first time, the election will make it possible to measure the extent of the recomposition on the left. ★

CONTRARY to common belief there are today more men in the world than women. But this is not due to natural causes. While 105/106 boys are born for every 100 girls, this is more than compensated for by the higher death rate

among men of all ages. Thus in regions where the two sexes are both adequately fed clothed and sheltered (Europe, North America, Japan), the overall male/female ratio works out at 103-105 women to each 100 men.

On the other hand there are only 87 women for every 100 men in India's Punjab, 90 in Pakistan, 93.3 in India, 94 in Bangladesh, 94.1 in China, 94.8 in the Middle East, 98.4 in north Africa and 100 in Latin America¹. In the Third World, south-east Asia, black Africa and also India's Kerala state are exceptional with respectively 101, 101.2 and 103 women for every 100 men².*

JEAN BATOU

THIS has led the Indian economist and philosopher Amartya K. Sen to conclude in a recent article entitled "More than 100 Million Women are Missing": "Given the enormity of the problem of women's survival in big parts of Asia and Africa, it is surprising that this prejudice has received so little attention. The number of 'missing women' with regard to their possible number if men and women benefited from a comparable level of attention to health, medicine and nourishment, is extremely high. More than 100 million women are quite simply not there because women are neglected in comparison with men... These figures sum up the terrible story of inequality and neglect which results in the over-mortality of women."³

We have seen that biology seems to give women a better chance of survival than men.⁴ Some researchers have even contended that there is a causal relation between this phenomenon and the birth of a larger number of boys. However, powerful socio-cultural factors at work in many countries combine to give the opposite result. Why? Amartya K. Sen rejects simplistic explanations, based only on the level of economic development or the socio-economic prejudice suffered by women. This article summarizes some of his arguments and discusses his conclusions.

It is often said that the East is more sexist than the West. But this generalization hardly withstands the facts. Japan was no less "Asiatic" in 1940 than at the start of

100 million women are missing

the century, but while the 1899 and 1910 censuses revealed a very marked deficit of women, by 1940 the ratio of the sexes was nearly the same as in Europe. Furthermore, in most of east and south-east Asia, women are as numerous, even more numerous, than men (104 to 106 women to every 100 men in Indochina, 101 in Indonesia, 100 in Thailand and 99 in the Philippines).

There is another remarkable contradiction. On the question of socio-cultural prejudice against women, how can we explain that while Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh have the biggest number of missing women, these countries have been among the first to elect women to lead the government or the main opposition parties? Certainly, these women are part of the ruling class and are the political heirs of a male leader — thus Indira Gandhi was the daughter of Nehru, Benazir Bhutto that of Zulfikar Bhutto and so on. It nonetheless remains the case that they have received the votes of the majority at elections.

In India, the lower house of parliament had 7.9% women before the last elections when the figure dropped to 5.3%. The figure for the House of Representatives in the United States is 6.4%. However, India's upper house has 10% women as against 2% in the US Senate. Amartya Sen remarks that he had more female colleagues in Delhi than at Harvard where he currently teaches.⁵ From this angle it is hard to see the cultural specificity of the East.

On the economic level there seem to be

two indisputable constants. Firstly, all the "rich countries" have more women than men. Secondly, most poor countries have a deficit of women. However while the first rule is absolute the second is more of a tendency. In fact it is not always the most "developed" regions of the South where women do best. One can even say that economic development is often accompanied by an increase in discrimination against women.

As we have seen previously, Black Africa, Latin America, and east and south-east Asia excepting China, have no significant deficit of women. Punjab and Haryana, which are among the richest states in India, have the most "missing women", while Kerala, which is twice as poor — with a per capita income lower than that of Bangladesh — has a male/female ratio close to that in Europe. In fact the deficit of women in India has grown along with economic development from 97/100 in 1901 to 93/100 in 1971 (it is 93.3/100 today) although the life of expectancy of both sexes has improved.⁶

In China, since the economic reforms of 1979, which have led to important successes in agriculture, the proportion of women to men has fallen from 94.3/100 in 1979 to 93.4/100 in 1989. Furthermore, women's life expectancy, which was higher than men's before the reforms, now appears to be lower⁷.

Status within the family

The status and power of women within the family differs significantly from one region to another. For example, the fact that they have their own property, and above all that they engage in socially recognized economic activity, considerably strengthens their position. Amartya K. Sen analyses the relations between men and women in the family as a particular type of "conflictual cooperation" (the two cooperate to gain but the distribution of the gains is the object of a conflict of interests of which the two parties are not necessarily conscious).⁸ As a general rule, the fact that the mother distributes the food does not prevent her from being deprived, along with her daughters.⁹

Here the perception of the respective value of the man's and the woman's work is crucial. Is their work equally "productive"? Which of the two contributes the most to the upkeep of the family? Each society has its own answers to such questions, answers which in their turn shape individual behaviour. The solution of the conflict in the family is thus largely conditioned by a culturally acquired "false consciousness".

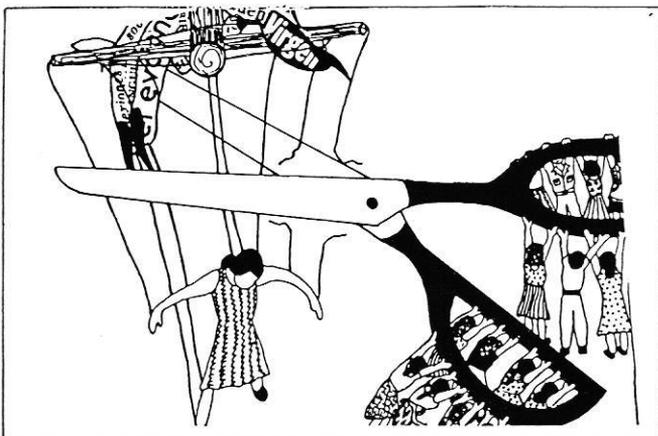
Empirically it can be observed that family life is unfavourable to women if: (1) they cannot count on an external income; (2) their work is considered to be unproductive; (3) they have no possessions of their own and (4) society does not recognize that women are the objects of preju-

dice and does not seek to remedy this. The first three points depend to a large extent on the women having paid employment outside the home. This last condition is clearly dependent on education, and the organization of social and political action by women.

First of all, a woman who works "outside" has direct access to income, albeit small. This means that she enjoys the respect due to someone who brings in at least a part of the household's necessary income. When the job also enjoys a degree of social and legal protection, the woman is guaranteed a certain security. Subjectively, also, the experience of working outside the home has an educational effect: the woman becomes more aware of her interests and their value to the family. These factors improve not only the position of the mother, but also that of her daughters, who generally are under-privileged compared to the boys. In fact, their lower status is largely due to the fact that they offer less of a guarantee for the old age of their parents.

In descending order here are the figures for employment of women outside the home in different regions of the Third World: China, 74%; Black Africa, 56%; South/South-East Asia (other than China), 51%; Latin America, 31%; South-Central Asia, 38%; Middle East and North Africa, 14-15%. If one then looks at the life expectancy ratio of women compared to men, the order of the regions is the same, with the exception of China, which this time occupies one of the lowest positions, and the Middle East/North Africa, which move up a place.¹⁰ This is a striking convergence given the big differences in all other respects between these regions.

The case of Sub-Saharan Africa is par-



ticularly significant. Here women perform 80% of agricultural work, produce 60% of goods consumed and bring in more than a third of monetary revenue in rural households. It is without doubt this central economic role and its socio-cultural implications that lead to the relative equality of men and women in the face of death, despite the discrimination against women on other levels.¹¹

China is a special case. The China of the 1950s inherited millennia of prejudice against women. However the policies of the new regime effected a spectacular turnaround.¹² The general expansion of health services and of opportunities for paid work, as well as the recognition of women's economic role, resulted in deep socio-cultural changes. While average life expectancy rose by 15 years between 1950 and 1979 (before the introduction of the economic reforms), that of women rose faster than that of men.

Economic reforms in China

Starting in 1979, the introduction of the economic reforms led to strong growth in agricultural output. According to the (doubtless exaggerated) official figures, agricultural output doubled between 1979 and 1986. But during this time, curiously, the death rate has also been rising, particularly for women. The women/men ratio in the population went from 94.3 in 1979 to 93.4 in 1986 (it is 94 today). It is even probable that women's life expectancy at birth has fallen below that of men (66

* This article first appeared in the April 5, 1991 issue of the Swiss revolutionary Marxist fortnightly, *La Brèche*.

1. The worst ratios in Latin America were in Nicaragua (96), Panama (96.2), Paraguay (97.6), the Dominican Republic (97.8), Venezuela (98), Peru and Cuba (98.5) and Ecuador (98.8), according to the figures in the *UN Demographic Yearbook*, 1987.

2. Jean Drèze and Amartya K. Sen, *Hunger and Public Action*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989, p. 52; Amartya K. Sen "More than 100 million women are missing", *New York Review of Books*, December 20, 1990, p. 61.

3. Amartya K. Sen, "More than..." p. 66

4. See Ingrid Waldron, "The role of Genetic and Biological Factors in Sex Differences in Mortality" in A. D. Lopez and L. T. Ruzicka (Ed.) *Sex Differences in Mortality*, Canberra, (Australia), 1983.

5. Amartya K. Sen, "More than..." p. 62

6. Ibid. See also, J. Kynch and A. K. Sen, "Indian

Women: Well-being and Survival" *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 7, 1983, pp. 363-380.

7. World Bank, *World Development Report 1990*, Oxford 1990, table 32.

8. In this regard, see Irene Tinker (Ed.), *Women and World Development*, Oxford University Press, 1990.

9. Lincoln C. Chen, Ermdadul Huq and Stan D'Souza, "Sex Bias in the Family Allocation of Food and Healthcare in Rural Bangladesh" *Population and Development Review* 7 (1), 1981, p. 67.

10. For the rates of activity of women, see Shirley Nuss et al., *Women in the World of Work*, B.I.T., Geneva, 1989. Drèze and Sen op. cit., p. 58. propose a similar classification, but with some geographical restrictions.

11. Janice Jiggins "How Poor Women Earn Income in Sub-Saharan Africa and What Works Against Them", *World Development*, 17 (7), 1989, pp. 953-963.

12. Elisabeth Croll, *Chinese Women since Mao*, M. E. Sharpe, 1984.

compared to 69 years).¹³

How is the combination of strong economic growth and a deterioration in the situation of women to be explained? The reason is that the "responsibility system" which went into general effect after 1983, which means that each family disposes of its own surplus product above a fixed norm, while it has permitted appreciable gains in productivity, has developed to the detriment of social gains of which women were the prime beneficiaries. For example, the disbanding of the work brigades and rural communes has meant the collapse of health organization in the countryside.

Decline in paid work

At the same time the new organization of work has meant a decline in paid work for women and thus of economic recognition within society. "The responsibility system has displaced the sources of women's income from work outside the home towards domestic activities, where there is no way of evaluating their contribution." Between 1978 and 1985 the share of net income of peasant households derived from individual plots has risen from 26.8% to 81.1%.¹⁴

Furthermore, the new insecurity contributes to reinforcing the preference for male children, as a guarantee for the parents' old age. In this context there is nothing astonishing in the fact that the authoritarian measures introduced in 1979 to promote "one-child families" led to an increase in the infanticide of girl children. According to some authors, infantile mortality of girl children went from 37.7 per thousand in 1979 to 67.2 per thousand in 1985.¹⁵

Even if these figures are exaggerated, the tendency clearly exists: indeed it has been recognized by the authorities who today authorize a second child if the first is a girl. To these factors it is necessary to add a political element: since 1979 the improvement of women's lot has ceased to be a government priority. On the contrary, the authorities are calling on women to "reinforce the domestic economy".¹⁶

Neither traditional prejudices, nor the place of women in "oriental" civilizations, nor under-development provide a full explanation for the missing women in vast regions of the Third World. In fact, we can see that egalitarian economic development, and the participation of women in paid work, reduces the demographic anomaly.

This participation, however, is not only determined by economic factors. For example, the level of education plays an essential role in the demographic outcome. And while there is a connection between levels of education and participation in social economic activity, this is neither automatic nor one-way. Thus, as we have seen, in India's Kerala state there is a particularly high women/men ratio

(103). Furthermore, female life expectancy at birth is 72 years there, as against 67 for men. However, the participation of women in economic activity is not especially high. On the other hand, there is a level of literacy (71%) which is higher than in any other Indian state, the average being 26%, or even China (56%), where two thirds of the illiterate are women.

This specific case has a long history, which provides some insights into the role of the family structure in relation to the property system. In a large part of Kerala, inheritance is matrilinear, which strengthens women's position. In the north of India on the other hand, the right of succession discriminates against the girls. In fact, since the 19th century, "in Travencore [part of what is now Kerala] as in other populations in the south, the proportion of the sexes has been closer to European standards than to those in the north."¹⁸ In the same period, female infanticide was very widespread in Punjab.¹⁹ We can see from this that ancient socio-cultural peculiarities can work either in favour of (as in Kerala) or against (as in northern India and China) women.

Political action

Political action, including efforts by public authorities and a level of mobilization and organization among women themselves, is an important factor. In 1817, the Queen of Travencore noted that "the state must take charge of the total cost of its people's education in order to avoid any backwardness in the diffusion of education."²⁰ At the start of the 19th century, the independent kingdoms of Travencore and Cochin, which are at the origin of Kerala state, enjoyed a public education system ahead of its time. It should be added that in the last decades of this century this heritage has been systematically developed by the left-wing forces that rule the state (the Communist Party won power in 1957), by putting emphasis on education and health services, and giving special attention to the position of women.²¹

The example of Cuba also shows the relative autonomy of political factors; if the male/female ratio is still one of the poorest in Latin America, the trend since the 1950s has nonetheless been favoura-

ble to women. The ratio was 91.6 in 1950, 94.8 in 1960, 95.1 in 1970, 97.8 in 1980 and 98.8 today. We have observed a similar tendency in China before the reforms of the 1980s.²²

Examples such as Kerala, Black Africa, Cuba or pre-1980 China show that under-development does not inevitably lead to the inequality of women in the face of death. Ancient socio-cultural prejudices can be combatted by political measures backed up by the mobilization and self-organization of women. On the other hand, economic growth unaccompanied by appropriate social and political measures can lead to growing inequality of the sexes as is seen in northern India and in post-1980 China.

In the last analysis

However, it is impossible, in the last analysis, to escape from economic determinism. While non-egalitarian growth can reinforce discrimination against women, generalized impoverishment certainly has even more dramatic effects. As can be seen currently in Sub-Saharan Africa, where "stabilization programmes" and "structural adjustment plans" are causing unprecedented misery and leading to a deterioration in the lot of women, through the dismantling of public services with the consequent effects on women's employment, education and health, the exodus from the countryside and the swelling of the informal sector in the big cities and all the rest.²³

In this field, that of the inequality of women in the face of death, as in all others, Third World countries have ever less room for manoeuvre. Nonetheless, Amartya K. Sen has shown that the growth of the overall resources of a poor country does not necessarily reduce the misery of the majority of its inhabitants, notably of women; for this to take place there must also be a more just distribution within society and the family.

This is not just a moral issue, but a political necessity. A real alternative to under-development" is impossible without the mobilization of the great mass of the disinherited around unifying egalitarian objectives, which must by their nature also be feminist.★

13. World Bank, op. cit., table 32.

14. Nahid Aslanbeigui and Gale Summerfield, "Impact of the Responsibility System on Women in Rural China, An Application of Sen's Theory of Entitlements", *World Development* 17 (3), 1989, p. 344.

15. Banister, China's Changing Population, table 4.12.

16. Margery Wolf, *Revolution Postponed: Women in Contemporary China*, Stanford University Press, 1984; Aslanbeigui and Summerfield op. cit., p. 347.

17. Drèze and Sen, op. cit., p. 222. H. Qi, "Do Women Hold up Half the Sky?" *Beijing Review*, 29 (9), 1986, p.4.

18. Quoted by Drèze and Sen op. cit., p. 224.

19. Monica Das Gupta, "Selective Discrimination Against Female Children in Rural Punjab, India", *Population and Development Review*, 13 (1), 1987, p.88.

20. Quoted in Census of India, 1931, XXVIII, Trivan-

drum, 1932, p. 301.

21. On socio-cultural policies in Kerala, see *Vivant Univers*, 383, Sept-Oct 1989 and *Monthly Review*, January 1991.

22. *Anuario Estadístico de Cuba*, 1987, p. 57.

23. Janice Jiggins, op. cit., pp. 953-963; André Michel, "African Women, Banks and Development. A Feminist Approach", *Peace Research* 22 (3), 1990, pp. 23-32.

The present situation in Sub-Saharan Africa can be summed up in several figures. 25 countries are under the control of World Bank and IMF plans. They import 25% of food consumed, there are 100 million starving people (of 450 million inhabitants), 50% of export income goes on servicing the debt and there was a decline of 25% in living standards between 1980 and 1990.