

international  
**VIEWPOINT**

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## Our apologies

OUR sincerest apologies go out to Swedish economist Sten Ljunggren, author of the pamphlet from which we took the graphs in last issue's article "No prince to save krona". Due to an oversight, he was not given due credit.

Some readers have written to complain about receiving copies of issue 244 with several pages missing. If there are any other victims of this unfortunate machine error, please don't hesitate to write us. We will gladly send out a replacement copy. — The Editors ★

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# Not a pretty picture

**O**VER the last few months, some less pessimistic diagnoses of the international economic situation have appeared from various quarters. These reports have focused primarily on the revival that has taken shape in the United States and, as far as Europe is concerned, on the signs of revival in Britain and the significant growth in Italian exports.

These are incontestable facts, but it would be quite wrong to overstate their importance. While Italian exports have risen, this is due primarily to the major devaluation of the lira last autumn, and not to any generalised improvement in the country's economy which, in fact, has not stopped its downward plunge.

As for Britain, the positive statistics remain very partial and it would be premature to draw the conclusion that a real turnaround is underway.

Germany is in the middle of a recession and, outside Europe, Japan is going through the most difficult period it has known for decades; and forecasts predict that in the coming years its rate of growth will be modest at best.

Even the most apologetic commentators have already toned down the optimistic analyses which talked about revival in the United States, a revival which has been limited and precarious and which, among other things, has been unable to reduce unemployment.

## "Little or negligible growth"

In an article which appeared in the *New York Times* in mid-May, John Kenneth Galbraith wondered aloud if his country's economy was going to get bogged down in conditions of under-utilisation of resources and under-employment with "little or negligible growth".

More generally, a recent report of the International Monetary Fund made things quite clear, saying that in 1993 Europe would not emerge from its stagnation, and that the average rate of growth in industrialised countries would be under 2% — the IMF now hopes that the 2.9% growth rate it had predicted for

this year will be attained in 1994.

But, beyond worries about the possibilities of an economic revival, economists and political leaders are growing increasingly anxious about medium and long-term perspectives. Broadly speaking, there is consensus regarding the fact that the world capitalist economy has to deal with structural tensions and contradictions — and that these will not be overcome through a simple change in the economic cycle.

It is becoming increasingly clear that, in order to set right the 'normal' mechanisms of the system, it is necessary to undertake a much more thorough restructuring than what was seen in the 1980s. This is true not only in regard to the technical and financial organisation of enterprises, but also on the macro-economic level — the pressing need, for example, to deal with the major upheavals in the international division of labour.

## Devastating social consequences

In any event, the implementation of plans aiming to deal with these problems would have devastating social consequences and inevitable upheaval in the political field. In this area, too, hypotheses and worries are on the rise.

We can't go into all the problems here. We shall, however, list rather schematically the reasons for which a thoroughgoing revival — or, to use some classical terminology, a new long expansive wave — of the capitalist economy currently seems improbable:

- Technological innovation will continue apace, but there will not be the critical mass of innovations needed to stimulate on its own new long-term growth. We can not foresee the emergence of new sectors which could play this role.

- There is no country which can be the global locomotive force, given the relative economic decline of the United States and the fact that Germany and Japan themselves seem to be running out of steam. Moreover, there is no poli-

tical leadership which is powerful enough to draw up and implement projects comparable to Roosevelt's New Deal or the post-WWII Marshall Plan.

- Multinational corporations, which are playing an ever more dominant role, are also running up against a growing number of difficulties and contradictions, which have already provoked veritable crises in a number of the most powerful outfits.

- In the current context, and in the foreseeable future, a new massive growth in the sphere of consumption, comparable to what was seen in the post-WWII period, is wholly improbable. Indeed, austerity policies and the unceasing growth of unemployment suggest quite the opposite.

- In most countries, the implementation of revival plans along Keynesian lines has come up against the huge obstacle of the public debt, which has now attained colossal proportions. This problem has already been encountered with Clinton's rather weak-kneed projects.

Then there is the question of whether or not capitalism could rely on a 'reconquest' of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for a major economic revival. Theoretically, this possibility does indeed exist. If there are concrete plans and if China itself can be reintegrated, in one form or another, into the world capitalist economy, the situation would be radically altered.

## No generalised revival

But all the analyses which we have frequently put forward in *International Viewpoint* and other publications of our movement indicate that this is not at all a credible perspective in the short or medium-term.

In the short-term, the world capitalist economy will have great difficulty emerging from its conjunctural crisis. And in any event, it will neither overcome its structural crisis nor experience a generalised and durable revival. ★

# An uneventful campaign

**THE REFERENDUM** campaign, whilst dominated by pro-Yeltsin propaganda on the television, saw virtually no popular demonstrations in support of the President. Neither was there much activity, with any mass support, from opposition groups. The only demonstration of note was called by the rightwing Front for National Salvation on the eve of the referendum. Some 40-50,000 people attended.

**POUL FUNDER LARSEN** — Moscow, April 29, 1993

**A**NDREI Sayez, editor of the Moscow trade union paper *Solidarnost*, aptly described this peculiar situation a few weeks before the referendum. "The President, the deputies and the judges of the Constitutional court live extremely stressful lives. They quarrel, make peace, swear their loyalty to the Constitution, then swear at the Constitution. But in the lives of ordinary, normal people this does not change anything at all. It only means that next to 'Santa Barbara', those who are interested can watch another equally drawn out series 'Yeltsin fights with Khasbulatov'".<sup>1</sup>

The groups and parties that came out of the former Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) still play a dominant role in the active opposition to Yeltsin. However, major parts of these currents can only nominally be termed 'leftwing'. Chauvinist tendencies that merge with the 'patriotic' new right are gaining ground amongst their supporters.

The communists in Russia are, with some notable exceptions<sup>2</sup>, now grouped around two organisations; the front of Working Russia (*Trudeyaya Rossiya*), and the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF). The neo-stalinist Working Russia, dominated by the Russian Communist Workers Party (RKRP) which at one point claimed 100,000 members, has been losing influence over the last few months and was only able to attract around 5,000 to its demonstration on the eve of the referendum. Meanwhile the KPRF, founded earlier this year, claims more than 500,000 members, and though this figure may be inflated it is almost certainly the largest party in Russia.

Both major communist organisations called on the electorate to vote against Yeltsin and his policies, for early presiden-

tial elections, but against early elections for the parliament. The latter position was certainly a difficult one to maintain, because the deputies have discredited themselves by their constant vacillations on all major policy issues.

The Congress of Democratic Left Forces, founded in the latter part of 1992, comprises a number of parties. The Socialist Workers Party (SPT), of which Roy Medvedev is a co-founder, and the Russian Communist Party (RKP) emerged from out of the CPSU. The Party of Labour (PT) represents other traditions. The Congress also involves trades unionists, women's organisations and activists from different social movements. In their campaign they called for a 'No' to Yeltsin and his policies and 'Yes' to early elections for both president and parliament.

In practice the Congress campaign was severely limited by material constraints, so to a large extent it hung onto the initiatives taken by the 'old' trade unions and the 'central' forces around the Khasbulatov leadership of the Supreme Soviet and the Civic Union, which in reality is led by Vice-president Rutskoi. But neither the unions nor the Civic Union campaigned in a particularly energetic fashion and did not come up with a precise recommendation for the voters as regards the question of confidence in Yeltsin. There were, however, some forces in the trades unions working for a 'No' to Yeltsin.

Relations with the Civic Union may indeed prove a mixed blessing to the leftists in the Congress. In the event of elections they will have to face the question of which candidates to endorse for the presidency: an independent candidate from their own ranks and/or the workers movement; or the candidate from the Civic Union. This is likely to be Rutskoi who is well known for his elitist and authoritarian

inclinations. These and related issues will almost certainly become a major debate inside the rather heterogeneous Congress and could lead to sharp differences or even splits between the forces advocating close collaboration with the Civic Union and those critical of its bureaucratic nature.

Of the leftwing groups outside the Congress — primarily small anarchist, left socialist and Trotskyist currents — most came out in favour of a boycott. The rationale for such a position was explained in an editorial of the independent Trotskyist magazine *Rabochaya Demokratia*:

"The state power and only the state power formulates the question, in a manner so that the answer is known beforehand, and even if this answer does not coincide with what was expected the right of interpreting it still rests with the state power. The answers to the questions in the referendum will be used by the different groups of exploiters sharing power. Whatever happens the workers will get nothing. So what sense does it make to participate in this farce and lend it an appearance of popular support?"<sup>3</sup>

Given the extremely manipulative set up around the referendum, this position did offer some insight, but it didn't allow its supporters to link up with the feeble, but really existing active resistance to Yeltsin expressed in the high number voting against his economic policies (some 48% of those voting). Indeed the 'active boycott' called for by these currents remained an abstract slogan, while the 'real boycott' by almost 40% of the electorate was based on apathy and disgust.

At the same time, it should be said that none of the leftwing organisations — whatever their line on the referendum — were really able to make themselves heard above the highly polarised struggle between the President and Parliament. However, the struggles that will unfold over the next few months are likely to give the left new and better opportunities for intervention. ★

1. *Solidarnost* No 5, 1993. 'Santa Barbara' is a never ending American soap-opera running on Russian TV.

2. For example, the Russian Communist Party (RKP), which contains an anti-stalinist current, and the Communist Tendency inside the Party of Labour, led by Alexander Buzgalin and Andrei Kolganov.

3. *Rabochaya Demokratia* No.2, 1993.

# Authoritarian yearnings

IT IS clear that the referendum vote has not resolved any of the fundamental problems facing Yeltsin. The economy remains at a low and Yeltsin's promises will certainly not facilitate a recovery. Political opposition has not disappeared; the outcome of the vote has strengthened the regional bureaucracies to the detriment of the centre.

**POUL FUNDER LARSEN** — Moscow, May 11, 1993

**Y**ELTSIN is now trying to grab the initiative — after almost six months of political stalemate — and pursue the line of a 'soft' constitutional coup by pressing for a new Constitution to be carried at breakneck speed. It remains to be seen whether he will succeed, but after the bloody clashes in Moscow, on May Day, the political confrontation has clearly taken on a more vicious character. The authoritarian yearnings of yesterdays democrats are coming out into the open.

Even if the turn-out, at 64%, was slightly higher than expected — though markedly down from the 74% of the Presidential elections in June 1991 — and the social-economic policies of Yeltsin were surprisingly endorsed by the 53% of those voting, the attempts of the Russian and Western media to portray this as a landslide victory for Yeltsin are far from the truth. Overall, Yeltsin lost millions of votes compared to his score in June 1991 and a majority of those voting actually called for early presidential elections.

But to appreciate the real situation — and the real dilemmas facing Yeltsin — we should look at the regional break-down of

the vote. In ten of the republics inside the Russian Federation there were firm majorities against both Yeltsin and his policies: in Dagestan Yeltsin received 14%, in Ingushetia 2%, in Tatarstan the turn-out was around 20%, and Chechenya boycotted the referendum altogether. Even in a large part of the 'heartland' of European Russia (for example, Lipetsk, Smolensk and Ul'yanovsk) majorities voted against the President. However, Yeltsin managed to poll 58% through strong support in Moscow and St. Petersburg and, on his native soil, in the Urals.

On the question of support for Yeltsin's social-economic policies 48 of the 88 regions participating in the referendum voted against Yeltsin. This included industrial centres like Novosibirsk, Omsk, Volgograd, Voronezh and Kuzbass, the centre of Russian coal mining heavily courted by Yeltsin over the last few years.<sup>1</sup>

In several regions questions on increased powers to the regional authorities were added to the ballot: in St. Petersburg nearly 75% voted for the city to be upgraded to the status of a 'republic', while a sweeping majority in the important republic of Bashkortostan voted for 'economic independen-

ce', and against Yeltsin.

From the outset it was clear that the most important aspect of the referendum would not be the voting itself, but the interpretation, and indeed manipulation, of the result afterwards. In this sense the April 25 referendum did continue the 'tradition' of Soviet and post-Soviet referenda, serving primarily as tools in the political battle among the top echelons of the apparatus, with few paying serious attention to the actual outcome of the voting. The bulk of the media was engaged in a pro-Yeltsin campaign of an intensity and fanaticism unknown in Russia since the early 1980s. With Yeltsin back in his well known populist posture — raising pensions and minimum wages, lowering petrol prices, and promises to fight unemployment and crime — and the opposition inefficient and divided, his victory was never in danger. Using the impetus gained from the referendum the Yeltsinites are now pressing ahead with privatisation, attempting once more to bring under their control the state credit policy and enforce bankruptcies in State industry. Alongside this are attempts to carry out a constitutional reform with strong authoritarian overtones.

One of the dominating issues looming behind the conflict between Yeltsin and the Supreme Soviet is the question of property, and the mechanisms for its privatisation.

Yeltsin and his neo-liberal followers are implementing the voucher privatisation scheme, which gives disproportionately large influence to the speculative fortunes accumulated over the last few years — with the speculators either buying in directly or gaining control over the investment funds that will acquire large chunks of industry. The very design of — atomised — voucher privatisation makes it extremely difficult for the workers collective of an enterprise to win a controlling stake.<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to the claims that voucher privatisation "returns property to the people" the concrete process has been one marked by, on the one hand large-scale fraud and



1. All figures from *Rossiskaya Gazeta*, April 28. In many mining towns of Kuzbas, for example Mezhourechensk and Leninsk-Kuznetsky, and southern Russia less than 50% voted.

2. When the voucher scheme was launched Anatoly Chubais, the head of the state property fund, claimed that a voucher would equal a large Volca car or at least 10,000 "old", pre-January 1991, rubles. Today, taking into account inflation is around 300,000 "new" rubles. Currently, however, the voucher is trading below 5,000 "new" rubles on the Moscow exchange.

close inter-action between government structures, and on the other the shadow economy, which Vice-president Rutskoi recently estimated at 50% of the Russian GDP.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that a situation, where state structures determine the value of property and outline the rules for its privatisation, while huge shadow fortunes wait in the wings, is prone with corruption. In a recent scandal for example, the whole port of Nakhodka, in the comparatively prosperous Russian far east, was sold off for R18 million — currently some US\$20,000!

To prevent speculators from ripping off the most valuable and profitable enterprises at rock-bottom prices several regions in the Russian Federation, for example Chelyabinsk, Volgograd and Novosibirsk — initially singled out as laboratories in the privatisation process — have temporarily suspended share auctions linked to the voucher privatisation, much to dismay of the government. Meanwhile, the 'Directors Opposition' around the Civic Union is proposing an alternative to the government privatisation programme, through the handing over of enterprises to the workers collectives. However, this will not in itself guarantee social justice. It will benefit the collectives of strong enterprises, while others will get little or nothing. (Particularly, in the case of those working in the 'budget' spheres of education, health care or culture.) And, even as regards profitable industrial enterprises this model will, in the absence of a genuine democratisation of social relations inside the enterprises and externally, amount to a de facto transfer of ownership to the management. This is the main reason for the support this idea has received from industrialist circles.

A major stumbling block for the attempts to subject the enterprises to the compulsion of the market — and eventually privatise them — is the failure to implement a working mechanism for bankruptcies. In spite of the 18 months of pro-capitalist reform not one state enterprise in Russia has actually been bankrupted; a failure that speaks volumes about the passive and structural resistance to marketisation in Russian society. Paradoxically this failure on the part of the liberal reformers is also a major reason for their success in clinging to power — because the low unemployment rate, officially 1.3% while production has dropped 30%, is an important factor in maintaining a certain social stability.

The fate of the government privatisation programme will, to a large extent, be decided in the regions. However, another decisive battle — closely linked to the issue of enterprise closures — will be fought out in Moscow, at the heart of the state appara-

## **Declaration of the Party of Labour**

**The brutal assault on the May Day demonstration showed that the Yeltsin regime is interpreting the results of the referendum in its own distinctive fashion: as a mandate to use clubs and water-cannon against attempts by workers, women, children and old people to say 'No!' to a policy of plunder.**

**The Party of Labour does not endorse the slogans of the extremist elements in the Front for National Salvation and the Russian Communist Workers Party. Nevertheless we have stood and will continue to stand together with working people in their struggle to defend their inalienable rights against a 'democratic' regime whose only argument against its opponents is the use of force.**

**It is clear that the attack on the peaceful May Day demonstration was a deliberately thought-out and carefully staged provocation. The demonstrators were met with clubs and water-cannon in the narrowest part of Lenin Prospect, towards which the march was directed by a solid row of dozens of heavy vehicles and hundreds of armed and trained 'guardians of law and order'.**

**This bloody assault, and the mass media hysteria which preceded it, bear the marks of a rehearsal for the introduction of a dictatorship by the overthrow of the Constitution. This must not be allowed to happen.**

**We demand an investigation into this crime, and the trial and punishment of those who organised the carnage.**

**We demand the holding of parliamentary hearings to determine the degree to which high-placed state officials are responsible for these events.**

**We say 'No!' to the President's authoritarian regime!**

**'No!' to the Constitution which the regime is trying to force through using such methods!**

**'Yes!' to popular power and to early general elections! ★**

tus. This will be about the control over the state credit policy. In spite of a host of foreign advisers and all the 'good intentions' of the monetarist zealots around Gaidar, the Yeltsinites only managed to maintain a 'tight' credit policy for a few months after the big price bang of January 1992.

Since then all attempts to reinforce this line have failed and the enterprises have either been bailed out directly by the central bank or accumulated inter-enterprise debts eventually to be settled through the central bank. In April an agreement was reached between the government and the central bank to limit credit emission, but with interest rates at 120% yearly and inflation expected to reach more than 1000% in 1993 there is little reason to believe that enterprises will feel discouraged to accumulate further debts.

The only sphere where Yeltsin may move quickly to limit credits is in relation to the CIS states, in this way continuing the economic 'go-it-alone' attitude towards the non-Russian states prevailing since the demise of the Soviet Union.

In spite of ingenious accounting methods to cover up the facts many believe that the budget deficit will reach 30% of Gross national Product (GNP) in 1993 — a far cry from the 5% 'allowed' by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Strict compliance with the IMF's prescriptions in the fields of credit and monetary policies has been presented as the precondition for

receiving Western 'aid'. But despite the package of nominally US\$43 billion in new credits from the leading imperialist powers, put together last month, the faith in "Western salvation" is receding. The actual sums forthcoming — be they credits or investments — are negligible compared to, for example, the capital flight from Russia. Last year this was estimated at between US\$20bn and \$40bn.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, if Russia eventually receives a new wave of large-scale credits this could very well be a short respite, since it will see Russian foreign debt soaring from the US\$ 85 Billion to \$120 billion by 1994. In the words of liberal Vice-premier, Alexander Shokin, "If we cannot use these resources effectively Russia will go into such a spiral of foreign debt that it won't be able to come out of it."<sup>5</sup>

But the single most disputed issue in the aftermath of the referendum is undoubtedly the question of a new constitution — a conflict which encapsulates all the contradictions between the bureaucratic elites. So far this struggle is unfolding along lines similar to the political confrontations of the last six months: There are two drafts for a constitution — one by the President and the other by the Supreme Soviet — and both

3. For Rutskoi's vitriolic attack on privatisation and corruption in the Russian state apparatus see *Russiskaya Gazeta*, April 20.

4. The World Bank estimated direct foreign investments in Russia at US\$1.2 billion as of mid-1992. *Kommersant*, April 17.

5. *Reuters*, May 6

## Manufacturing consent

The following statistics came from Russia's parliamentary press office. They have not been challenged by the president's office. The referendum was held on April 25.

- In March the president's image appeared on the television between 2 and 3 times a day.
- After April 10 the president's image appeared on the television between 11 and 17 times a day.
- After April 20 the president's image appeared on the television between 20 and 25 times a day.

In addition to these statistics there have been a number of abuses of media time. For example, in the week before the referendum an hour long programme was shown which presented the president as a 'family man', showing him 'at home' in a humble flat with his wife and children. The 'humble flat' was in fact not where the president lived at all.

While Yeltsin's supporters are invariably described in the Western press as 'democrats', an editorial in the April 2 edition of *Business World Weekly* gave the real game away.

**"Russia needs a strong, authoritarian government that can restrain public discontent within limits not threatening economic reforms and ensure the development of private enterprise. This government must remain authoritarian until the economy becomes efficient enough to offer good wages and salaries to the people and thus make protests and discontent subside. This was how things developed in Greece, Chile and Taiwan where the government relied on elite troops, or in South Korea, West Germany and Japan in which the USA had major military bases or troops stationed." — Renfrey Clarke ★**

are claiming to be the only legitimate one, creating a peculiar situation of constitutional 'dual power'.

However, both contenders have to take note of the dramatic weakening of the centre and the growing powers of the regions, and consequently both are busy handing out concessions to the regional bureaucracies. For that reason Yeltsin envisages convening a constituent assembly without general elections (!), but with a strong representation from the regions. He hopes to by-pass the Supreme Soviet and thereby complete the 'velvet coup' he tried to pull off in March. There is certainly no shortage of calls for such a coup — or even a 'Chilean solution' — from the emerging bourgeois layers of entrepreneurs, speculators and former nomenclaturists. Mikhail Yurev, a vice-president of the influential Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs spelled it out recently: "I do not rule out that all these games will result in the abolishment of the Parliament, and a period of some kind of authoritarian rule. The current power vacuum has already driven me to the point where I am not against this. If this junta occupies reasonable economic positions, and does not interfere too much in these questions, then why not?"<sup>6</sup>

This authoritarian neo-liberal model, of which the ambitious entrepreneurs and pro-capitalist intellectuals in Moscow can still only dream, is now implemented in the small oil rich republic of Kalmykia, a subject of the Russian Federation. Here a

young multi-millionaire, Kirsan Ilyumzhinov, was elected President after waging a campaign under the slogan "I am not a socialist, I am not a communist, I am not a democrat — I am a capitalist". He has preceded to dissolve all the Soviets and parties on the territory of the republic and enforce a so-called "Moratorium on political activity".

But this is hardly a viable option for the Yeltsinites at the level of the Russian Federation as a whole. Firstly Yeltsin has to walk the tightrope between acquiring more powers at the centre while not alienating the regional elites. And secondly, the social base for this type of authoritarianism is quite narrow at least in the short term, since the pro-capitalist strata cannot yet base themselves on a consistent (capitalist) logic and are therefore not in a position to force through their unilateral 'solution' to the systematic crisis of bureaucratic rule.

Consequently, Yeltsin has to construct a broader alliance behind his political project of a "Presidential Republic". The partners for this are drawn from a variety of different sources — including from some of the 'independent' trade unions, formed over the last few years, with leaderships eager to gain influence at any cost.

In this context, the efforts the Yeltsinites have put into rehabilitating the Cosacks — including the formation of Cosack units to "defend Russian statehood" in the conflict-ridden northern Caucasus region — is an important ideological indi-

cator. "Restoring law and order" on the fringes of "the empire" is a cause that could help to unite liberal and etatist forces.<sup>7</sup>

Of more immediate significance for Yeltsin's attempts to broaden his power base are probably the fissures that have opened up amongst the industrialist forces and the regroupments inside the corps of enterprise directors as a result of the slow, but real change of relations inside and between the enterprises. A pro-Yeltsin Association of Privatised and Private Enterprises and an organisation of Entrepreneurs for a New Russia (also pro-liberal) have been founded in the last few months, while support for some kind of liberal-centrist alliance is gaining ground within Volsky's Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs.

This suggests that "a strong Presidential power" could hope eventually to base itself on a compromise between sectors of the liberal and statist forces, within the perspective of a market reform with strong elements of state interventionism.<sup>8</sup>

The outcome of the present, protracted power struggle is, however, far from certain. The clashes on May Day, provoked by the Moscow authorities, mark an escalation. But passive resistance from the regions and from the sectors of the Bureaucracy and the centre opposed to Yeltsin's reform concept effectively blocks any rapid strong arm solution.

The forces dominating the opposition remain firmly situated within the logic of the apparatus, and even if they counteract some of the most harmful aspects of the economic reforms they represent no global alternative to Yeltsin. Indeed on some issues, for example relations with the CIS states, the opposition nurtures positions that are at least as reactionary as Yeltsin's.

For the time being no independent alternative with a mass base is in sight — though there are beginnings among socialists and in the workers movement. Still, on balance, the present power vacuum at the top may give the left what it needs — time to organise and develop. ★

6. Also see box on media bias, page .

7. One Moscow leftwing economist recently remarked in a personal conversation with me, "If everything else fails Yeltsin could go for the nationalist option. It is now largely forgotten, but Yeltsin was the first prominent Russian politician to meet Pamyat." The inclusion of Rutskoï as his Vice-president was another early sign of Yeltsin's interest in blocking with parts of the supporters of a "Greater Russia".

8. One example of this trend was an article in the liberal business paper *Oelovoi mir* on April 23, "rehabilitating" Valentin Pavlov, former Prime Minister, coup plotter and proponent of state capitalist model.

# UNP serendipity

**PROVINCIAL** Council elections took place at the end of May. The governing United National Party (UNP) won comfortably. The campaign was peaceful despite the atmosphere of violence that dominated following the assassinations of opposition leader, Lalith Athulathmudali, and President Ranasinghe Premadasa. Below, we publish a short report that outlines the central features of the campaign, the parties involved and the reasons for the UNP victory.

**VICKRAMABAHU KARUNARATNE \* — Colombo, May 20, 1993**

**I**T is still not clear who or what forces were behind these killings. The security forces have claimed that they were the work of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). But there are too many things that need explanation, particularly in the case of Lalith's assassination. Nobody believes that this murder was done without the connivance of government forces.

However, Premadasa's assassination may have been carried out by a Tamil terrorist group. But the question of whether some government politician is involved in the conspiracy remains unanswered. In any event both murders were very helpful to the governing party, the United National Party (UNP). They managed to shed their unpopular autocratic face, while also

removing the smiling populist image of Lalith's Democratic United National Front (DUNF).

D.B. Wijetunga, the new President, hails from a peasant family in the Kandyan province. He is reputed to be a simple peasant farmer who still looks after his cattleshed and garden. This image struck a sympathetic chord with many. The bourgeois opposition, the DUNF and the Podujana Jana Peramuna (Peoples Alliance — PA), were claiming before Premadasa's death that all bad things were due to his personal behaviour. They were very annoyed with the Nava Sama Samaja Party (NSSP) for raising political questions that went beyond Premadasa and the establishment of a non-Presidential constitution.<sup>1</sup> Now a terrorist has removed Pre-

madasa and the new President is talking of reducing Presidential powers. In this situation it is quite natural that the broad masses conclude that it is necessary to test out the policy of the new President.

So, the UNP were victorious, particularly in rural and plantation areas. Nonetheless, it is in the plantation sector that a strong tendency has developed towards the left. Chandrasekharan, the Tamil plantation leader, under detention as a terrorist suspect, was elected as an independent. But the fact that the UNP won when they were quite incapable of any intimidation or electoral malpractice, shows that the rural masses and the plantation workers still keep faith in the government. Police and state officials were fair and in many places went out of their way to prove this point. Only the opportunist opposition leaders, who are unable to explain their defeat, come out with complaints of malpractice.

The PA, the coalition between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the opportunist left, emerged as the hope of the working masses.<sup>2</sup> It was supported by the DUNF. Together, they dominate three provincial councils; the southern, western and north western. These provinces contain a good 90% of the Sinhala working class. These workers will press for reforms and welfare expecting the PA/DUNF leaderships to help them out. In particular, workers will expect measures against police brutality and police intervention in workplace disputes.

We can expect a period of class unrest but it will be based on illusions in coalition politics. The PA has already become a radical movement in the eyes of the masses, with the Lanka Sama Samaja Party (LSSP) and the Communist Party winning important positions within the coalition. Where left leaders were elected they won with a substantial number of preferential votes, further compounding the illusions of the working class in coalitionism. Anura Bandaranaike, the central leader of the SLFP, and her adjuncts were undoubtedly discredited in the eyes of the workers as those who undercut the cam-



D.B. Wijetunga

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1. For details of the NSSP's campaign see *International Viewpoint*, No. 245, May 1993.

2. The People's Alliance coalition also included the Lanka Sama Samaja Party and the Communist Party.

paign. But it is very unlikely that Anura's leadership will be challenged.

UNP economic policy has antagonised workers while pauperising the peasantry. We cannot then, attribute their rural support to the success of their poverty alleviation programme. The rural masses are in a very difficult situation. They consider a vote against the UNP as a very serious step that might bring bad repercussions. A vibrant opposition movement is necessary to pull these layers away from this defeatist mentality. Although the PA coalition is accepted by a majority of workers it has not penetrated the rural masses to the same extent. The DUNF has support amongst the new rich middle classes in the rural areas. Elsewhere, they have managed to draw upon the support of urban working class elements.

The NSSP, with nine other radical organisations, contested all 17 districts. It was a successful campaign, reaching millions in the southern areas. In particular, we explained the right of self-determination of the Tamil people to the Sinhala masses. One comrade was elected and the Party's overall vote was 59,514. However, we have had to accept that militant workers have abandoned us for the PA. The opportunist opposition leaders were successful with their vicious campaign to isolate us from the rank and file.

They kept on slinging mud, even claiming that we are paid by the UNP regime to break up and divide the opposition. They compared us with Ossie Abeygoonasekara, the infamous left Presidential candidate who walked over to the the UNP.<sup>3</sup> Not only were we isolated from the workers, but also from the youth.

The influence of the Janatha Vimukti Peramuna (JVP — Peoples Liberation Front) was clearly evident when workers abstained or spoiled their votes deliberately.<sup>4</sup> This reached 10% in areas where JVP activity was high during 1988/89 disturbances. This certainly indicates the distrust of radical youth towards the parliamentary electoral process but racism is also a feature. Provincial Councils are considered by Sinhala chauvinists as a gift to the minorities. Though there was no campaign for a boycott all Sinhala chauvinist groups, including the Mahajana Eksath Peramuna (MEP — People's United Front), supported one. ★

3. Ossie Abeygoonasekara and his Sri Lanka Mahajana Party were a part of the the United Socialist Alliance that was formed in 1988 and included the Communist Party, LSSP and the NSSP.

4. The Sinhala terrorist group were effectively wiped out by army action in southern areas in late 1989 and early 1990.

# No friend of the poor

The obituaries following President Premadasa's assassination were, almost without exception, sycophantic in the extreme; praising the late President's 'common touch'. Below, we publish an 'alternative obituary' in order to counter at least some of the more glaring fallacies that have been produced.

**THIRUNAVUKKARASU\* — May 8, 1993**

**P**RESIDENT Ranasinghe Premadasa of Sri Lanka was assassinated during a May Day parade. In parts of Sri Lanka fire crackers were set off in celebration. But some sections of the national and international media have portrayed him as a hero and a friend of the poor, particularly since he was himself of poor origin.

He was a friend and favourite of imperialism in the South Asian region. He was a demagogue, maintaining on the one hand (for public consumption) that he would not be cowed by the terms of any foreign lending agency; while on the other, he carried out to the letter the dictates from the IMF and the World Bank.

He was also a highly authoritarian President. His former minister of Food and Cooperatives accused Premadasa of running a "one-man-show" and, about a year and a half ago, spearheaded an impeachment motion against him. This was none other than Lalith Athulathmudali, who was shot dead just one week prior to the assassination of Mr Premadasa.

Whenever Premadasa faced a political crisis, such as the impeachment motion, he would plead that he was a common man and that the elites were all out to cut his throat. But he had proved that he could outshine the classical comprador bourgeoisie (represented by former President Junius Richard Jayawardena, the late Althulathmudali et al) by implementing every imperialist dictat on privatisation or cutbacks in vital social services.

Premadasa had become "widely praised in the business community for his economic policies including one of the fastest privatisation programmes and most extensive deregulation campaigns in Asia".<sup>1</sup> This, of course, has meant big rises in unemployment, cuts in wages and the consequent fall in living standards. The 1991 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report

on Sri Lanka bears ample testimony to this:

"In the current situation in Sri Lanka, the entirety of the poor have become vulnerable. Indeed nutritional assessments indicate that they have become adversely affected. Such a situation places the poor, pregnant and lactating women and pre-school children in especially difficult circumstances. The situation is worsened by the increased susceptibility to infections to which the under-nourished are prone. The plight of these groups is further aggravated by their limited access to effective, proper health care."

Premadasa boasted that the growth rate was 4.8% despite the civil war in the north and east. For 70% of the population this means nothing. The country is groaning under the weight of a debt burden of US\$ 5,000 million, an increase from US\$ 284 million in 1978.

His utterly evasive and sterile approach to the Tamil national question has led to an intensification of the 10 year long war between the government and the LTTE, especially by aerial bombing that has targetted hospitals, schools, refugee camps, examination centres and places of worship. The war now devours Rs 25bn a year. Over 50,000 lives have been lost in the north and the east.

It is clear, even from this brief balance sheet, that Premadasa was no friend of the poor. Rather, he was anti-poor. For all his posturing on poverty alleviation, even the already eroded food stamp relief scheme was being wiped out in devious ways. Indeed, he was a friend and favourite of imperialism. Premadasa has fallen to the very methods of State repression and terrorism that his regime employed for silencing dissent. ★

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1. *Financial Times*, May 4, 1993

# The circus in Washington

**UNDER pressure from the United States and all the Arab governments, the leadership of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) decided — after great hesitation — to allow the Palestinian delegation from the occupied territories to go to Washington and rejoin the negotiations.**

**MICHEL WARSHAWSKY\* — Jerusalem, May 20, 1993**

**T**HERE were numerous reasons why they shouldn't go: the 400 or so Palestinians expelled last December have still not been authorised to return; the Israelis still refuse to recognise that the long-term objective of these negotiations is their withdrawal from the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip; repression in the occupied territories has overtaken in terms of sheer horror the worst moments of the Shamir government; and the Rabin government even refuses to freeze settlement in the occupied territories.

The leaders of the Palestinian delegation have said on many occasions that they would not return to Washington until the expelled Palestinians returned home; they knew that Palestinian public opinion was against any other approach. Two factors have led to the abandonment of this stand: on the one hand, there was the active intervention of American diplomacy in the corridors of the negotiations; on the other, the occupied territories were closed down.

For the new American administration it was urgent to re-start the process interrupted both by the American elections last fall and by the expulsion of 415 supposed Palestinian militants. To this end, the White House pressured Israel to make some gestures which would make things somewhat easier for the Palestinian delegation. The removal of Israel's veto against Faisal Husseini leading the Palestinian delegation is one such gesture — up to this point, Israel had refused to negotiate with anyone residing in East Jerusalem.

The return of some thirty leaders expelled from the territories in the 1960s and 1970s was another such gesture. There was the promise to allow last December's expelled Palestinians to return "as quickly as possible", as well as guarantees of a softening of the policy of closing down the occupied territories.

Once these measures were obtained and the promises made, the USA could use

its Arab allies to blackmail the Palestinians, by saying, "we are going with you or without you. Take it or leave it; it's up to you to decide."

Faced with this Arab blackmail and the danger of being totally isolated, Yasser Arafat decided to negotiate Palestinian participation in exchange for large sums of money for the empty coffers at HQ. But even after making the decision to re-join the other delegations in Washington, the PLO president had to convince the other members of the delegation. They still believed that re-starting the negotiations before the return of the expelled Palestinians would definitively cut them off from their base.

It was the closing of the occupied territories by the Israeli government which convinced the Palestinian delegation to re-start negotiations. The misery provoked by this collective punishment of the population of the occupied territories — alongside the tremendous economic, social and cultural damage — convinced the majority of negotiators that they had to give into the blackmail in order to soften the Israeli policy.

With the re-start of negotiations, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators had at least one common interest. They had to convince their respective populations that progress was being made and that, since Secretary of State Warren Christopher's visit, the USA had decided to play a more active role in the negotiations and, if necessary, exert the required pressure to keep things moving along.

The setting up of several working groups, including one on human rights and another on land and water, seemed to be a concrete sign that this time they were going to accomplish something and that real problems were on the table.

After three weeks of negotiations, the results are meagre, to the point of being insignificant; to such a degree that the Palestinians had to reduce their presence at

the negotiating table.

Doctor Ghassan el Khatib, representative of the People's Party (formerly the Communist Party) in the delegation, who had refused to join his colleagues in Washington, explained in an interview in the daily *Haarets* what, in his view, had transpired in the previous weeks: "The Palestinian leadership now recognizes that it made a mistake to give into the pressures of Arab states and to return to Washington before the promises made to the Palestinians were in fact carried out. The USA and Israel have not kept their word and have not done what they committed themselves to doing before negotiations re-started."

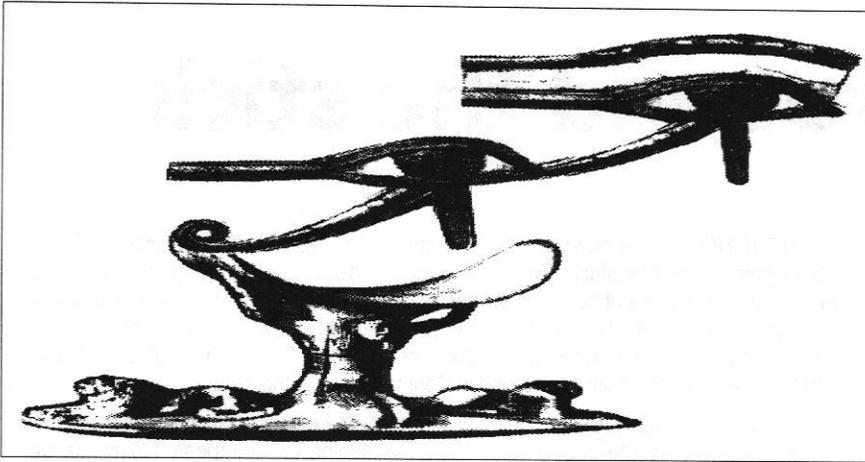
Ghassan el Khatib knows what he is talking about, given that he was part of the smaller group that negotiated with Washington the return of the Palestinian delegation to the negotiating table.

First of all, the Americans had let it be understood that the Israeli government would re-examine the dossiers of those expelled to South Lebanon and then authorize the return of a substantial number among them. In the end, only 25 have received such authorization. If Rabin's goal was to totally destroy the credibility of the Palestinian negotiators, he has done a very good job.

Secondly, the USA made a commitment, speaking for Israel, to improve living conditions in the occupied territories and to reduce the repression. In fact, the opposite has taken place. During the first week of the negotiations, ten Palestinians were murdered by the Israeli occupation forces, including two children aged 7 and 13. Several dozen homes have been cemented shut and about twenty have been destroyed by anti-tank missiles. The military tribunals continue to hand out heavy punishments to youths accused of "disturbing public order". Prisons are fuller than they were last year.

But the worst measure has without a doubt been the closing of the occupied territories. There is no end in sight and it has made life impossible for one and a half million people. Indeed, not only has it cut nearly 100,000 people off from their only

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source of earnings, but it has divided Palestinian society into four regions totally separated from one another.

By forbidding Palestinians to enter Israeli territory, the government has condemned the Gaza Strip to total isolation, even in relation to the West Bank. By forbidding them to be in Jerusalem, including East Jerusalem, annexed to Israel in 1967, the government has divided the West Bank into three distinct zones.

But the occupied territories constitute a whole, whether from an economic, social, cultural or administrative point of view — with East Jerusalem in the centre, not only geographically but also politically and socially. There is no economic or social life possible for Palestinians without Jerusalem. Everything happens through Jerusalem; and a lot happens in Jerusalem.

It was for this reason that the Palestinian delegation was obliged to put the issue of Jerusalem on the top of the negotiations agenda, in spite of their previous willingness to accept the Israeli point of view which is that Jerusalem will not be on the agenda of negotiations on autonomy.

Israel's acceptance of Faisal Husseini as part of the Palestinian delegation, in spite of his Jerusalem identity card, is of little significance compared to what fifty days of closing the occupied territories has shown the world: East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Palestinian West Bank; it is its heart and nerve centre.

In this sense, the closing of the occupied territories has created a double obstacle in this set of negotiations. It has meant a qualitative worsening of repression and living conditions for the population of the occupied territories; and it has widened the already large gap between the positions of the two camps on the question of Jerusalem. What was meant to be the last point on the agenda has once again become a central and urgent issue.

When one asks a Palestinian their point of view on the closing of the occu-

pled territories, they will almost always reply, "Do you want separation? We too, but with Jerusalem. We are not against you putting a border between you and us, but on condition that East Jerusalem is part of the Palestinian area." And this common reply has little to do with considerations of the type that say, "Jerusalem is an integral part of our Palestinian fatherland" and much more to do with concrete arguments of the type that say, "without Jerusalem, our whole administrative system will crumble, our health services will no longer work and we will have no cultural life."

Aside from the question of Jerusalem, the main differences between the Israelis and Palestinians revolve around three points: control of land and water during the period of autonomy; the link between the period of transition and the definitive future solution; and the definition of the governing powers of the autonomous Palestinian administration.

For the Palestinian delegation, United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 calling for the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories must be put into effect in the transitional phase — as a transitional and not provisional measure. For them, the Israelis must recognize that a definitive solution will be reached according to the "land for peace" formula, and that land and air must immediately fall under the exclusive control of the Palestinian administration. As far as the powers of the autonomous administration are concerned, they should not be limited except for those cases where Israeli security may be jeopardized.

Contrary to the promises made by the Americans on the eve of the re-started negotiations, on these three points the Israelis have in no way changed their original positions — positions of the previous government, which everyone knew had no intention of ceding anything in the negotiations.

For Rabin and his government, the period of autonomy would not be transitio-

nal. He sees it as an intermediary solution between the current situation and the future situation in which everything would be an open question: independence, a federation with Jordan, a territorial compromise or even annexation by Israel. All these solutions are equally legitimate in the eyes of the Israeli delegation — and like Shamir, Rabin refuses to make any commitment whatsoever regarding the ultimate status of the occupied territories. That being the case, it can be understood why he also refuses to recognize any substantial powers for the Palestinian administration and any control over natural resources and the land.

This is clearly unacceptable for the Palestinians, however moderate they may be. Dani Rubenstein, writing in *Haaretz*, May 14: "From the point of view of the Palestinians, the situation is bleak, and in their eyes the Washington negotiations are for naught. Israel is continuing its policy of *faits accomplis* in the West Bank and Gaza and is enforcing de facto its conception of the intermediary solution [...] The building of settlements continues and the government is not doing anything to limit the activities of the settlers, leaving in tact their privileges and letting them do as they wish. Palestinian activists in the West Bank and Gaza interpret this as a strong-arm policy aimed at imposing Israeli plans on the Palestinian population. So what is the use of negotiating?"

But the most forthright proponents of negotiations recognize that popular support for the process is declining in a dramatic fashion. A professor at Bir Zeit University told us recently that 80% of students were for an immediate end to the negotiations with Israel — and one can imagine that in the refugee camps in the Gaza Strip there is even greater disappointment.

The professor, who is hardly a radical, continues, "the more we negotiate the worse things get. What then is the point of this circus in Washington? Better to let the Israelis manage the situation all on their own, and stop sewing confusion among the people and in international public opinion. What Rabin is proposing is that we administer our own occupation — and that in the meantime, by sitting at the negotiations table, we give our tacit support to the policy of *faits accomplis* in the occupied territories. No thank you."

The Central Council of the PLO is scheduled to meet in two weeks in Tunis. If there is not a big turn in the Israeli policy, it is doubtful that Yasser Arafat will be able to continue the policy of participation in the negotiations. ★

# The carrot and the stick

**With the proverbial 'carrot and stick', the political establishment in Denmark succeeded in getting a 57% majority for the Maastricht Treaty in the May 18 referendum. But the alliance behind the 'yes' campaign was already breaking up. In inner Copenhagen — one of the few constituencies with a solid 'no' majority — rioting started. Police shot into the crowd, wounding eleven people, in the most violent confrontations during the last ten years.**

**ÅGE SKOVRIND\* —  
Copenhagen, May 21, 1993**

**T**HE riots included only a very small minority of the 43% 'no' votes in the referendum. However, the riots portrayed a general feature of Danish society today — that of more and more people being marginalised, outside political influence. Unemployment has constantly increased and is now expected to hit more than 350,000 (12.5%) by the end of 1993.

There is no doubt that this underprivileged layer of the population is behind the opposition to 'their' Maastricht Treaty and to the European Community (EC) as such. Extraordinary anger was mobilised because, according to many people, this referendum was the same as last year and only organised because the politicians didn't accept the first result.

Statistically, only 7% of the voters shifted from a 'no' to a 'yes'. Most people didn't believe that the Edinburgh summit of the EC last December gave substantial concessions to Denmark, despite claims to the contrary.

Anyway, the 'yes' was to be expected this time. Only 50,000 votes ensured the surprise 'no' majority last June. The new factor of primary significance was that all the political parties — with the exception of the rightwing Progress Party which stood firm on the 'no' — cooked up a 'national compromise', claiming that the second referendum was different from the

**INTRODUCTION** — The prosecution had no grounds for appeal after a majority of Danes voted against the Maastricht Treaty on June 12, 1992. So a scapegoat was found: wasn't everything at risk of being overturned because of them? Now the 'Danish obstacle' no longer exists. Thanks to a series of opt-out clauses which only delay the implementation date and don't deal with the social effects of the Single European Act and the 'single market' a majority has finally been found in Denmark to ratify the Treaty.

This was a pyrrhic victory, to say the least, as the Danish referendum only provided a tiny amount of relief from the economic burdens threatening the European Treaty. As we have underlined several times in these pages, the objective necessity for European Union in order to meet the ends of European capital runs up against two great difficulties: the recession and social resistance. The former has developed, for the moment, more rapidly than the anti-crisis remedies that European Union was supposed to bring to bear. The second was inevitable faced with the violence of the social attacks that every European government is carrying out to supposedly recreate the conditions for economic growth.

Therefore, a majority of the Danes voted 'Yes' but everyone can see perfectly well that the Summit accord on criteria for convergence is already in shreds. The dynamic is no longer that of convergence but of a growing divergence around public levels of inflation, deficit and debt. Within the framework of the single market, these divisions between the different economies can only stoke up monetary speculation and the re-adjustment of exchange rates. The European Monetary System, nerve centre of the unification project, is thus itself entering into crisis.

To rectify that the governments still have the option of planning stronger and stronger attacks in order to reduce social expenditure and improve competitiveness. but the employers will maintain recession. They would have to do everything at the same time: reduce public sector deficits whilst raising the capacity of the state to intervene, increasing the rate of insolvency, restructure the factories without increasing unemployment!

Faced with this conundrum many have ended up by opting for simple strict controls over budgets and monetary supply. But they then need the political capacity and the relationship of forces that the violence of such 'remedies' calls for. This was the gamble of the German bosses when they tried to break the agreement about the perspective of parity in wages between the new Lander and the rest of the country.

But there is also the endeavour, currently led by the Dutch government, to attack, amongst other things, the gains of young people and the students. However, on each occasion, there is a large gap between the intention and the results. The fight-backs are, in effect, more fierce since the employment and social policies had previously been presented as the corner-stone of consensus between the classes. So now it is the States and the bosses' organisations themselves that are putting an end to the policies of 'social peace'!

The other difficulty for the great European ambition of capital concerns the political fragility of the governments or institutions. Even without having to face up to strong trade union mobilisations these are very difficult policies to carry out when the apparatus of the State is itself entering into crisis. One can think, for example, of Italy and perhaps Belgium tomorrow.

There will not, in the short term, be any reversal of this tendency. The workers will be subjected to still more attacks that they will be unable to step aside from. But simply knowing this gives no indication of the capacity of the system to overcome in the long term, its present contradictions. We must, therefore, take note of the political and social phenomena which have the greatest effect on the relationship of forces between the classes. We have to start from the resistance and mobilisations as they are unfolding today in order to map out perspectives for the future; formulate new demands and learn new forms of rebellion and intransigence. — **Claude Gabriel** ★

first one. Did Edinburgh produce any changes or not? That question was the principal theme of the debate, thus putting the content and the meaning of the European Union somewhat into the background

compared to last year.

One of the principal conditions for the 'national compromise' operation was the

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participation of the Socialist Peoples party (SF — a left reformist party with 8.3% at the last election), one of the main components of the 'no' campaign last year, but now campaigning for 'a totally different yes' as they said in their posters.

Essential for SF was a desire — and a pressure — to be included in the group of 'responsible political parties'. They sought influence or even participation in a future Social Democratic led government. However, this rightwing orientation failed.

The bourgeois government resigned in January when an Inquiry Court concluded that the Prime Minister had given false information to the Parliament and the Minister of Justice had cancelled the legal rights for refugees to be associated with their relatives. The Social Democrats indeed formed a new government, but with three small bourgeois parties — not with the SF!

At its Congress in May, the party reacted with a left turn, now calling for a government without participation of the bourgeois parties and threatening to vote against the government. But the recommendation of the Maastricht vote was not changed.

Only about 20% of SF's electorate seem to have followed the shift of the leadership in their referendum vote and among the membership too there seems to have been some opposition. Three of their 15 Members of Parliament (MPs) voted against. The youth organisation turned out for a 'no' — despite the recommendation of the leadership. Some SF members have left the party in protest.

But at the Congress, only about 15% of the delegates voted against the political resolution, and the main opposition spokespersons underlined that they intend to

stay in the party. Their fundamental problem is that they don't have a different overall perspective.

There were 'no' votes coming from all sides. It was said that the typical 'no' voter was a woman, less than 50 years old, living in Copenhagen and without major education. Social Democratic voters were particularly decisive because of their numerical weight (one third of the total electorate). A substantial number of them went from a 'no' to a 'yes'. In Denmark there has always been a considerable amount of opposition to the EC. This has been a source of division in the Social Democratic party and particularly in the trade unions. In that sense, opposition to Maastricht clearly has a left tendency although this is much less manifest than earlier.

Unlike last year, in this referendum the Social Democrats managed to win over a majority of their voters to the 'yes' side. One explanation is that they have feel more confident given that they are represented in the EC by a government of their own. Moreover, this time the Social Democrats ran a real campaign while last year they were engaged in an internal struggle over the election of a new president.

One of the main arguments advanced by the Social Democrats was that the single market needs political regulation, particularly concerning the environment and social protection.

The new government has also announced a tax reform, presented the day after the referendum. Together with employers and union leaders, although with differing emphasis, the government made it clear that the economy would be better off after a 'yes' to Maastricht. With only a one seat majority in Parliament they are desperate to offer something that will improve their

popularity. According to opinion polls they are set to lose that majority after new elections.

There should be no doubt that Denmark's participation in the EC will remain a central political question in Danish politics.

The referendum campaign also helped Enhedslisten (Red-Green Alliance)<sup>1</sup> to get more publicity, as it is the most important political formation to the left of the SF. Support for the Alliance has increa-

sed in recent opinion polls, some of them indicating that support is higher than the 2% necessary for Parliamentary representation.

Enhedslisten tried to conduct an internationalist campaign directed mainly towards the electorate of the workers parties. A big internationalist event was organised in Copenhagen on April 23 & 24 and 350,000 copies of an agitational paper were printed that underlined the need for an internationalist alternative to the Maastricht Union.<sup>2</sup> However, the Enhedslisten campaign was also affected by the general focus on the possible exemptions contained in the Edinburgh agreements.

Nonetheless, the campaign has strengthened Enhedslisten, increasing its audience and improving the possibilities of gaining parliamentary representation in the next elections which will be held before the end of 1994.

In the period prior to the next elections for the European parliament in 1994, much of the debate of this year will probably be revived.

In the last European elections in 1989, the Peoples Movement Against the EC took 4 of the 16 Danish seats. Although the May 18 referendum showed that the control the traditional political parties have over their electorate on the EC question still remains very weak, it will not be easy to retain these four seats.

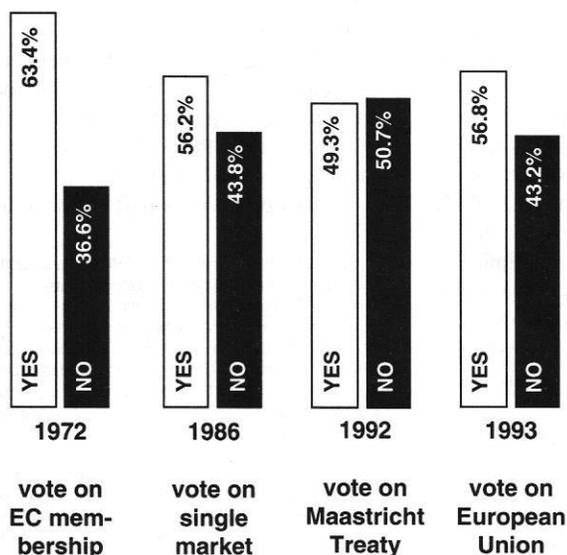
There are number of reasons for this:

Firstly, the Peoples Movement has split during the last few years with three of the Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) going over to the June Movement, the principal movement up to the May referendum. (Theoretically, the difference between the two movements is that the June Movement is opposed only to the Maastricht Treaty but not necessarily to the EC as such.)

Secondly, and as a result of the split, there is an increasing problem about uniting opponents of the EC on that basis alone, particularly as European integration continues and one has to face the EC as a policy making reality.

Thirdly, while the Peoples Movement has been put on a sideline in this referendum, only this movement has the legal right to stand in the next European

How Danes have voted on Europe



1. Enhedslisten — the Red-Green Alliance. The coalition unites a number of different political forces, including the Left Socialists (VS), the Communist Party (DKP), the Socialist Workers Party (SAP — Section of the Fourth International) and many socialists not organised in any political party. Enhedslisten was formed in 1989, primarily to overcome the 2% barrier to be represented in Parliament. At the 1989 general election it polled 1.7%. Since then, it has developed into a political coalition which is not exclusively related to electoral work. It has around 10 representatives in several city councils, including three on the Copenhagen City Council.

2. See *International Viewpoint* 245, May 1993

elections. To obtain that right, one has to collect about 60,000 signatures during a period of one year. The June Movement has begun collection of signatures, but it seems unlikely that they will succeed. This has to do also with the fact that the June Movement has conducted a media rather than a real mass campaign based on activities. It claims to have 3,500 members.

Thus, much depends on the possibility of finding a formula which can unite the competing movements in the next European elections. As for *Enhedslisten*, it will be impossible to collect 60,000 signatures. The only possible way to stand in the elections will be in co-operation with the 'no' movements. However, this will also involve a political problem.

The arguments of the principal 'no' movements changed for the better compared to last year, partly because of the real impact of the referendum on the rest of Europe. Then, the main argument was that Denmark should have some exemptions and allow the other countries to go ahead. This time, the argument was that a Danish vote would put an end to the whole Maastricht construction and that the new debates must define the future European collaboration. The Europe of Maastricht was criticised for being closed to other European countries, undemocratic, centralised and bureaucratic. However, a clear alternative was not — and could not be presented.

It is also quite possible that Denmark will have yet another referendum in 1997. The Maastricht Treaty envisages a new inter-governmental conference in 1996 to redefine the future of the Community.

Much of the discussion here has centred around the so-called exemptions that were given to Denmark at the Edinburgh summit last December. Included, were the right to stay outside the common defence policy and the third phase of the Economic and Monetary Union.

However, these rights already existed in the Maastricht Treaty. What is new, is that the political parties promise that if a parliamentary majority — later — want Denmark to take part in the integration on these levels, then it must be approved by a new referendum.

Thus, if the process of European integration continues without major problems, and if there is pressure from the Community and from the Danish political establishment; there will be one or several new referendums in Denmark in the coming years.

This is certainly interesting, because it was the so-called Edinburgh exemptions that were used as the 'carrot' — enticing the necessary amount of people to change from 'no' to 'yes'. ★

# After the referenda

**AFTER the referenda of April 18, a new government — headed by the former governor of the Bank of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Campi — was formed in Italy. It is supported by a narrow majority, composed of the four traditional government parties — the Christian Democrats (DC), the Socialist Party (PSI), the Social Democratic Party (PSDI) and the Liberals (PLI). But it also enjoys the abstention with favor of the Republicans (PRI), the Greens, the Party of the Democratic Left (PDS, ex-PCI) and even the Northern League.**

**The Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC), on the far-left, and the Social Movement (MSI), on the far-right, voted against the new government. The "Rete" (the network), which considers parliament illegitimate, did not participate in the vote.**

**Italy now has a kind of government of national solidarity, with anti-worker leanings, which could constitute a transition towards conservative, and perhaps outright reactionary, solutions.**

**FRANCO TURIGLIATTO\* — Milan, May 16, 1993**

ITALY has neither escaped the contradictions of the current phase of the capitalist economy, nor the international recession. To be sure, the devaluation of the lira by about 30% in relation to the strong European currencies, which accompanied Italy's exit from the European Monetary System (EMS), has made Italian products more competitive and has led to a considerable growth in exports (of more than 30% to non-European countries and in a significant way to the other countries of the European Community (EEC)).

But this growth of exports has not prevented a generalised stagnation. Forecasts point to a growth in Gross National Product (GNP) in 1993 of 0.3% compared to 0.9% in 1992. Industrial production has dropped 4.5% over the last few months compared to the same period in 1992, and there is no improvement on the horizon.

And if the devaluation has not sparked increased inflation, this is easily explained. Salaries have been frozen since the middle of last year, following the elimination of the sliding scale and the drastic limitation of additional work contracts at the enterprise level. Their growth has lagged 2% behind that of inflation, thus provoking a shrinkage of consumption, in its turn a factor contributing to recession.

On the employment front, the situation remains gloomy. In 1992, 7% of jobs in large-scale industry were eliminated. The unemployment rate is nearing 11.2%, with forecasts predicting a rate of 11.6% for the

second half of the year. In the short-term, there will be some 3 to 4 million unemployed (the figures are rather inexact, since the official bureau of statistics has changed the criteria to "reduce" the real number of unemployed). As for technical unemployment, it has increased by 45% in relation to last year.

Thus, poverty, marginalisation and unemployment are threatening ever-widening sectors of the population, and creating a climate of uncertainty and social malaise.

From a political point of view, the April 18 vote incontestably constituted a success for the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup> The proposal to replace, with respect to the Senate, the proportional electoral system with a single round majority vote was accepted by a crushing majority of 82%.

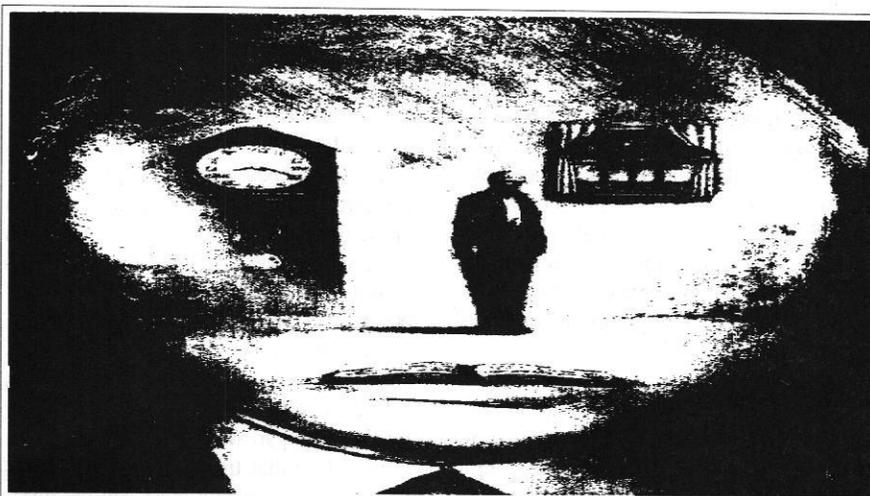
Almost all the political leaders, with the help of the media, nourished the foolish belief that changing the electoral system would solve all the problems, especially that of generalised corruption.<sup>2</sup>

This operation is part of the Italian

\* The author is a member of the PRC and a supporter of the Fourth Internationalist journal *Bandiera Rossa*.

1. There were eight referenda, but only two or three had political importance. The passage of the question on the abrogation of the law on the financing of parties was foretold. With a relative majority of 55%, the articles of the law on drugs which called for prison and forced hospitalisation of addicts were struck down. This was the only question which was initiated by the left.

2. We will not return to the corruption and scandals which have been in the headlines of the Italian press over the last year, and have been the focal point of the whole regime's crisis. We need only recall that it has been revealed that the former PCI, now the PDS, is much more implicated in the scandal than thought just a few months ago.



bourgeoisie's plan to equip itself with a political system that guarantees a stronger and more authoritarian executive power and a less costly party system. They hope to put an end to the order which emerged after the end of the Second World War, which gave the PCI-led opposition some influence over the government in exchange for its moderating influence on mass struggles.

This project has progressed insofar as the working class movement has suffered serious defeats in recent years, seen its organizational structures greatly weakened and been unable to advance any serious social or political alternative to the hegemony of the dominant classes. The PDS has greatly contributed to this state of affairs, by giving credibility in left milieu to the bourgeois project of renewal through changes in the electoral law.

The governmental crisis at the end of April was cut short with the decision of the president of the Republic (who is behaving more and more in a semi-Bonapartist fashion) to reject the demand of the left opposition (PRC and Rete) for new legislative elections to take place in the short-term. This left opposition believes that the current parliament, in which about 300 members face charges, is no longer legitimate.

Ciampi, a non-practising Catholic who always carried a big stick in his capacity as governor of the Bank of Italy, is a clear expression of the class nature of the new government and of the bourgeoisie's desire to more directly assume, through the intermediary of reliable people, the political running of the country.

At the same time, the make-up of the government is equally significant insofar as it mixes continuity and "innovation" in a supposed political turnaround. The traditional government parties (DC, PSI, PDS and PLI) continue to play a central role. The DC, for example, has kept the most important ministries: the Interior, Finance,

Foreign Affairs, National Education, and so on. Other ministers are 'technicians' — that is to say, experts who should be able to guarantee smooth politico-administration, outside of the interests and pressures of the various parties. In other words, they should contribute to the government attempt to escape social pressures and the influence of the class struggle.<sup>3</sup>

In as much as the Ciampi government sees itself as an innovator, it is not only looking for active support from the employers confederation (Confindustria) but also for a favourable reception from the Greens and the PDS — who have been inexorably sucked into the governmental whirlwind.

It should be said that to begin with the PDS had even agreed that three of its members should become ministers. They only withdrew this commitment after the outpouring of popular indignation which followed the majority vote in the Chamber of Deputies against the incrimination of the former Socialist leader Craxi, who had become a symbol of the corruption of political parties.

For its part, the Northern League, after invoking fire and fury against the new prime minister, had a change of heart at the last minute and abstained. Indeed, the liberal economic programme of the new government corresponds to its own. Moreover, as the former governor of the Bank of Italy, Ciampi enjoys the confidence of the League's small and middle-bourgeois electorate which was able to turn its tax evasion into handsome Treasury bond holdings.

The programme of the new government is entirely in keeping with that of the Amato government which — supported by the Confindustria and the Bank of Italy, accepted by the union bureaucracy and faced with no real opposition from the PDS — was able to inflict serious blows on the working class movement. It eliminated the sliding scale of wages, imple-

mented ultra-liberal reforms in the health-care and pension system, and unleashed the privatisation of state industry.

As such, Ciampi, the enthusiastic partisan of Maastricht, will attempt to put in place the following programme:

- A new taxation system which, to the detriment of working people, will collect 13bn lira;

- Bring forward the budget to July (it was planned for autumn), with the aim of pursuing and deepening a programme of rigorous austerity and reducing the public deficit and indebtedness (which remains greater than 100% of GNP);

- Continue the elimination of the so-called structural rigidities of the functioning of the labour market and business. In other words, giving the green light to firings and the complete deregulation of the labour market;

- Encourage the massive intervention of private capital in the health care and pension systems;

- Proceed with the sale of state enterprises.

In spite of this openly pro-capitalist programme, the three main union federations (CGIL, CISL, UIL) have supported the government and participated enthusiastically in the privatisation of the pension system.

Working people are facing frontal attacks. The measures imposed by the government a few months ago, which were unsuccessfully opposed, have weighed heavily in social and economic terms. Unemployment nurtures demoralisation and discouragement. The union oppositions have not been strengthened either organisationally or politically. They are not seen as being able to provide credible alternative leadership, and have not been able to assemble the capacity for initiative necessary for the revival of the mass movement.

The demonstration of February 27 could not on its own rekindle working class resistance.<sup>4</sup> For their part, on April 2 the three union confederations — who were in favour of the elimination of the system of proportional representation — called for a symbolic "general" strike of four hours with no demands, conceived in fact as a way to support the new government! The union oppositions, as much in the Confederations as outside them, were not able to unmask this bureaucratic

3. The leader of the CGIL opposition wrote, "...the interests of the dominant classes have been hidden behind the smokescreen of technical expertise. In this way, the members of the government know that while they are ever less representative they are also ever more in control."

4. The demonstration of February 27 was organized by the Councils Movement and was a tremendous success. The PRC played a big role.

manoeuvre, to develop an alternative platform of struggle, or to initiate their own mobilisations.

It is true that in several regions some very serious struggles have developed in defense of jobs. From the miners of Sulcis in Sardinia to the workers at Alenia, a large industrial group producing armaments and electronic goods in Naples and Turin, these struggles have received the support of the population in the South. But they have remained isolated, without any type of co-ordination.

It is not at all surprising that, in current conditions, these struggles have only provided evidence of popular desperation and have generally concluded with very unfavourable agreements for the workers and, in some cases, outright defeats. Serious confrontations are on their way in the big steel group ILVA, on which the EC has imposed a programme of drastic restructuring, as well as at Alfa Romeo in Milan. Fiat's plan is to close this establishment — which it bought at a cut-rate price a few years ago (the union committee at Alfa Romeo has requested an investigation into this) — which is known for its great technical capacity and for the militancy of its workers.

For a long time, the three union confederations have been caught up in a process of integration into the mechanisms of the capitalist system and state, and have completely internalized the capitalist ideology of the market. The elimination of working class gains has been carried out in the name of increasing the productivity of Italian enterprises against foreign competition.

At the same time, the attitude of the bureaucrats towards the workers has grown increasingly arrogant. All decisions are imposed from on high, with complete disdain for even the semblance of union democracy.

The CISL and UIL haven't had great difficulty implementing such practices. On the other hand, the CGIL has had some problems. It has a different tradition, based on class struggle, with a more active rank and file; the opposition has a real audience among the workers.

Thus, the CGIL leaders have to manoeuvre with a greater finesse, take initiatives every now and then, and blame the other confederations for their capitulations — invoking the need to maintain unity. In the last analysis, the CGIL now finds itself caught in its own contradictions: for years, it presented itself as the incarnation of class struggle unionism, and now has to pay a higher price than the others for its renunciation of social conflict and the defense of the workers' interests — and

for the resulting decline in struggle.

The CGIL now has to deal with, among other things, the offensive of the secretary general of CISL, D'Antoni, who has proposed to form a single moderate union — which would become a veritable institution of the government, definitively breaking with a class struggle approach and replacing democratic relations with the workers with the complete delegation of powers to a leadership group in which the apparatus of the CISL would be hegemonic.

The UIL, led by Larizza, has proposed another version: a union that would support the progressive democratic regroupment which is supposed to emerge, and would operate as an internal lobby whose goal would be securing for its members parliamentary seats and political responsibilities.

The CGIL leadership is neither willing nor able to counter these proposals with the idea of a new beginning for militant class struggle unionism. It has to defend the interests of its apparatus, but the dynamics of the political situation compel it to sign up for the single union project of D'Antoni and Larizza — even though this project is currently only on the drawing board.

Since last autumn's protests, *Essere Sindacato*, the CGIL's internal opposition, has not been able to develop an alternative adapted to the social and political difficulties of the current period. The initiative it had is now on the decline. It did not have the strength or, in its majority, the will to orient itself directly to the working masses by going around the traditional apparatuses and breaking, if need be, the discipline of the confederation. Internally, certain sec-

tors elected to limit their initiatives, in the vain hope that they would be able to build a new majority with some members of the union leadership linked to the PDS.

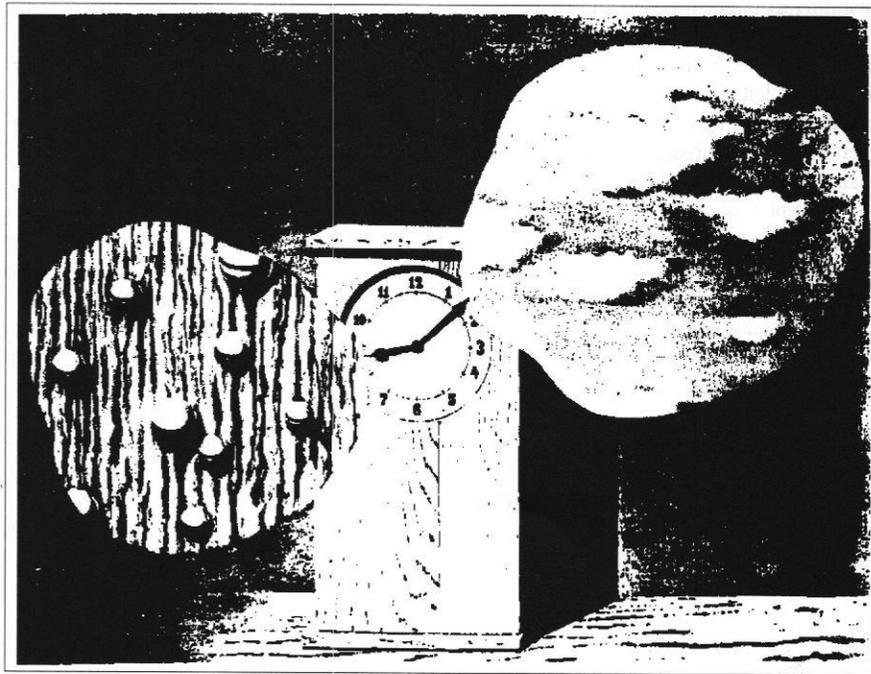
As far as the Councils Movement is concerned, which was behind the initiative for certain important mobilisations — in particular the February 27 demonstration — it should be underlined that this is an entirely different phenomenon from what occurred in the 1970s and the early 1980s.

Today, the Councils Movement is above all a union sector, with 90% of its members from the CGIL, and identifying for the most part with *Essere Sindacato*. It is very rare that the united CGIL-CISL-UIL symbol reflects a mass self-organizational reality comparable to that of a decade ago — not to speak of what was seen even further in the past. In most cases, the councils have not been re-elected for years and the electoral mechanisms are such that they ensure the artificial representation of the apparatuses.

The February 27 demonstration provided an opportunity to build and radicalize the councils at the workplaces. But these possibilities have yet to be harnessed. Alongside the terrible objective difficulties, another obstacle consists of the majority orientation of the national co-ordination of councils.

This orientation aims at influencing the policy of the CGIL leadership, with the old idea — condemned to failure — of exerting pressure on the heights of the union. The end result is that of being heavily conditioned by the 'left' apparatus of the confederation.

As such, the same people who had wanted to limit the initiative of *Essere Sindacato* did not at all try to develop the



potential of the councils movement. As far as those sectors outside the traditional unions are concerned, there are two types of attitude:

- Certain forces, such as the FLMU, who came out of a split of CISL steelworkers, and the Rank and File Representation (RDB), have denounced the reactionary character of the CISL-CGIL-UIL policy; but they have remained outside of the autumn movement, going so far as to desert the mass mobilisations.

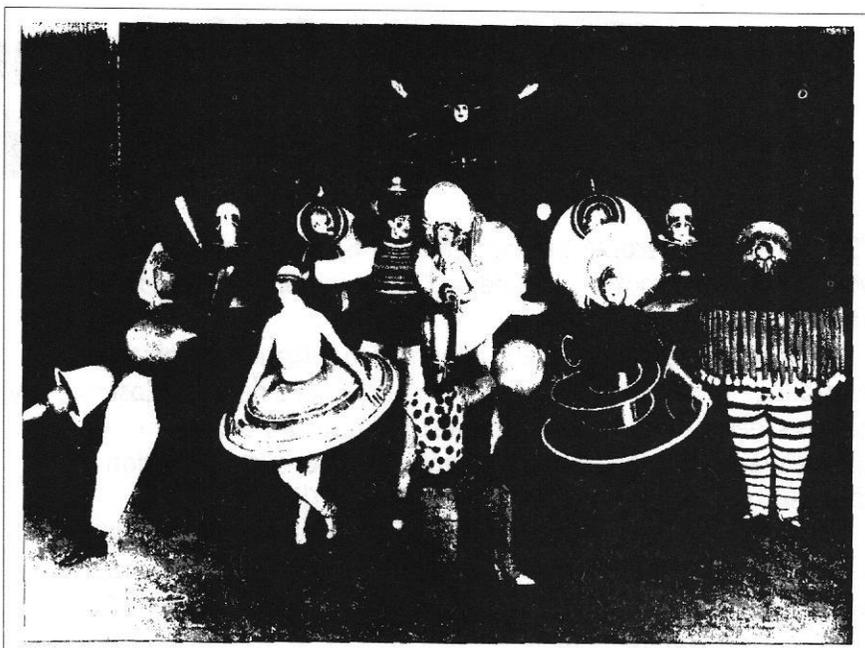
- The Rank and File Committees (COBAS) of industrial sectors, especially those of the two big Milan enterprises, Alfa Romeo and Ansaldo, and that of Alfa Romeo in Pomigliano (near Naples), have created a national structure, the Union of Self-Organized Workers (SLA) — which does not present itself as a real union, but rather as a coordinating structure and above all as a force for promoting the self-organisation of workers, as a pre-condition for the building of a new mass class struggle union.

The SLA has real roots in certain cases, but remains a minority force. This union sector was at the head of last autumn's initiatives, participated in all the mobilisations, including those called by the bureaucracy, and has generally sought out unity in action with other union oppositional forces. It hasn't yet been able, however, to be integrated into the councils movement since the councils have not allowed them to join, preferring to stick to the CGIL-CISL-UIL schema, even though they no longer represent the workers in their ensemble.

The PRC, the Councils Movement and the union oppositions are seeking to revive the social movement through the collection of signatures for the abrogation of three pieces of legislation enacted under the Amato government: the counter-reform on pensions; the reforms of the healthcare system; and the privatisation of public parks.

A fourth referendum concerns Article 19 of the Workers Statutes — adopted in the beginning of the 1970s — which deals with union representation in the enterprises and gives the CGIL, CISL and UIL a monopoly on representation by preventing workers from actively taking part in the decisions that concern them.

The CISL, UIL and the majority of the CGIL are against this referendum; sectors of the CGIL apparatus have shown weak support. On this question, there are serious differences between the COBAS and the councils. The councils are collecting signatures around two formulae, one which calls for the plain and simple abolition of the monopoly of the bureaucratic apparatuses,



the other which only calls for changes in its form. The COBAS and the SLA are collecting signatures around the first formula.

At the same time, the CGIL leadership is gathering signatures for popular initiative legislation on union representation, which changes certain norms without touching the main body of the system.

The situation is very confused, and it is difficult to forecast the outcome. The needs of the mass movement and the political concerns of the most conscious union members can be summarised in a few points. It is on this basis that the possibility of assembling a response to the challenge of the Ciampi government will be determined:

- The ability to break the isolation of the workers currently involved in struggles for the defense of their jobs — to link them with others, to pursue more radical forms of struggle such as factory occupations, and to build broader solidarity between workers and the wider society.

- A revival of *Essere Sindacato*'s initiative in favour of a co-ordination of workers in struggle today, to strengthen the opposition inside CGIL and at the same time to build links with autonomous unionism. There should also be work to reactivate the Councils Movement and resist the pressures of the apparatuses.

- In this framework, it is possible to advance the idea of building a generalized struggle in defense of employment and for the reduction of the working week without reduction in pay. In Italy, the last reduction of the working week was in 1970. Since that time, industrial productivity has increased annually by 1.8% and created a massive growth in unemployment. At the

same time, it is necessary to demand a rise in salaries to compensate for the elimination of the sliding scale.

- The union oppositions must respond to the conservative project for the 'single union'. To defend the CGIL as a bastion of class struggle unionism is not only utopian, but is not at all credible. The struggle inside the CGIL must be fought to the end. But this is not sufficient. There is a great risk that once the CGIL leadership gets caught up in the conservative wave there will not be adequate forces to propose an alternative programme, and that the left will be marginalised and will have to build a minority union.

The development of unity among the union oppositions is a political precondition for the formation of an alternative leadership group which will be able to organise — with real mass roots — a broad democratic constituent assembly in opposition to the apparatus unionism of D'Antoni.

Now that we have a less democratic political system and a crisis situation in the working class movement, a party like the PRC faces enormous problems. Until this point, this party has been above all else the party of political and social resistance, asserting the need (in a generic sense) of rebuilding a communist force.

Today it is being called upon to give some real content to its name, through the elaboration of an anti-capitalist strategy, and by moving from resistance to the construction of a mass movement — to discuss and develop a political and strategic line which can rise to the situation. These are the issues in the preparatory debate for the PRC's next congress, scheduled for the autumn. ★

# Re-establishing the socialist tradition

"SOCIALISM has become a rather refined intellectual thing. And what you have to do is root the debate on Europe in peoples' real experiences. That's the road to go down."

Tony Benn has, alongside the miners' leader Arthur Scargill, been the central figurehead of the British left for well over a decade. Most recently he has spearheaded the left's critique of Maastricht, clearly differentiating himself from the essentially nationalist opposition of those such as former Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher.

We republish here, extracts from two interviews conducted in the last 12 months about Benn's Commonwealth of Europe Bill and the campaign against Maastricht. The latter interview was conducted prior to the second Danish referendum.\*

## INTERVIEW

**C** *AN YOU outline the main features of your Commonwealth of Europe Bill?*

It is a Bill to replace the Treaty of Rome, to extend the framework of European co-operation beyond the countries of the European Community to the whole of Europe, including all the Eastern European countries and former USSR.

The principles I put down here for the foundation of an association of the peoples of Europe — the Commonwealth — are not anything to do with the free movement of capital and labour.

It must be based on mutual respect, the fully self-governing status of member

countries, working for co-operation, committed to uphold the Charter of the UN, believing that the different identities of the member states must be preserved, resolving to work for these ends with good-will, and a spirit of tolerance and understanding. I also include a Charter of Rights, incorporating social and economic rights that would require a very active political role. The reason I've done it is that this idea that you're either pro- or anti-Europe is a complete illusion. The question is what sort of Europe do we want.

What the proponents of Maastricht are trying to do is to say that there's only one type of Europe (and) that you have to be for or against.

*Would you see your ideas, as set down in the Bill, as a socialist alternative for Europe?*

It isn't explicitly socialist. It would provide that if a state wanted to vote for a different system it could. It is an enabling bill for socialism, which under the Treaty of Rome is impossible — it would be excluded by the constitution, by the judges. What my Bill does is remove some of the obstacles for socialism rather than create it itself.

But of course, when you set out a Charter of Rights then you are beginning to set out the constitutional changes that contain a political objective. And these are socialist objectives.

*But isn't a socialist alternative implicit in the Bill, for example in posing a guarantee of full employment?*

There are some fairly radical proposals. But it's presented within the framework of you've got to have the power to do it. For example, we could demand all these things in practice, but in theory we couldn't achieve them. It would be illegal to do it.

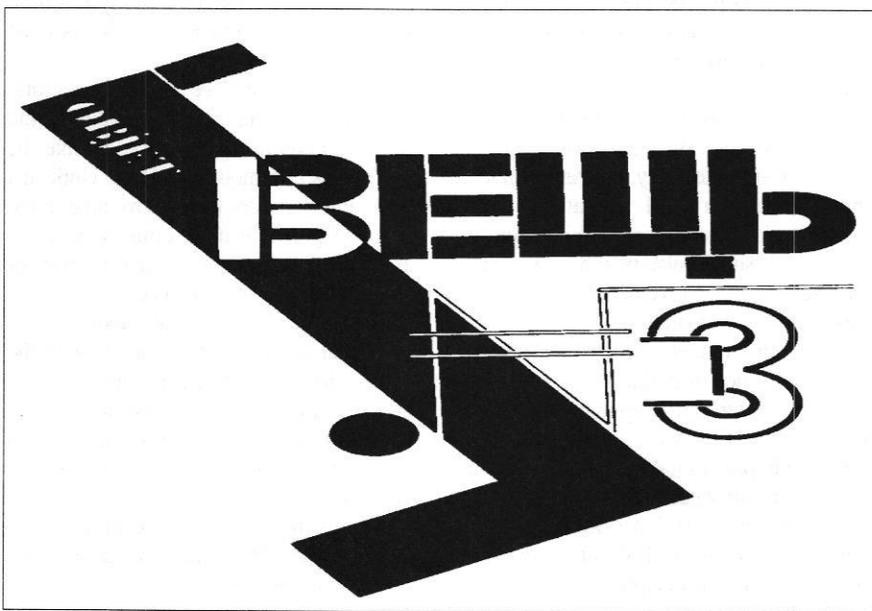
*Your Bill is not going to get passed by Parliament, what are you intending to use it for?*

Of course it won't get passed but these things can have an educational role. I've sent it around a little bit. I've been working on this for about ten years one way or another. I think there are a lot of people who may be open to this alternative.

(...) The future of socialism has to be thought through very carefully now. The collapse of the centralised Stalinist system showed that without the vital ingredient of democracy that project was an absolute dead end.

What the Common Market is about is the liberation of capital and the enslaving of labour. We have to have a programme for the control of capital and the liberation of labour — and that must be done on an international basis. ★

\* The interviews were originally published in *Socialist Outlook*, a fortnightly paper supported by Fourth Internationalists in Britain. SO 22, May 1992 and SO 39, March 1993.



**SOME people on the left suspect that campaigning against Maastricht gives cover to rightwing nationalism, and that only the rightwing benefits from such a campaign.**

That is simply untrue. In Britain it was the left that was against the Treaty of Rome, the Tories (Conservative Party) were all in favour of it; it was the Tories who took us into the European Community (EC), using the Royal Perogative, without consulting anyone. It was the Labour Party which came out in favour of a referendum on the issue.

The reason why the Tory opponents of Maastricht are getting all the publicity is because only they have the power to defeat the government on the issue; if there was a Labour government in Britain it would be the left critique of Maastricht getting all the publicity.

The proponents of Maastricht want to present the anti-Maastricht campaign in a way which alienates liberal opinion, so they say, well it's led by Le Pen and Thatcher, but it's not the case at all.

### **What will happen if the Danish vote against Maastricht in the coming referendum?**

By voting against Maastricht last time the Danish put themselves at the heart of Europe, not as Major says outside Europe. If they vote 'no' again, then Britain went go in. Kohl has said that they might have to go ahead with a 'core' ten countries. But it won't work, and there will have to be a big rethink. Then I think proposals like my Commonwealth of Europe Bill will come into their own. But it has to be said that the near unanimity of the political leaders in Denmark in favour of Maastricht makes another 'no' vote a difficult task.

### **Do you think that the Maastricht Treaty will be realised?**

It's much more difficult now, to create the kind of capitalist economic and political unity they are looking for, because of the depth of the economic crisis. Harmonisation is very difficult when there are such disparities between states, and the interests of different groups of capitalists conflict. But my worry is that a failure of Maastricht, because of the way it has been done, could lead to a rise of reactionary nationalism. The French will blame the British for Hoover, the British will blame the French for subsidising agriculture, the Americans will blame the Europeans for subsidising the Airbus.

So we've got to find a way of building a

substructure of working class links in Europe, and not only in Europe, to prepare an alternative to the rise of reactionary and rightwing forces. That's why I'm in favour of building a Fifth International, a common association of working people worldwide to confront the power of capital.

### **What do you think is the real meaning of 'Fortress Europe'?**

The real intention of the people who founded the EC, like the people who founded the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), was to prevent socialism spreading. That's what it's all about. They aimed to rejuvenate European capitalism with the aid of the Marshall plan, that's what the EC was all about, and to defend capitalism, that's what NATO was all about.

Now that the cold war is over NATO is extending into what is called an 'outer area role'; and for capitalist Europe this is an attempt to restore the dominant position it had in relation to the colonies it lost during the two world wars.

What we're witnessing is 'Euro-nationalism' preparing to challenge the United States and Japan for world dominance. And this Euro-nationalism is not internationalism at all, it's the opposite.

### **If the EC is about defending capitalism, then why have the main social democratic parties in Europe all adopted such enthusiastic pro-EC policies?**

It's well worth reflecting on this question. In my opinion it's because of the collapse of socialist confidence, and a collapse of understanding about what socialism means. Look at Yeltsin; he was the secretary of the Moscow Communist Party, and now he's so far to the right of Thatcher he makes her look like a progressive. The socialist parties became career structures. You joined a socialist party and got into power; you became a minister. Then you expelled dissidents, distanced yourself from struggle and hoped the establishment would accept you as one of the two ruling parties.

Nobody in these parties discusses capitalism any more, let alone socialism. I can understand the Labour leadership in Britain not discussing socialism, since they don't have the remotest idea what it is; but you would think that they'd discuss capitalism and its crisis. But all they discuss is Major, Lamont and Heseltine.<sup>1</sup>

So there is this huge vacuum. Socialism is about building a society on a moral basis, about internationalism and about democracy. And those three ideas have a universal validity throughout human history. But these

values have been totally neglected, so there's a gap which is filled by trying to strengthen capitalism, whilst calling it 'a more humane society'. It isn't at all. It's the same as it always has been, throwing workers on the floor and allowing the privileged and rich elite to run things.

### **What can be done to turn around the present difficult situation for the working class and socialism?**

The first thing is to re-establish the socialist tradition of debate, argument and education. The media in Britain have obliterated serious discussion, it's all in terms of personal abuse and sound bites. The first thing to do is to get people asking basic questions again — why are we poor, why are we unemployed, why does every family spend money on weapons before the rent? Why? Once you ask these basic questions, you're half way to a socialist analysis, and that's how real socialism started in the first place — as a critique of the existing order.

Now everyone knows the working class has changed in Britain, and internationally. But the definition of working class hasn't changed: do you own things or do you work? By that definition the working class is very much alive.

But the situation of the working class is difficult today because the debt chains have been added to unemployment. Becoming unemployed can be a real personal catastrophe because, unlike the 1930s, you can lose your house and savings. So people are worried about challenging the boss. There's a real groundswell of anger, but it's partly frozen by fear. And it's denied an outlet, because the leaderships of the socialist parties have stopped talking about any alternative.

### **But still, coming back to Maastricht, isn't there a problem about outlining a socialist alternative to it? The left can criticise the Maastricht process, but what do we propose?**

That's right. A negative criticism on its own is inadequate, because I don't want a capitalist Britain living outside a capitalist Europe, I want a socialist Britain in a socialist Europe. That means that you've got to have a much stronger socialist association across Europe and the world, and that is precisely why I'm fighting for this idea of a Fifth International. ★

1. This is a reference to John Major, the current Conservative Prime Minister; Norman Lamont, the recently dismissed Chief Finance Minister; and Michael Heseltine, the current Chief Trade and Industry Minister.

# "The revolt of the dwarfs"

FOR the first time in sixty years, twenty factories in the steel and electronics industry went on strike in Saxony, along with six steel mills in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). From May 10, the steelworkers of Thuringia, Berlin and Brandenburg and Saxony-Anhalt joined in. This struggle concerns all unions, for if the steel industry remains outside the agreements on salary — which seek to align salaries in the East with those in the West — the whole system of negotiations will eventually become defunct.

Jacob Moneta looks at the roots of the current conflict, which represents a turning point of sorts in the history of reunified Germany.

## JACOB MONETA\*

**T**HIS year, the May 1 issue of the PDS (former East German CP) newspaper re-printed the front page of the daily *Junge Welt* of June 30 and July 1, 1990.

That is to say, the front page of an issue that is now almost three years old. At that time, *Junge Welt* cost 40 pfennigs in the East and one mark in West Berlin. What did the headline say, in large bold characters? "Forward, and don't forget: things will not be worse than now for any citizen of the German Democratic Republic! On the contrary!"

The people of the GDR voted massively for the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), certain that this would lead to what the 1990 'Social Report' said about the federal government-authored agreement negotiated with GDR, "Monetary, social and economic union will create a single unit. Its goal is a united and equal German state."

"With respect to the difficulties of transition, monetary, economic and social union will mean a considerable growth in production, new jobs and an increase in salaries. And a social security system far superior to that which existed in the GDR will be put in place."

But after that time, the refrain changed from year to year. In 1991, the Chancellor was still saying, "no one will see their situation worsen". In 1992, he declared, "now is not the time for salary demands. Employment and stability take priority over all other considerations". And in 1993, "we have lived beyond our means. Unfailing discipline is the imperative of the hour."

So what happened to employment and stability in the former GDR? At the end of 1992, industrial production was less than a

third of what it was in 1989. The active population, which reached 9.9m people in 1989, was reduced to 5.1m in 1992. 650,000 work part-time or are involved in re-training programmes.

While the number of welfare recipients in the former West Germany tripled between 1973 and 1990 — that is, over 18 years — their number has quadrupled in 21 months (from September 1990 to June 1992) in the ex-GDR, and is now 200,000 and mounting. What happened to the conditions for the greatly superior social security promised in the unification treaty?

Unemployment in the ex-GDR has primarily struck women (some 63%) and young people under 20 years of age. There is a particularly high number of unemployed who have a high level of education, qualifications and specialisation. Out of 17m inhabitants, the ex-GDR had 2m post-secondary and technical graduates.

According to professor Wolfgang Richter, president of the Society for the Protection of Civil Rights and Human Dignity, more than one million of these graduates now find themselves, culturally and socially in particular, on the margins of society — hit by the loss of employment and deprived of their pensions. The 50% drop in the birth rate in the ex-GDR is an unambiguous sign of the population's loss of hope.

There are two questions. Was there no resistance when the catastrophe began to unfurl? What are the perspectives and significance of the strike movement led by IG-Metall?

In the GDR, most people had the illusion that it would be sufficient to convert East German marks into West German marks in order to attain prosperity and also,

above all, to gain access to West Germany's social gains. They did not understand that these social gains were the fruits of labour and social struggles, and did not flow automatically from the market and competition.

Afterwards, during the shutting down of factories and the first firings, the workplace councils expressed their approval, 'with a clear conscience'. This was due to the fact that the first to go was the so-called 'unproductive workforce' — that is, the cumbersome bureaucracy in the factories, but also supposedly 'marginal' elements and the handicapped, all characterised as 'unproductive'.

Moreover, the factory councils believed that productivity gains could only be made through privatisation — seen as the only way, in spite of the human cost, to save the enterprise. Everyone thought that unemployment would be short-term, lasting only as long as it took to make the new privatised firms efficient, healthy and profitable.

To be sure, there was an undeniable shock for many struck by unemployment, all the more so given that they had never had such an experience before. And women were particularly hard hit, since workplace childcare centres were simply shut down, seen as obstacles to 'profitability'.

All this was accepted with the same notion that better days were on their way. After all, the federal Chancellor himself had promised that no one would experience a worsening of their situation. But this all changed much sooner than one would have expected.

Resistance in the ex-GDR was seen from the beginning with the strikes of the postal and railway workers, which nevertheless ended too soon. As far as IG-Metall is concerned, a questionnaire circulated in 1990 gave some idea of the union full-timers' opinions.

The renewal process in the union was judged positive by a majority, based on its initial activities which revealed an enormous mobilisation potential and also produced some tangible results. However, there were already some doubts: given the federal government policy, the questionnaire asked, "could the unions have a real influence on the defense and creation of

\* This article originally appeared in the May 20 issue of *Rouge*, weekly paper of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International.

jobs?"

The great majority of respondents — either by instinct or after having had the practical experience of the liquidation policy of the Treuhandanstalt (the body in charge of privatizing enterprises in the ex-GDR) — came to the conclusion that the unions were the only force potentially able to exert real influence on the government's policy. But, according to many, until that point, this had only been true in certain cases, and only after spontaneous resistance developed in isolated workplaces.

And then came the social conflicts, accompanied by workplace occupations (which is hardly a common occurrence in Germany), supported by the structures of IG-Metall. This was the case, for example, during the occupation of the Henningsdorf steel plant and shipbuilding yards — occupations which spread to other workplaces.

However, it is in Berlin that a Collective of Workplace Councils first appeared which, acting independently, called publicly for a halt to the shutdowns. It also demanded that the Treuhand seek to 'upgrade' factories before privatising them, with protection for the workforce during the process of privatisation.

The innovative feature of this collective was that it brought together not only IG-Metall representatives, but also people from other unions. From the beginning, two things were clearly stated: the collective intended to remain independent from all parties, and requested that they all support its demands.

In no way did they want a split in the union, which could have created an 'Eastern union'. The collective underlined that unions would do well to base their activities directly on the experience of the workplace councils, which had already gone through all the ups and downs of illusion, hope and disillusionment with respect to their adversaries, in particular with respect to the Treuhand.

During its first congress, on June 20, 1992 in Berlin, the Collective drew up in an appeal the following evaluation of the Treuhand's activities: "Various adventurers, new and old cliques, real estate speculators and private investors of all stripes snatch up the tastiest morsels of the ex-GDR; and the Treuhand serves them dishes of a finely sliced and 'fat-free' workforce and they fill their pockets with tax subsidies — while all this goes on, thousands of working people, men and women, are condemned to unemployment, part-time work and retraining programmes, forced into early retirement, herded into ill-fated temporary workplaces and hassled by the demands of supposed 'former owners'. Desperately, workplace councils are trying to save those jobs which

still can be saved. Over the last few months, in Henningsdorf, Finow, Rostock, Riesa and many other places, the employees occupied their workplaces. Tens of thousands of people descended into the streets to protest the destruction of jobs. Now, we have to reflect, discuss, and better coordinate the struggle for the creation of jobs."

After listing the main demands, the text concluded, "It is only by exerting collective public pressure on political leaders that we can make ourselves heard and win our demands."

After this first meeting — which was well reported by the media and which had the support of the national union federation, the DGB, which, after some hesitation, provided a hall for the conference — the Collective contacted all the political parties in Bonn. In Bonn on September 9, with 300 workplace councillors, it organised a protest demonstration and met the parliamentary groups and Chancellor Kohl.

On the morning of this initiative, in Bonn, the Collective learned from the press that IG-Metall — to whom it had delivered all its publications and with whom it had even had friendly discussions within the Collective — was taking its distance.

Under pressure from IG-Metall, the DGB began to avoid giving direct support. During the October 1992 IG-Metall congress in Hamburg, the Collective addressed itself to the union through its magazine *Eastern Wind*, to make clear its goals. However, in his report, IG-Metall leader Franz Steinkuhler rejected all forms of support to the Collective, for fear of provoking a split.<sup>1</sup>

A second Collective meeting took place in Berlin on November 21, and on December 15 a protest march in front of the Treuhand gathered (according to police reports, 1,200 people), half of whom were members of workplace councils and workers' delegates from the Lander in the East and West Berlin.

It was in February that the 'revolt of the dwarfs' — the name given to the actions which broke out in West Mecklenburg-Pomerania. Actions followed in the steel industry in the East and West — with a 24-hour strike in the Hoesch-Krupp group's factories and, in March, a demonstration of 65,000 steelworkers in the north which marked a qualitative turn in the situation. The workers of the East and the West showed that they belonged to the same organization, IG-Metall, and that they could act together.

Under the name "Enough is enough! Northern Germany has awoken", a series of spectacular actions took place, displaying tremendous inventiveness. The locks of the North Baltic canal were shut down, a rally was organized in Pinneburg-Itzehoe, while

in Schwerin the steelworkers, men and women, blocked access to the regional parliament. In the port of Hamburg, IG-Metall and the ÖTV (the office workers union federation) organized a "scrap metal demonstration"; in West Mecklenburg-Pomerania, the railway bridge to Rügen Island was blocked.

The 60,000-strong demonstration in Bonn was characterised by the massive participation of metalworkers from the East and West. This pattern was seen again in the warning strikes which affected the whole country and caught union leaders off guard: the workers of the East are ready to strike, in spite of media claims to the contrary.

And even the heavy artillery, the DGB, entered into the fray. On April 24, 200,000 members from the whole spectrum of German unions participated in six demonstrations in solidarity with IG-Metall, four in the West and the two in the East in Potsdam and Leipzig. After the referenda on strike action in Saxony and the East German steel industry, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* newspaper had the audacity to write, "This does not come as a surprise to anyone. 90% of unionists [...] want a strike. IG-Metall is an organisation that works. It wants to show that it also has solid roots in the new Länder, as it did in the past."

Indeed, the unions' successes have forced their adversaries to swallow their past lies and tell the truth. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, like most of the media, did not previously believe in the unions' success and knew that IG-Metall, like the other unions, had lost hundreds of members in the East — since the unemployed do not see the interest in remaining organised, and the unions had lost credibility.

The current conflict, which is not only over wages but also political in nature, which concerns all working people and their organisations, should be able to count on the united action of all the member unions of the DGB. In the past, every union, sometimes even every factory, struggled and was defeated in isolation — a fact denounced by the Collective.

Today, hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake — and not only in steel, the mines and textiles, but also in automobiles and the mechanical industry. Only a united strategy of all the unions, only the collective mobilization of everyone, in the East and West, can have enduring results — and force the employers and the government to back down from their current policies. ★

1. The article was written before the resignation of Franz Steinkuhler as leader of IG-Metall, following revelations about his share dealing.

# The DSP and the elections

MUCH to people's surprise the Labor Party was returned to power in Federal elections in March. The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP), although small, ran the only substantial socialist campaign. At the beginning of May, Roland Wood spoke to John Percy, National Secretary of the DSP, about their election campaign and the projects in which they have been involved.

**INTERVIEW** — May 7, 1993

**W** *HAT was the motivation for the DSP standing its own candidates?*

*What kind of alliances was the Party hoping to build from the election campaign?*

This wasn't a new step for us. We haven't run in every election but we first ran back in 1975.<sup>1</sup> We would have preferred a broader, united campaign that was able to bring together different forces and parties to the left of Labor.

Unfortunately, this wasn't possible at this election despite the fact that some steps in this direction have been made in recent years. So the DSP helped organise the Democratic Socialist Electoral League campaign. Some of our members also stood as candidates for the Green Alliance and local green parties. There was a range of Green parties standing, varying from state to state.

We would have liked to have found a way of uniting the different green parties, the Democrats,<sup>2</sup> our own Democratic Socialist campaign and other socialist groups in a 'non-aggression' pact in certain areas. In some campaigns in the past we have had a broader alliance. For example, in a Brisbane local government election campaign we were part of a campaign that united the Democrats, green parties, the Socialist Party of Australia, and the DSP.<sup>3</sup>

Last year in the State elections in Victoria there was an attempt to get an alliance going. This was on the initiative of a part of the leadership of the State Public Services Federation, Senator Janet Powell, who had split from the Democrats and ourselves.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately this alliance didn't hold together. But these examples give an idea of the kind of alliance that we would have liked to have seen in the Federal election.

*Are the electoral alliances you have described and attempted to pursue a reflection of alliances that are being made on a day-to-day basis, away from electoral politics?*

No. There is not a united struggle in the labor movement. This is a real contrast to what has happened in New Zealand with the development of the NewLabour Party. They split from the traditional Labour Party in opposition to the monetarist policies that were being pursued by the Labour government. They have formed an Alliance with the Green Party, the Maori Party, the Democrats and Liberals. This Alliance receives between 25-40% in the polls.

There is no development in Australia of a similar nature, based on real struggles in the trade unions or the Labor Party. There are united actions on single issues but at the moment there is no ground swell towards a united electoral campaign. Nevertheless, when we've been able to put alliances together people have responded and generally the votes are higher for a united campaign than for parties running in their own right.

*What is the DSP's balance sheet of the election and its own campaign?*

Our balance sheet is this. Firstly, on the overall political level it was positive for the working class and other sectors of Australian society that the Liberals weren't victorious, that is that Labor got in. We should point out though, that the policies of the Liberals, although a little more extreme were not fundamentally different from Labor.

The Labor Party's victory was not the result of great enthusiasm — it was more a vote against the Liberals, specifi-

cally their promised Goods and Services Tax, and threatened attacks on the rights of unions and the health care system. Voters saw Labor as a lesser evil and nothing more than that.

Secondly, in terms of our own campaign. It was useful for putting forward our alternative platform. We were able to distribute large quantities of material and we were able to mobilise larger numbers of people in support of our campaign than previously. From a purely propaganda view it was an extremely successful campaign for us, and people have been joining the party as a result.

*The DSP was central to the launch of Green Left Weekly (GLW). The paper has made some impact, not only in Australia but internationally. What was the motivation behind the project?*

In Australia GLW is now seen as the alternative, progressive newspaper on the left. It has earned the respect of activists from a wide range of social movements and campaigns.

It began in 1991. In a small way it is a regroupment of individuals even though the DSP and Resistance are the organisations that guarantee its circulation and its success.<sup>5</sup> There are large number of sponsors, contributors and shareholders coming from different political currents.

During the course of the 1980s the DSP attempted to regroup with other forces; to build an alternative. In 1984 the Nuclear Disarmament Party was a potential break from the Labor Party that unfortunately didn't carry on. We also made attempts to unite broader forces through a social rights campaign with most of the left parties and left union

1. In 1975 the DSP was called the Socialist Workers Party (SWP)

2. The Democrats split from the Liberals, the main bourgeois party, in the 1970s. During the course of the 1980s, the Democrats have moved to the left of Labor, taking progressive positions on most social justice and labor movement issues.

3. The Socialist Party of Australia was formed in 1971 by people who left the Communist Party in opposition to the CP's criticism of Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

4. State Public Services Federation is the union for public sector workers at the state level.

5. Resistance is the youth organisation in solidarity with the DSP.

activists. We also attempted to unite with the euro-communist Communist Party of Australia in 1986-87. They pulled back from that and have now dissolved themselves and are no longer a factor on the scene.

Again, in 1988-89 we discussed unity with the pro-Moscow Socialist Party of Australia. We were able to reach agreement on many Australian questions but not on international issues. Everything came apart under the impact of Tiananmen Square. The campaign for a united Green Party has also, so far, been unsuccessful.

*GLW* came after these discussions and in a small way has managed to do what the potential regroupments should have been able to do, that is unite left forces, the different movements. Since *GLW* began it has played a role in providing a forum for other forces. For example, each year the different International Women's Day collectives in each city use *GLW* to put out a supplement.

Similarly, the campaigns in solidarity with Latin America and the Caribbean use *GLW* for distribution of their magazine, *Venceremos* and there have been supplements on Indonesian solidarity and Cuban solidarity. The Environmental Youth Alliance has also had supplements in *GLW*. Just recently a new paper, *Solidarity*, uniting trade union activists has appeared as a supplement in *GLW*. The paper has managed to pull people together at a difficult time for the left internationally.

Although its circulation is still limited in relation to what is needed, it has been able to expand, even to small towns where there are no DSP or Resistance branches. So it has been a bright spot on the left horizon in Australia.

***The DSP has over the last few years been extending its international contacts. Is this just a practical way of helping to improve international coverage in GLW or is their a specific project in mind? What kind of international movement would you like to see?***

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the regimes in Eastern Europe its been both a difficult time for the left and a time when there are possibilities for regrouping different elements of the left, in a sense refounding the socialist movement. At this stage we have got no organisational schemas. But we have



been trying to do a little bit, from far away in Australia, to get these different elements of the left in touch with other and collaborating around specific projects.

Obviously, *GLW* has been very useful in helping people to understand the new period and what is happening around the world. From the beginning we have had correspondents permanently based in Moscow, Prague and Western Europe. But a broader network of correspondents has developed around the world.

Some readers of *International Viewpoint* will be aware of the background of the DSP; that as the SWP we were members of the Fourth International up until 1985. We left the FI with the hope of broadening out our international contacts. We still wanted to retain comradesly relations with the FI and with sections of the FI but we saw the need to develop contacts with many other people who we saw as revolutionaries and people moving in a leftward direction.

*GLW* has helped that to some extent and we've developed close relations with people in the NewLabour Party in New Zealand, also with socialists in South East Asia, in the Philippines, Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

We also pay close attention to events in South Africa where the class struggle is accelerating. We have tried to improve relations between Australian socialists and the movements in South Africa, the ANC, the SACP and COSATU.

One of the ways we have helped build links between the Australian left

and movements overseas has been to organise conferences in Australia and bring out speakers and representatives of parties and currents of thought. In 1990 and 1991 we organised two very successful Socialist Scholars Conferences. Each of them was attended by about 1,000 people and had an impressive range of international speakers.

This broadened out the intellectual horizons of the Australian left, which certainly needs to be done. We are planning another conference for April 1-4, 1994. It will be billed as an International Green Left conference. We expect a similar attendance from Australia but an even greater attendance internationally, especially from the Asian and Pacific region.

We would like to have representatives from the Brazilian Workers Party, from the South African Communist Party, the left of the green parties in Europe, people from the Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) in Italy, the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in Germany and the Committees of Correspondence in the USA, people from the Fourth International and representatives from the New Zealand NewLabour Party.

Our aim is to bring people together from different trends and socialists from different origins so that we can have a real discussion and exchange of views. It will be a forum in which participants can discuss the next stage forward for the socialist movement in Australia, and internationally. ★

# Countryside triumphant

Having forgotten the Tiananmen spring — and the massacre — it's business as usual in a China open to the world of capitalism. Roland Lew examines the transformation taking place in Chinese society, a society characterised by both rapid change and deep-rooted traditions.

**ROLAND LEW\***

**O**NE cannot help but be surprised by urban China. One expects to find an urban scene paralysed after the tragic events of 1989, in the expectation of long-awaited political changes. One expects to find a frightened society; after all, the victors of 1989 — those responsible for the massacre — are still in power, including Prime Minister Li Peng whose term has just been renewed for another five years.

Instead, one discovers a freedom of activity and even often of expression of a population swept away by the economic boom (almost 20% industrial growth in 1992), engrossed in a passion for business matters, thirsting after consumer goods and determined to carry out its plans with, without or against the regime.

One expects to visit one of the last bastions of the 'socialist' state (a contradiction in terms which long ago ceased to surprise anyone). Instead, capitalism is visible at every turn and eagerly sought after in the most dynamic sectors of urban life.

This desire to build a Chinese capitalism barely hidden behind various turns of phrase (such as the 'socialist market economy', which has recently been written into the Constitution) has been on the order of the day since Deng Xiaoping launched an offensive at the beginning of 1992, given official blessing at the fourteenth Party congress in October 1992 and hammered home at the spring session of the National Assembly of the People.

And even those who were not naive about the real evolution of the country — those who know the difference between official pronouncements and reality — expect to find signs of an authoritarian state, of the state that sent in the tanks to crush the Tiananmen spring.

Instead, one finds many signs of a weak state. While there is a repressive system in place and the smothering of any open opposition, the state also suffers from a highly fragile authority in the social and economic fields. This is the

China of the 1990s: a country which still has to make decisive choices or at least openly consolidate those that have already been made.

Over the last year, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has on several occasions declared that the new orientation — towards the market — will be a policy valid for 100 years. However, nothing is certain given the fact that everything relies on the steps taken by an old man of nearly 90 years with no apparent successor.

The designated successor, Jiang Zemin, has amassed a host of positions which in principle should make him as powerful as Mao was in his moment of glory: secretary general of the CCP (Mao was president), president of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and president of the powerful military committee of the CCP. Nevertheless, the Chinese people are not impressed, aware as they are of the fact that he has much less power than Deng Xiaoping, a man who no longer occupies any official posts.

In 1993, urban Chinese are voracious consumers, dressing up in leather (often Chinese-made), on the look out for 'new look' entertainment from Japan and Hong Kong. More than this, they want to set up a small business to quickly improve their standard of living and, for the most successful, attain a purchasing power equivalent to the West or to Hong Kong — up to and including the ability to buy that rare and particularly expensive item, the automobile.

And they take this path with that much more energy given the fact that they are emerging from a long history of misery and face an uncertain future. The government is definitely weak, and seen as such, but experience has taught the Chinese to be wary of a possible return to the rule of the truncheon, big shifts in policy and arbitrary measures taken by the Party-state. The uncertainty has less to do with upcoming struggle over the succession of Deng Xiaoping than with the viability of the development currently underway and the continuation of current successes.

The vitality, dynamism and optimism of the Chinese prevent them from openly expressing these doubts to foreigners. China is changing but remains true to itself: aware that it is emerging from a level of underdevelopment which can be seen everywhere, in the city as in the countryside. Aware that it is a country where, as throughout its history, a few bad harvests can throw everything into doubt.

In China one now inhabits a universe which is torn between the desire to benefit from a boom which may prove to be short-lived and the need to guarantee solid foundations for family interests. No one in China knows, neither in the population nor in the highest reaches of the regimes, who will really take Deng Xiaoping's place — in what context and to do what, to carry out which change or impose (if this is possible!) which retreat.

People are not joking when they say they want a new 'emperor', authoritarian but not despotic. They want a leader who will go further in the direction of the current changes and who will satisfy the aspirations of the people. No one imagines that the people have something to say about a process which represents nothing less than leading the nation into a major turn in Chinese history.

This of course reflects the authoritarian turn in the political field unleashed by the brief yet severe repression in 1989. But it goes further still: city dwellers do not express the belief that China was, or is ready to go beyond anything more than a dictatorial regime. There is great scepticism regarding the possible success of democracy in this vast and complex country-continent (whereas people are conscious of the progress made in this direction on the island of Taiwan).

And there is a similar amount of scepticism regarding the democratic convictions of many of the dissidents from 1989. In a way, they are seen as being 'too Chinese' and too much products of the authoritarian experience of the PRC for them to be credited with genuine democratic aspirations.

Many people one comes across say that democracy is for later, when the people are more educated — unconsciously but sincerely repeating an old line of

\* Roland Lew has recently returned from a trip to China. His article originally appeared in two parts in the April 29 and May 6 issues of *Rouge*, weekly paper of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, French section of the Fourth International.

argument used on numerous occasions throughout the 20th century in China, whether by Guomindang nationalists or by Communists. Once again, one comes across a traditional China, whose old reflex to defend elites is very much present in the current upheavals.

The current period is a dramatic indicator of post-Maoist China. While it is exaggerated and highly illusory to think that today everything has been revealed, it is nonetheless the case that many things can be clearly distinguished. The passions of the day reveal some of the fundamental forces and traits of Chinese society as it has emerged from several decades under the Maoist regime.

The dynamism of urban society merely reveals the degree of the rural presence in the cities. There is first and foremost the large number of rural migrants in the cities: those urban layers who came from the countryside after 1949, classic products of the industrialization process.

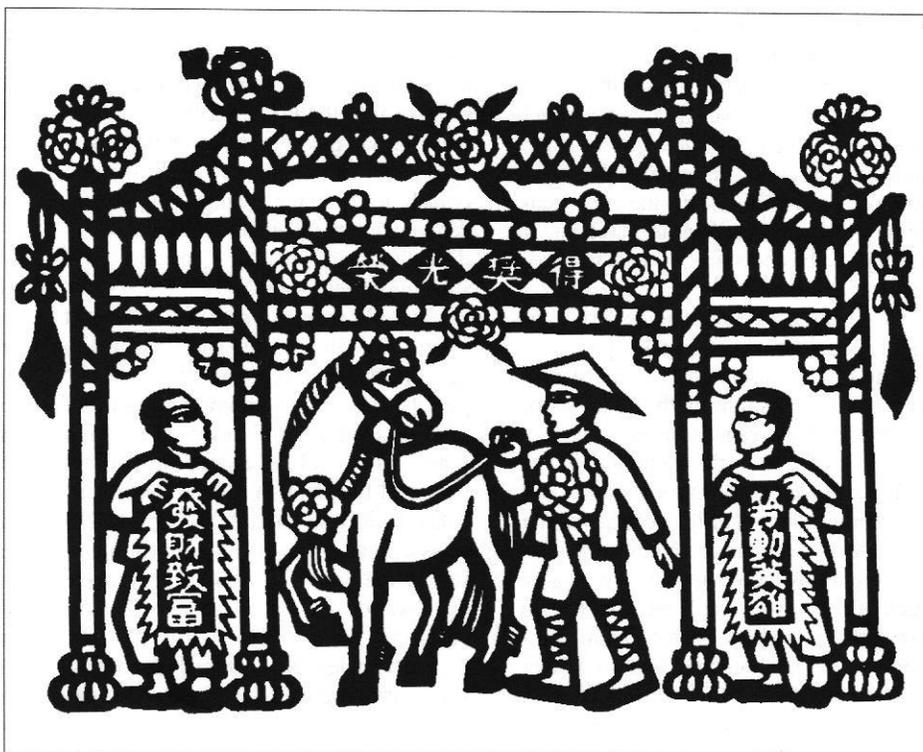
In China this goes further: the Chinese city — including the most city-like of Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai — has always been the countryside in the city. This striking reality, visible to all now that there is no longer a regime which closes the country to the world, has its negative and positive sides.

It is precisely because the rural world represents not only the huge majority of the country but also the greater part of the cities that the country has survived the bad medicine administered during the Maoist period and that its vitality can shine through today.

It is peasant characteristics and values which are behind the current successes. This carefree China which is moving at a lightning speed, ready to trade one economic system for another whatever the name, is a China rooted in a peasant world which has proved to everyone its incredible capacity for resistance.

This peasant world has shown itself ready to retreat when necessary, yet quick to rebound, to seize the opportunity and improve its lot — that of the family, the clan, and so forth — in at least a provisional manner, but really no more than that.

The peasantry's horizons remain narrow, both in the city and in the countryside. But they have displayed tremendous confidence, tremendous energy in their search for concrete and immediate solutions and great determination to seize the initiative and proceed without great sentimentality with an acute sense of what is possible at any given moment. This is how the peasant survived in the past — and the



history of the 19th and 20th century has been particularly dramatic for the peasantry.

The peasantry used the same values, the same qualities and the same schemes under the Maoist regime. The peasantry was favourable to the agrarian reform of 1950 which redistributed lands in the way they had wanted for a long time; and it was cautious but not entirely hostile to Mao's forced collectivization of 1955-56.

The disaster of the Great Leap Forward — the terrible economic reversals and the three years of famine which it provoked — and the poor results of two decades of collectivization led the peasants to place greater and greater pressures for a new orientation after Mao's death in 1976.

These pressures led to — against the advice of the regime but with its agreement — a rapid decollectivisation at the beginning of the 1980s and the de facto return of private family farms. The time for individual and clan rural initiative had arrived, with caution and attention given to mollifying local leaders — but nonetheless with great determination and unceasing work.

The flux towards the cities is all the more irresistible given that urban social life is not different in the main from that of the countryside.

The experience of the city since 1949 is clearly different from that of the countryside. On the one hand, the peasantry can only obtain that which is acquired through their work and that of their family — and by using all possible avenues, including the super-exploitation of other peasants.

On the other, at least until recently, the state system offered very little room for individual initiative — but it allowed for a peaceful life and provided for various advantages which city dwellers received (rather than won) during the Maoist period.

But for the past several years the urban scene has been subject to productivist pressures which do not guarantee the continuation of these advantages. As a result, the incidence of private initiative increased. Thus, city dwellers — like good urbanized peasants — were swept up by the passions of the day and have plunged into the joys of business, to get an immediate and tangible gain (today, not tomorrow) in its position.

It is striking to see the the enthusiasm of city dwellers who have decided to 'swallow' all that is on offer in the shops and the prosperous markets — taking advantage of all that can be eaten, put on one's body and placed in one's apartment to impress oneself and one's friends. There is a clear turning of backs to the misery of rural life and the suffering of the past in this eagerness and readiness to consume as if everyone — however one may want to describe this people which is optimistic in its discourse, not inclined to be depressed and very suspicious about others, and not only foreigners — is living in uncertainty about the present, and even more so about the future.

These characteristics of the peasantry — of a rural world still present in the cities — can be easily found among those who would be insulted were they to be pointed

out to them. And this is especially true among a number of urban intellectuals.

However, one need only see their refusal to participate in even a slightly abstract discussion which does not involve some concrete concern or immediate advantage. And one need only observe the great exaltation that possesses them in questions of setting up a business or some concrete project.

I saw high-level academics very excitedly discussing a banal, routine project of setting up an automobile service station through their institute with the hopes of increasing their meagre salaries.

This is far from the traditional image of the intellectual, of the mandarins and their ancestral disdain for commerce and business — a disdain shared by a tradition of Communist activism but now beaten back by the drive towards business (or the exploitation of others' business) now common among CCP cadres, less so among women cadres but their turn will soon come. And these cadres are often themselves the children or grandchildren of peasants.

This fact of rural life in the city reminds us of the Soviet case. The historian Moshe Lewin has shown in a convincing way that one can't understand Soviet society of the 1930s without taking into consideration the ruralisation of the cities

caused by the influx of peasants. This ruralisation of the cities outweighed the urbanization of these peasants forcefully brought into the urban centres — a fact which had major importance on the Soviet system, on the realities of Stalinism (which, for example, manipulated popular demonology to full effect) and for the very difficult task of creating a specific urban space in Soviet society.

The same thing goes for Communist China. The Chinese peasantry has had to bear the weight of economic development, paid the price for the arbitrary measures of various leaders, and suffered through Mao's whimsical twists and turns. It has managed to maintain a continuity of its values (which is not at all self-evident in Russia), and in its way to contribute to saving the country as much in wartime (civil war or war against an invader) as in peacetime.

Nevertheless, there should be no glossing over the price China has had to pay for this: the fragility of any kind of urban "civility" (not to say civilization) and the absence of an autonomous urban world. In other words, a long-standing characteristic of Chinese society continues to be felt: the low autonomy of the urban social space and the lack of a specifically urban area separate from both the countryside and the attractive and remunerative powers of the

regime.

What the Chinese city still reflects today are the continuing problems associated with tearing a city away from its peasant origins and the building of a specifically urban universe with its own values and patterns of social behaviour.

The cities have taken the lead in the economic changes, taking on the 1980s dynamism of the countryside. But they do not play a leadership role in the forging of a new political and social orientation. This is quite striking in cities like Beijing and Shanghai — especially in Shanghai, a city proud of the prestige it has historically for being the bearer of innovation in China.

The rural weight in the cities, which is hardly restricted to China, explains the political retardation of Chinese society or, rather, the relative ease with which the Communist power has controlled an urban society which, however, grows more and more restless faced with an authoritarianism imposed by the Party-state of another age.

And this retardation has not been effaced since the explosion of spring 1989, which revealed the discontent of the students and of urban society — but also the unpreparedness of this same urban world to take up the challenge, to propose credible alternatives.

Indeed, the opposition was too weak due to its superficial roots in the changes which themselves are insufficiently embedded in the social landscape. And now this opposition has been swept away by the business madness.

The People's Republic of China has lived through a kind of paradox of the separation and non-separation of the city and the countryside. The social world is no longer clearly separated — above all, the city no longer has a role of its own and cannot play the part of stimulating social and political changes.

But the city is economically separated from the countryside; it can even be said that it was protected by a kind of *cordon sanitaire* from peasant intrusion, and has preserved up to this day privileges denied to the peasant majority — with the argument that the country was too poor to generalize social security, education and other public programmes.

This separation, codified with the famous Hukou (the city residence permit, currently less enforced), was vigorously defended by the Maoist regime. It obscured family ties, the social continuity between the city and the countryside — and the undeclared victory of rural China.★



# Independent at last

**There can be no doubt about the popular support that exists for independence. In the referendum on self-determination of April 23-25, more than 90% voted in favour of an independent Eritrea. International observers, present during the poll, confirmed that voting had been fair. The Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF), which led the struggle for independence, is in charge of the government in Asmara and clearly has an enormous reserve of support.**

**FRANÇOIS CAZALS — May 24, 1993**

**T**HE referendum was the culminating point of one of the longest armed national liberation struggles in Africa. But Eritrean independence, officially proclaimed during ceremonies on May 24, has been a reality since the occupation of the Eritrean capital Asmara, in May 1991, by EPLF forces, at the same time that the regime of President Mengistu Haile Mariam was overthrown in Ethiopia.

The independence of Eritrea closes a previously incomplete chapter of decolonisation in the region. A former Italian colony, dating from the time that Africa was divided up between the various colonial powers, Eritrea was taken from the Italians in 1941 after their defeat at the hands of the British in East Africa.

Britain held onto the territory until 1952. While the Western powers managed to come to an agreement on the fate of the other former Italian colonies in the region — giving Libya and Somalia their independence — they couldn't do so for Eritrea, whose strategic position made it an object of great inter-imperialist wrangling. The American government set up a radio station near Asmara with the permission of the British, a station which later became the famous Kagnew listening station.

To find an acceptable solution for the big Western powers, the question of Eritrea's status was brought before the United Nations. But it was Washington's views which prevailed. The United States got along well with Haile Selassie's regime in Ethiopia, to which it gave military aid. They presented a motion before the UN to federate Eritrea with Ethiopia, a resolution passed in 1952. This was nothing more than the placing of Eritrea under Ethiopian tutelage with the support of the Americans. And in 1962, Haile Selassie unilaterally violated

the UN resolution by carrying out an annexation of Eritrea, which he made Ethiopia's fourteenth province. In exchange for their diplomatic role in the annexation, the United States is given its listening station near Asmara.

The birth of the Eritrean liberation movement and the beginning of the armed struggle against Ethiopian domination date from the time of the annexation. The armed struggle broke out in the west of the country in 1961 under the leadership of the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF).

This movement had been created earlier that year in Cairo by young Muslims who had emerged from the traditional political parties. The religious and ethnic diversity of Eritrea as well as its social stratification — relatively developed for the region at that time — formed the bases upon which the conflicts which soon struck nationalist ranks.

The leaders of the ELF, who found allies and friends in the Arab governments of the region, are largely Muslim. The religious character of the ELF developed to such a point that it became an obstacle to its growth among the Christian population in the central plains, the region with the greatest industrial potential. At the same time, the highly hierarchical internal regime of the ELF heightened the internal crisis, leading to a split into a number of rival factions.

After a series of twists and turns in the situation, the Popular Forces for the Liberation of Eritrea (PFLE) was born in 1972, which then gave birth to the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), now in power in Asmara.

This evolution reflected a political radicalisation of the nationalist movement. Many young ELF militants who studied in Beijing and Havana played a central role in

this process, including the current general secretary of the EPLF, Issayas Afewerki. These militants were largely Christian and were raised in the pro-Soviet school of Marxism.

When this generation arrived at the head of the Eritrean national movement, the struggle for independence took on its own dynamics and broke from the previous ELF pattern of being manipulated by its Arab sponsors.

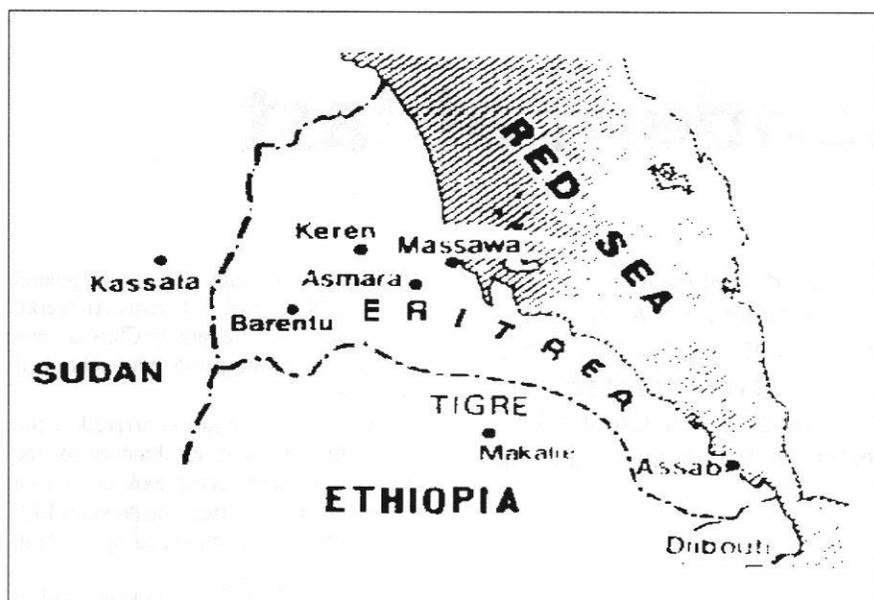
For the EPLF, independence had to have a democratic and anti-feudal character. EPLF militants struck roots in the heart of the Eritrean population, the degree of their implantation changing from region to region, by seeking to always take up certain of the people's elementary social needs — the building of schools and rural hospitals. Propaganda in favour of agrarian reform seems to have played a key role in the EPLF's subsequent preponderance over the rival factions of the ELF.

But the originality of the Eritrean national movement has to do with the religious and ethnic differences of Eritrean society itself. To begin with, this was the source of a fierce competition between the EPLF and the ELF which spanned several years and even produced armed confrontations.

This 'war within the war' lasted 11 years, and the EPLF took the military and political upper hand in the early 1980s. Several Arab states then tried to continue their support to certain factions of the ELF, but this only involved limited activities in the diaspora and in certain Eritrean refugee camps in Sudan. The Ethiopian authorities tried on several occasions to take advantage of these divisions; nevertheless, it was the Eritrean armed struggle which ended up undermining several governments in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital.

As such, the 1974 Ethiopian democratic revolution which overthrew the feudal regime of Emperor Haile Selassie was sparked by a mutiny of Ethiopian troops stationed in Asmara. However, the new military team around President Mengistu, in power after 1974, carried on the expansionist ideology of the previous regime.

The refusal of the Eritreans' (as well as the Tigreans' and the Oromo's) right to self-determination is a central component of the imperial ideology which characterises the nationalism of the Amhara elite, then in power in Addis Ababa.



It is very revealing that the reflex of the insurrectional forces of 1974 was to release Ethiopian prisoners from the jails while refusing to do the same for the imprisoned Eritrean nationalists. Even before the dictatorial Bonapartist regime of President Mengistu clearly demonstrated its contempt for the Ethiopian masses, its reactionary character in relation to the aspirations of the Eritrean people was clear enough.

As a consequence, Eritrean fighters decided to continue their armed struggle. The attitude of the Mengistu regime on the Eritrean question was a decisive test of its true nature, which was confirmed in the following years.

The Somalia-Ethiopia war of 1977 provoked a diplomatic realignment of the superpowers in the Horn of Africa — a realignment which heightened the international isolation of Eritrean nationalists.

Before 1977, they had been supported by the USSR and Cuba, as had been the supposedly “socialist” Somali dictator Siad Barre. But when Somalia attacked Ethiopia to capture the Ogaden region, Washington supported Somalia whereas the USSR supported Ethiopia.

Soviet experts were expelled from Somalia, and replaced by US Marines who set up a base at Berbera. The Eastern Bloc provided elite units, officers and arms to the Ethiopian president in his war against Siad Barre. But once the war in Ogaden was over, Mengistu turned his forces against Eritrean independence forces. Indeed, the Eritreans had made headway, and by October 1977 they had liberated a large part of their country, including the main cities. All that remained was the capital and four other garrisons.

The Ethiopian army was on the verge of defeat. In the beginning of 1978, the EPLF controlled 85% of the countryside, encircled

the Ethiopian garrisons and controlled the road between Asmara and the port of Massawa. But the first major military offensive of the EPLF in 1977-78 was halted at Massawa with the massive arrival of arms and the involvement of Soviet military advisers. Soviet aid prevented Eritrean victory.

For their part, the Cubans, while taking their distance from the EPLF’s struggle, refused to participate in battles against the Eritreans in the north. Havana felt that it was an internal Ethiopian matter. But the Cuban press continued to praise Mengistu, including for his military “successes” in Eritrea; and the Cuban military continued its aid to the Ethiopian army on the southern front with Somalia.

The EPLF was forced to retreat. Its soldiers left newly occupied regions and dug in their heels in regions long under their control, in the west and north of the country. Lined up along the Sudanese border, they resisted several Ethiopian military offensives, including Operation Red Star, personally led by Mengistu himself in 1988.

The Ethiopian peasantry, who in large measure make up Mengistu’s army, paid a high price for the blindness of their leaders and their Soviet allies. Hundreds of thousands of Ethiopian soldiers, often lacking motivation and unprepared, perished in Eritrea. According to Ethiopian Army figures, between 150 and 200 thousand troops were lost from 1978 to 1984. Clearly, the Eritrean people also paid heavily for this murderous adventure.

But successive Ethiopian offensives did not manage to crush the Eritrean resistance. Soon the EPLF regained the initiative and went on the offensive, and in 1982-83 recaptured lost territory. The Eritrean side was bolstered by the fact that the Eritrean civil war came to a definite end in 1981 when the EPLF dispersed ELF forces who

had maintained an active presence in the rural zones of the west of the country, a region with a Muslim majority.

At the same time, the EPLF helped the Ethiopian rebellion against the Mengistu regime in Tigre, a province neighbouring Eritrea. The EPLF collaborated with the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) — previously pro-Albanian and now defenders of a neo-liberal orientation — which has been in power in Addis Ababa since May 1991.

In 1989, the command of the second Ethiopian army, surrounded for months in Asmara by the EPLF, wanted to negotiate a separate peace with the Eritrean rebels. This, in any case, was the accusation made by Mengistu when he tried and then executed 12 superior officers. This decapitation of a section of the Ethiopian military command contributed greatly to Mengistu’s isolation even within the country’s military hierarchy, his only source of support.

After the collapse of the Mengistu regime in May 1991, the new Ethiopian government, made up of former comrades in arms of the EPLF, understood that the only way to put an end to the war in Eritrea was to accept the inevitability of independence, even if this meant that Ethiopia would lose its coastal territory.

The new authorities in Addis Ababa really had no other choice, given the strength of the Eritrean army which had occupied the whole of Eritrea. The leadership of the EPLF set up a provisional government in Asmara and new trade agreements were made with the new Ethiopian government — in order to ensure the passage of Ethiopian merchandise through the Eritrean port of Assab and to determine the conditions of Ethiopia’s use of the refinery at Assab.

The provisional Eritrean government is totally dominated by the EPLF, whose leaders have maintained their rather ascetic living habits and a secret and rigid internal functioning, conditioned by their military traditions. Ministers are not paid and don’t enjoy any great comforts. Their soldiers have not yet been demobilized, and are working on reconstruction projects. Signs of social differentiation within the leadership of the EPLF have not yet appeared.

The country is small and does not have any great resources apart from oil, for which there is an ongoing search in the Red Sea. The greater part of the Eritrean industrial apparatus, developed in the 1950s and 1960s, has since disappeared — dismantled and taken back to Ethiopia or destroyed during the war. There will be great difficulty in sparking an economic revival, and the reintegration of hundreds of thousands of exiles will be a formidable task. Even if the new government does not face any embargo

from Western countries, it has already fallen prey to the economic and financial intervention of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

The first victorious national liberation struggle since the fall of the Berlin Wall, independent Eritrea must face a new international situation characterised by the end of the East-West conflict. Just ten years ago, given the prevailing circumstances of the time, the emergence of the new Eritrean state would have quickly become an international issue given its strategic position on the Red Sea.

Today, the event has almost passed unnoticed. However, the stakes of Eritrean independence are not negligible and go well beyond the borders of this new small African state. To be sure, Eritrean independence will not alter the global relationship of forces, but it is going to provoke a redistribution of diplomatic cards in the region. This is due not only to the country's location in the Horn of Africa, where the EPLF's army of 100 thousand men makes it one of the most powerful military forces in the region — but also due to its relationship with the Arab world.

On the diplomatic level, the leadership of the EPLF is ready to pursue a policy of 'realpolitik' which would reassure Washington. It is for this reason that Asmara has already responded positively to Israel's diplomatic advances — while at the same time maintaining good relations with fundamentalist Sudan.

The diplomatic and economic rapprochement between Tel Aviv and Asmara has greatly displeased Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, which has recently expelled EPLF representatives. And this in spite of the fact that the Eritreans have taken care to announce that they will not undertake any military cooperation with Israel nor allow any foreign bases onto their soil.

Eritrea, like Ethiopia, is a country inhabited by Christians — a religious community on which Israel hopes to rely in its struggle to ensure that "the Red Sea does not become an Arab lake". The same geo-strategic reasons which led Israel to aid Mengistu's Ethiopian regime now propel its leaders into discussions with the majority Christian leaders of the EPLF.

Internally, the EPLF undeniably enjoys popular support. Most of the ELF factions have come around to support it, except one which is active in the Eritrean diaspora in Europe. The small fundamentalist group, the Eritrean Jihad, only has roots among certain refugees in Sudan and has not yet managed to make any significant inroads into the Muslim populations in the west of the country.

Nevertheless, there is reason to fear that

the EPLF's militarist tradition and its rather intolerant approach to internal debate have not prepared its leadership to manage a pluralistic political system. Their conversion to economic liberalism does not imply an immediate abandonment of certain anti-democratic practices. In this area, their ability to establish good relations with the Afars and Dankalie peoples along the Red Sea coast will be a decisive test.

For the moment, Asmara's leaders have promised multi-partyism and democratic elections. But the president of the provisional government, Issayas Afewerki, has said that this will not be for several years. Yet between now and then important debates on questions of orientation — such as agrarian reform, industrial development, privatisation and regional political representation — merit the greatest possible freedom of preliminary discussion.

The major part of the stakes in independent Eritrea are in the socio-economic field. The EPLF leadership is aware of this and has refused, for the moment, to implement the wish list of the United States in the area of economic reforms — even though Washington conditioned its aid on the creation of a liberal regime for the private sector and foreign investors.

While accepting the capitalist model, the EPLF leaders want to give the state some kind of economic role and hope to proceed cautiously with the question of property. A total liberalisation of the economy would have deep-going social repercussions, leading particularly to the concentration of the best lands and companies in the hands of the wealthiest layers — which probably means Christians from the diaspora who have accumulated their capital abroad.

The political cost of such an orientation for the EPLF would be very high. The Muslim populations in the west of the country, who in the past were the base of Eritrean movements opposed to the EPLF, would react quickly to anything which appeared to be creating a 'new bourgeoisie' in the highlands. And certain political groups hostile to the EPLF are on the lookout for this kind of development to revive their opposition heavily tainted by Islamic fundamentalism.

Independence does not have the same



Issayas Afewerki

meaning for the whole Eritrean people. In the rural and pastoral areas of the lowlands, the mainly Muslim population are waiting to see if the new authorities will improve their lives and help to reintegrate the hundreds of thousands of refugees returning from Sudan.

On the Red Sea coast, the Afars, whose irredentism is currently dormant, will judge the EPLF based on the degree of commercial and administrative autonomy it allots them, and based on its attitude towards the Afars rebellion of the Front for the Restoration of Unity and Democracy (FRUD) in neighbouring Djibouti.

As opposed to what newly independent countries like Angola and Mozambique had to endure, Eritrea is not the target of Western ostracism and attacks. The referendum on self-determination did not take place before the World Bank and a pool of donors set up a programme of economic restructuring of more than \$100m.

Clearly, this aid is not free. The price to pay is the acceptance of a programme of economic liberalisation as prescribed by the technocrats of the IMF and World Bank — whose consequences will be accelerated social stratification in Eritrea.

Eritrea's ability to resist these pressures is very limited. For now, its resistance has been limited to slowing the rhythm of the privatisation of enterprises nationalised by the previous regime, maintaining certain price controls to avoid an inflationary spiral, and pursuing property reform in a very prudent manner.

But even when taken in small doses, the potions of liberalism can still be very bitter indeed. ★

# 1939 revisited

THE first Yugoslavia collapsed in 1941, two years after the de facto partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina between the Croats and the Serbs. The second Yugoslavia officially ceased to exist in January 1992 (with the recognition of Croatia and Slovenia), one year after the first Serbo-Croat discussions about the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

**PHILIPPE KOULISHER \***

**W**HO remembers? In March 1991, when the war with Slovenia (in June) was still far off and when the representatives of the six republics were pretending to look for a new agreement, under the pressure of a more and more intransigent Serbia, Messrs Milosevic and Tudjman met for the first time as virtual 'heads of state', somewhere in Vojvodina, in an old hunting lodge belonging to Marshall Tito at Karadjordjevo.

This meeting, held in secret, was only for those who wanted it to remain so. In fact the Serb and Croat Presidents hit upon the key problem in the disintegration of Yugoslavia, which each of them knew was absolutely inevitable: the geo political status of Bosnia. In Zagreb, as in Belgrade, everyone knew that war would break out between Serbia and Croatia. Milosevic played at being the one "who could hold back the humiliated Serbian people" and the federal army, whilst Tudjman, an old military man, understood that he could obtain independence only at the cost of a defensive war against Serbia, the only way to disengage from the Yugoslav yoke.

But these important considerations mean little to the two politicians. Pencils in hand, a map on the table, they draw and redraw the frontiers and dividing lines along the Drina, the Sava, the Neretva, the Bosna. The big question is still: who will have the right to what in the future Bosnia-Herzegovina (a sovereign member of the United Nations)? Concretely, little is known about

## *The bitter fruits of 'Realpolitik'*

The 'international community', as it is called, must now face the impasse of its policy of 'Realpolitik'. The Vance-Owen plan essentially adheres to the logic of territorial dismemberment in Bosnia-Herzegovina along ethnic lines. It ratifies the conduct of the warlords.

From this point of view, the Vance-Owen plan is a 'Serbo-Croat' plan, as described by Philippe Koulischer. Organiser of a Geneva association in defence of Bosnians (*Mirna Bosna*, a Bosnian expression of peace and friendship), he has amassed evidence on the consequences of ethnic cleansing, based on numerous investigations in the region. And the ethnic cleansing is far from over.

On the Croatian side, on July 3, 1992 Mate Boban proclaimed the "Croatian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina", called Herceg-Bosna, with its own flag, its own militias (the HVO, subordinate to Franco Tudjman's party), its own currency — and attached to Croatia. It includes towns with a Muslim majority. For months now, it has refused to take in Muslim refugees and blocked arms destined for Sarajevo — in keeping with the logic of dismemberment.

On the Serb side, the territories have not yet been united and attached to Serbia — unlike Herceg-Bosna. However, they have been 'cleansed' of their most recalcitrant elements. The Serb 'referendum' displayed the determination of that part of the Bosnia-Herzegovina population to join Serbia — in a climate of war where neighbours are set against one another through the invocation of the memory of past violence, the result was a foregone conclusion.

Like Philippe Koulischer, Tihomir Loza, a journalist at the Sarajevo-based newspaper *Oslobodjenje*, sees in the Vance-Owen plan a replica of the 1939 agreement on territorial division agreed by the Serbian government and Croat nationalists.

But as he points out, "unlike 1939, the Muslims cannot be ignored". And this explains the ambiguities of the Vance-Owen plan, which perpetuated the myth of provinces where one ethnic group 'predominated' (as opposed to homogeneous provinces), within a single state of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

But if we accept the idea that territorial separation provides protection, and that it is no longer possible to live together, inevitably three 'ethnic states' will be built — more specifically, a greater Serbia, a greater Croatia and a Muslim 'reserve', bound together on a small territory, with every reason to become fundamentalist in nature.

The only alternative is the demilitarisation of Herceg-Bosna and Karadzic's self-proclaimed Serbian republic — within the framework of a new union with Serbia and Croatia. This would allow the Bosnian provinces to remain multi-ethnic and the UN troops to withdraw. — Catherine Samary ★

the steps suggested at the time. But the essential point remains: the two leaders of the most powerful federal republics are, from that moment, agreed on three basic principles:

- Bosnia-Herzegovina will be divided up between Serbs and Croats.

- There will never be a really independent Bosnia, in the same way as there will never be an 'Islamic State' in Europe.

- Bosnia will serve as a bargaining counter when it becomes necessary to regulate Serbo-Croat differences, which are bound to arise.

Free with his declarations because he has a better image, Franco Tudjman never

misses an opportunity to recall, in an explicit or implicit way, these grand ideas. On August 17, 1992, he affirmed in *Time Magazine* that the most serious danger driving the Yugoslav crisis is that of seeing the creation of an 'Islamic Republic' in Bosnia.

He argued that the only way to prevent that is to leave only a small nucleus of territory to the Muslims. On 16 December, 1992, during a press conference in Chicago, he took an even harder line: "I don't believe the West

\* This article first appeared in the Swiss publication *Mirna Bosna*, no. 2, March 1993. Some alterations to the original have been made by the author himself for publication in *International Viewpoint*.

would tolerate the idea of an Islamic state in Bosnia”.

Meanwhile common projects took shape. In December 1991, in Graz, the servants of Tudjman and Milosevic, Messrs Boban and Karadzic met and worked out the details of the division: at the time, the Serbian aggression in Croatia was about to come to an end, Vukovar had fallen, a third of the republic was occupied. More than ever Bosnia became an indispensable basis for negotiations to resolve Serbo-Croatian problems.

This was confirmed by a further meeting in May 1992 which was preceded by an accord, signed (again at Graz) on 27 April by Karadzic and Boban, concerning the main lines of demarcation. While the war was raging in the condemned republic, the secret policies of the two leaders bore fruit in the summer, when discussions began at the Peace Conference and there was no longer any doubt that Bosnia-Herzegovina would never arise again.

On September 30, in Geneva, Tudjman and ‘Yugoslav’ President Cosic, came to an agreement denouncing ‘ethnic cleansing’, but, more importantly, on the return to Croatia of the military peninsular of Prevlaka, to the south of Dubrovnik.

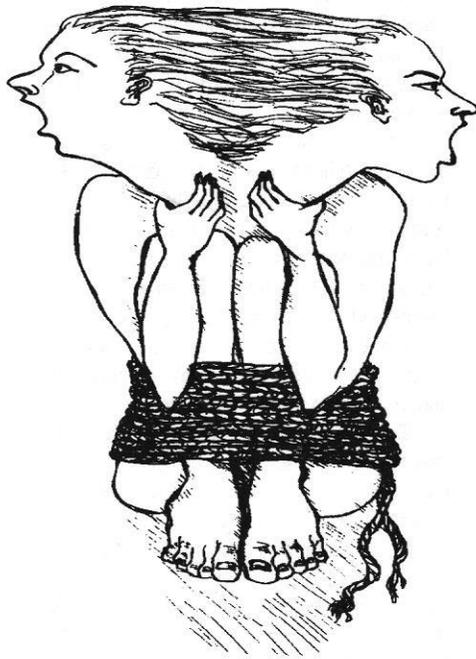
A few days later the town of Jace, defended by the Muslims, fell like a ripe fruit into the ‘Serbian Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina’; a series of unexpected events prevented Croatian forces from coming to the aid of the besieged town and replenishing the Bosnian Army with munitions. Curiously, neither Serbs nor Croats saw anything inconvenient when, in January, the Vance-Owen plan included Jace in the Croatian zone.

This was not, moreover, a new scenario; in September the town of Bosanski Brod saw, in an identical manner, a division of the para-military HVO (Bosnian Croatian forces) leave the area at the decisive moment and literally allow the town to fall into Serbian hands. This division, the Handzar-Divizija, was just a replica of the infamous SS division of the same name which had been created by the Germans with the help of the Ustashe. A model ‘quisling’ division the Handzar-Divizija led by the execrable Ekrem Mandal simply returned to Croatia, where it whiles away its days peacefully.

By the purest of coincidences, Mandal is an honorary President of the Democratic Muslim Party of Croatia, whose strident appeals to the Bosnian Muslims are echoes of those of the HDZ (Tudjman’s party). “Muslims! It is a lie to say that if you declare yourselves Croats you will lose your faith. Return to reason!”, declared its President Mirsad Birksic during the Croat-Muslim conflicts in January 1993 (*Domovina*, Janua-

ry 1993). Bosanski Brod will also return to the Croatian zone under the Vance-Owen plan.

The whole of the north/north east region of Bosnia (called Posavina) will also return to Croatia even though, in spring 1992, Serbian forces carried out terrible massacres in the concentration camps Brcko (4-7,000 deaths) and Bosanski Samac — some of whom were Croats. These Croats were deliberately sacrificed for the policies of ethnic division promoted by Tudjman and Milosevic, along with others in the districts of Prijedor, Sanski Most, Dobojo and Bosanska Dubica.



The intentions of these two map-drawers are clear: each designated zone must be as ethnically homogeneous as possible. If necessary, Croatia and Serbia are determined to ‘release’ populations to the enemy, whether it is a reciprocal arrangement involving Serbs and Croats or the Muslims. (The Serbs have allowed several zones in the ‘frontier’ regions of Tuzia, Konjic and Bihac to fall, even though this was by no means an inevitable outcome.)

Whatever, as *War Report* (Auckland St., London) asserted in January, “There is hardly any doubt that Posavina was the object of special negotiations between Serbs and Croats”.

Moreover, particular negotiations have taken place behind the backs of the Muslims on the thorny question of the Sarajevo region. According to the same publication (November/December 1992), “fighting between Croats and Serbs have been noticeably absent from the region of Kiseljak and Hadzici, and particularly in the out-posts of Sarajevo where the Muslims were expecting the

Croats to continue their attack on the capital. But the Croats stopped, even establishing customs relations with the Serbs, whilst Croat-Muslim conflicts increased in tension”.

For the dynamic set in train by the project of Serbian-Croatian ethnic partition has been inexorably continued since the rapprochement of September 1992. The schema is, nevertheless, clear: every new resolution of a Serbo-Croatian conflict implies a new defeat for the Muslims. This was so in January 1993 when Croatia recovered a new peace of its territory occupied by the Serbs during the ‘Operation Maslencia’.

Carried out with the full agreement of Belgrade, this Croatian reconquest took place at the very moment when Serbian pressure was greatly reduced to the north of Tavnik (keystone of the ‘unified’ Croat-Muslim defence) which allowed units of the HVO to carry out ‘cleansing’ (primarily military, but also civilian) in the regions of Gornji Vakuf, Bugejno and Prozor with their overwhelmingly Muslim population. These are all regions which are to be returned to Croatia under the Vance-Owen plan which, as we know, leaves 26% of Bosnian territory to its more than 45% Muslims.

In 1939, the Macek-Cvetkovic accord anticipated the participation of Bosnia through the means of its division into three banovina (‘principalities’), of which two would be returned to Serbia and the third would fuse with the rest of the Croat lands.

It is astonishing and revealing to compare this partition with that proposed in January 1993.

Clearly, the Croatia provinces of 1993 recoup exactly the banovina of 1939. There is no doubt that the terms of the accords between Serbs and Croats, especially the April 1992 ‘pact’, envisaged the restoration of the system created 50 years earlier. Certainly, for the Serbian side, the Vance-Owen plan does not does not completely return the two banovina of the first Yugoslavia; but it is the weight of accomplished fact which remains determinant.

For half the zones ascribed to the Muslims they currently find themselves under Serbian control and it is highly improbable that Karadzic would agree to their return, especially if one bears in mind the events of February/March 1993 in the east of the republic when the Serbs — with the help, voluntary or not, of the UN forces and the American parachute drops — proceeded with new ‘cleansing’ of the Bosnian pockets of resistance (Cerska and Srebrenica especially).

It is glaringly obvious that, with the exception of the residual Muslim zone in the centre and around the city of Sarajevo, the map hardly differs from that of 1939. The only striking differences concern the restitu-



tion to Croatia of Posavina and the region to the north of Travnik.

It is important to remember that all the confrontations between Croats and Muslims have taken place in the regions that are to be returned to Croatia under the Geneva plan (Prozor, Travnik, Vietz, Busovaca, Jablanica, Konjic) in which the Muslims are the most numerous, and that the administrative centre of province No. 10 is supposed to be the town of Gornji Vakuf, where the conflict between the HVO and the Bosnian army has been the most violent.

It is not a question of implicating the Croats, whatever the effects of their Realpolitik. It remains the case that the extermination/deportation of the Muslims has, up till now, been the preserve of the Serbians, with one or two exceptions (Prozor, Novi Travnik and Mostar).

It is merely a question of being aware that the partition of Bosnia-Herzegovina has been implicit in the relations between the two neighbouring republics for more than two years, in any case, (and no doubt for longer) and that it is simply a replica of what happened previously with the collapse of the first Yugoslavia. One can even ask to what extent the Tadjman-Milosevic accord, ratified by the meeting of Boban-Karadzic in April 1992, had been anticipated for a long time, down to the smallest details, always with the aim of leaving the Muslims the smallest possible part of Bosnia, making every zone as ethnically homogeneous as possible and preventing any Bosnian attempt to create a sovereign state, whether Islamic or not. We just have to look at other maps, those of the 'UNPA' zones or under the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) mandate in Croatia, which have recovered, as we know, exactly the Serbian annexations of 1991. The merest glance convinces us of a significant fact: above everything else these zones totally isolate Bosnia from Croatia on more than half of their common borders.

What is most striking is that one sees that the western border is entirely in the hands of the Serbs or/and under the control of the UN as far as the town of Drnis (and

even further since the UNPROFOR is stationed to the south of this town covering over 20 kilometers of what is called a 'pink zone'. Now it is exactly at the point where this ends that, on the Bosnian side, Croatian Herzegovina begins (a little to the south of Kupres) which skirts the border down to Nevesinje, where Serbian Herzegovina begins. In other terms, along more than 500 km of common borders the Muslims directly control less than 100 km along the Sava in the north. Now, as we have seen, the Sava region (Posavina) must be returned to the Croats and the fighting there makes passing from one republic to another extremely risky. We have to bear this in mind to understand two important elements:

- The destruction of the bridge between Bosanski Brod and Slavonski Brod in Summer 1992, which prevented the exit of refugees to Croatia, except by boat;

- The theoretical closing of the Croatian frontiers to Bosnian refugees on 13 July, 1992, at the very moment (3 July) of the proclamation of the 'State of Herceg-Bosna' by Mate Boban.

In this way the isolation of the peripheral zones of Bosnia (under Croat or Serb control) has been almost total since the end of the summer of 1992; the central zone can no longer really be supplied with arms and it will be the Croats and Serbs who will be in possession (at Split, Gornji Vakuf, Kiseljak, Zvornik) of the key humanitarian corridors. Around Sarajevo itself, it is also the forces of the HVO (to the south of Visoko and at Stupe) or the Chetniks (at Ilidza and Pale) who control entry to and exit from the capital. As for the airport, again in July, it has been under international control with the establishment of the "air bridge".

We should also recall that since December 1992, the Croats (military and civilian) have an unrestricted right to cross the Serbian positions at Ilidza whilst the Muslims can only try to beat an unrealistic path through the zone of Dobrinja, the focus of the 'sniper alley' which leads to the airport where UNPROFOR, in theory, prevents all traffic towards Butmir held by the Bosnians.

During spring 1993, the dynamic of the

tacit Serbo-Croat accord made itself clearer, even more urgent, and with a new dimension: that of the impeccable timing between the actions of the Chetniks in the east and those of the HVO in the west.

Thus whilst all the media controversy revolved around Srebrenica and its 'cleansing' facilitated by the UNPROFOR, Croat forces carried out new operations in the districts of Prozor and Jablanica, forcing over 3,000 people to flee and causing murderous outrages (nearly 300 victims on the Bosnian side).

Whilst the deportation of Muslims from Srebrenica was in full swing (with, among other catastrophes, the death during the journey of more than 20 people 'forgotten by' or 'fallen from' the UN vehicles, the HVO even tried a particularly audacious coup at the end of April: the bombardment, after Vitez, of the town of Zenica, up till then a sanctuary for the Muslim forces.

At the beginning of May, with Srebrenica fallen, the Serbs continued their offensive and 'cleansed' Zepa, the third enclave in the east (after Cerska and Srebrenica) to fall, with the total indifference of the UN 'observers' and the Security Council. The very same day the HVO launched a mass offensive against the city of Moslar, causing hundreds of Muslims to flee from their burning houses and then interning a thousand or so men of combat age in the municipal stadium (a method used by the Serbs at Zvornik, Bratunac, Bosanski Novi exactly a year earlier).

In future the Muslims will have to constantly face both ways and when they try to force a breach to the east they will automatically find themselves taken by surprise in the west.

Thus the margin for manoeuvre by the Bosnians is minimal: decimated by the Serbs, 'cleansed' from the Croat side, they were, however, forced to sign agreements on co-operation with the HVO and accept the plan proposed at Geneva. In effect the Croats hold all the trump cards: 275,000 muslim refugees in Croatia and 50,000 in Herzegovina are real hostages that Izetbegovic cannot afford to abandon. The Serbs, for their part, in closer collaboration with the international community, have, for the future, total latitude to make use of their best weapon: time.

And we should remember that it is in the best interests of everyone (that is the Croats, Serbs and the West) that Bosnia disappears as a sovereign state and that the minimum possible number of Muslims remain within the project of ethnic dismemberment defined at Geneva and which continues to be called the Vance-Owen plan even though it is purely and simply the plan of Tadjman-Milosevic, which is itself a slightly revised and corrected version of the Cvetkovic-Macek plan of 1939. ★

# High stakes in Brazzaville

**WHILE** the media spotlight has been focusing on the recent troubles in neighbouring Zaire, formerly 'Marxist-Leninist' Congo has been continuing its trip down the rocky road of a 'democratic transition' coupled with an IMF-inspired Structural Adjustment Plan. In the following article, Jean P.E. Mpélé, a leading member of the leftwing *La Cause* group, looks into the background of current developments, examines the problems faced by the left and discusses the enduring presence of neo-colonialism in the region.

**JEAN P.E. MPÉLÉ** — Brazzaville, May 10, 1993

**T**HE democratization of Congo has produced some rather surprising results. In the end, the break with the past so desired by the Congolese people never took place. The current head of state, Pascal Lissouba, is a rather striking symbol of this fact.

In the elections of August 1992, the majority of voters chose Lissouba, who is hardly a newcomer to the political scene in Congo. He was elected with the National Alliance for Democracy (AND) coalition, in which his Pan African Union for Social Democracy (UPADS) party plays the dominant role.

In so doing, Lissouba completed his long ascent up the state hierarchy. After the mass insurrection of August 1963 which overthrew the openly neo-colonial government of President Fulbert Youlou, he became a minister and then the prime minister of the government headed by Alphonse Massamba Dbat.

After being dismissed from President Massamba Dbat's government in 1966 — the president found him too ambitious — he

was once again named minister in the Marien Ngouabi government which took power in the military coup d'état which overthrew Massamba Dbat and declared itself 'Marxist-Leninist'.

Along with many other countries, it established the bases for what would later be called the 'non-capitalist' path of development — through the construction of a strong state sector (creation of state enterprises, followed by the nationalization of certain private colonial enterprises).

In fact, the measures opened up a phase of primitive accumulation for the national capitalist class. Not having experienced any dynamic of capitalist development in the colonial period, the state had to play this role — a factor which, among others, helps explain the conflicts for control of the neo-colonial state power from independence until today.

Lissouba has been one of the main protagonists in these conflicts. It was during his prime ministership that three of his political 'competitors' were assassinated. This crime was perpetrated by him and carried out by elements of the Youth of the National Revolutionary Movement (JMNR) and forces from a neighbouring country.<sup>1</sup>

We should recall that the popular opposition to the neo-colonial and increasingly repressive government of General Denis Sassou Nguesso did not begin with the fall of the Berlin Wall or the Franco-African summit in La Baule.<sup>2</sup>

As in other African countries, it was the Structural Adjustment Plan (SAP) — promoted as a solution to the

social-economic crisis of the dependent countries — that propelled people to challenge the government.

It is often forgotten that it was high school students, in November 1985, that courageously demonstrated in Brazzaville against the implementation of competition for university grants, which had been freely given to those enrolled in the university. The measure was part of the SAP package that the government had to implement, and was considered highly unjust since it wasn't very difficult to identify the local forces responsible for the socio-economic crisis.

Colossal indebtedness, the bankruptcy of state enterprises and the failure of the 1982-1986 five-year plan was profitable for party-state dignitaries, their national entourage and their western partners — at the expense of the Congolese people.

The aggressive social measures concocted by the government, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank were continually rejected by the people. Structural adjustment was never fully applied. For the people, democratization meant and still means putting a halt to the deterioration of living conditions and improving them. The firing of office workers, early retirement packages, the lowering of salaries and the privatization of state enterprises were not accepted.

This is what explains the split of the Congolese Union Confederation from the Congolese Labour Party (PCT) in 1990. In the middle of the crisis, the Confederation was able to negotiate an improvement in the salary grid for public sector workers. It also exerted pressure for the convocation of the National Sovereignty Conference (CNS), held between February and June 1991.

Multipartyism was seen as a means and not the end of the democratization process. But the capitalist West waged an aggressive ideological campaign around the formula 'democracy = economic liberalism + multipartyism'. Congo, like Benin before it, was fertile ground for such an ideological fraud.

As such, while the CNS led to the acquisition of certain elementary rights and freedoms it also saw the establishment of an elite consensus in favour of pursuing the logic of exclusion and neo-colonial dependence.



1. The JMNR was the youth organisation of the single party, Massamba-Débat's MNR.

2. During the 16th annual Franco-African Conference in La Baule, France in June 1990, French President François Mitterrand said that aid would be conditioned on democratisation.

At the CNS, the analysis of the Congolese social formation was simplistic; the real causes of the current national malaise were not revealed. The majority of academics and state functionaries present held the same rather dull view: since 'Marxism-Leninism' was the official ideology and the state sector of the economy was large, Congolese society was socialist and not neo-colonial. Thus, they concluded, it was necessary to take the capitalist road. The economic programme for the transition period bore a strange resemblance to the SAP.

This path is, of course, highly beneficial to the state bureaucracy and the economic criminals of the single-party system — who can now enjoy the fruits of their ill-gotten wealth. Administrative layers rely on the cult of 'merit' to advance themselves even further.

It was assumed, of course, that the people had nothing to say about these matters. And there was no question of consulting them, especially given the flagrant contradiction between the hopes for social justice expressed by the people and the economic decisions of their 'representatives'. The CNS established a 'consensus' within the Congolese elite around the pursuit of neo-colonial dependence and the logic of social exclusion.

The stifling of dissent has been most efficient. With respect to the Constitution, in the March 1991 referendum the people were compelled to support the adoption of a ridiculous imitation of the Constitution of the Fifth French Republic, while the proposal for a democratic constituent assembly was simply ignored.

It is the sharing out of privileges and control of this internal sharing out that have mainly preoccupied the 'political class'. Newcomers want to quickly compensate for time lost; and longtime bosses don't want to be threatened with legal investigation into the methods of their past enrichment.

In this member country of the Structural Adjustment club, deputies supposedly representing the people have unanimously adopted a monthly salary of more than \$3000, while the minimum wage is not even \$200 and peasants don't even have an annual revenue of \$200 due to insufficient outlets for their products.

Ministers are equally spoiled, and administrative staff are joining the 'big parties' in huge numbers in order to become deputies, ministers, councillors and central directors.

The burning questions for the peasantry — such as outlets for their products and the building of health and education facilities — are not on the order of the day. The withdrawal of the state and blind praise for private initiative will lead to a lowering in the standard of living for the country's peasant population. They will have to work even harder to

meet their basic needs.

Ethnocentrism (tribalist and regionalist) is not a new phenomenon in Congolese political life. Already on the eve of transition from colonialism to neo-colonialism or 'independence', the existing political parties were tainted with an ethno-centric colouring, which transcended their ideological affiliation to socialism, democracy or liberalism.

Jacques Opangault, leader of a socialist-inspired party was seen more as the leader of the northern part of Congo than as a socialist politician. The priest Fulbert Youlou, according to his own claims, was a leader of the Pool region in the south of Congo. He had taken great care to win over the following of André Matsona, a venerated nationalist leader assassinated by the French colonial regime after the Second World War.

In spite of the Youlou-Opangault reconciliation after Youlou's accession to the presidency in the Republic of Congo, the history of the neo-colonial state has been characterised by ethnic patterns of rule.

There is always a clan, a tribe or a region which has a dominant position in the state. After three decades of independence there is more ethno-centrism than there is nationalist consciousness. The proclamation of Marxism-Leninism changed nothing and was even considered as an ideology of the 'northerners' in power.

The opposition politicians from the south fought for capitalism or for social-democratic reformism. As for the so-called socialist regime, it conveniently declared that the local lackeys of imperialism were to be found in the other part of the national territory.

The February 22 Movement cannot be co-opted by the 'political class', not only because it was a Guevara-Marxist-inspired organisation but also because its leadership remained linked to the guerilla up until their assassination in 1973 by military heads still active on the political scene.<sup>3</sup> Their attachment to socialism was stronger than to their ethnic origins. They represented the most advanced stage of nationalist consciousness.

Almost 20 years later, the CNS and the 'democratic opening' have freed ethnocentric forces suppressed by the single party system.

Parties had constituted themselves primarily along ethnic lines, all the while proclaiming the need for democracy, nationalism, social democracy and so forth. The domestic 'death of communism' and the thirst for control of the state — however decrepit it may be — have made multi-partyism a breeding ground for tribalist and regionalist parties.

The easiest way for the various partisans of neo-colonialism to differentiate themselves and acquire an electorate is to proceed

along ethnic and regional lines. Those who not long ago criticised the ethnocentrism of the PCT have proven to be just as bad if not worse. 'Intellectuals' have been busy justifying the proliferation of tribalist and regionalist parties and stigmatised the extremely small minority opposed to these chauvinistic trends.

For administrative layers, membership in a regional or tribal party would prove highly profitable in the event of an electoral win — even in the case of a defeat, since great importance is given to the national unity of the neo-colonial petty bourgeoisie. Easy access to a lucrative social position is set out as the ideal.

It is clear that tribal feeling is used not for the interest of the tribe or the region — those facing specific problems and those which are victims of a specific social injustice — but rather to allow certain minorities to be well placed for the carving up of the national pie.

The people only receive presents at election time. For the fundamental social questions, they are told to look to the IMF and the World Bank — whose demands mean postponing promised happiness to the next mandate.

In a country where neo-colonialism and ethnocentrism were administered for two decades by an officially 'Marxist-Leninist' party-state, the notion of 'left' can not help but be discredited. During the CNS, there were parties which called themselves socialist, social democrat, labour and even communist. But almost all of them have disappeared, overtaken by the tribalist and regionalist parties. Some of them have survived, but only to participate in pro-capitalist alliances and coalitions.

In Congo, currently there are only two leftwing organisations, the Movement for Democracy and Freedom (*Molidé*) and our organization, *La Cause* (People's Association for Self-Emancipation and Control).

*Molidé* evolved from a populist line, which involved participation in the post-CNS transition government, towards a radicalising anti-colonialism. *La Cause* is radically anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist. Ever since the eve of the CNS, we have been arguing for self-management, ecology and feminism — something which seems to be very much against the current these days.

But the objective situation (economic and social) is such that the pro-capitalist electoralist parties can't propose alternative solutions for the problems of their still illusion-

3. M-22 is an anti-imperialist current which entered the PCT and the government. After it broke away, it created the February 22 Movement and took up armed struggle against the government. It was largely dismantled and its leader, Ange Diawara, was executed. One of the current's main documents was the 'self-criticism' on their participation in the PCT government.

filled electorates. There is a consensus currently being forged in the 'political class' around the idea of a strong state and the stepped up violation of basic freedoms — which, if fully enjoyed, would pose a threat to the peaceful implementation and reproduction of the neo-colonial order.

In August and September 1992, we already saw certain violations of press freedom, through the censorship of particular political television programmes. Only *La Cause* and *Molidé* denounced this censorship. The defense of basic rights won in the CNS is not of great concern to the main parties, more worried about administering the neo-colonial state.

For *La Cause*, any radical break from the neo-colonial order — whether single party or multiparty — can only take place with the conscious participation of the people.

We believe, for example, that the question of ethnocentrism can't be fought among the people simply with elaborate arguments about national unity. Rather, it is through immediate and concrete questions in the neighbourhoods, at work and faced with attacks from the state and the complicit pro-capitalist parties.

Resistance against layoffs and the state's PAS-driven neglect of its neighbourhood and village dispensaries — these factors among many others can create solidarity against ethnocentric division, so long as the left is present on the ground.

The Congolese left has to deal with a number of problems:

- The numerical weakness of the industrial proletariat, and tribalist consciousness, even in the unions, which is an obstacle to the development of class consciousness. In the private sector, the employers know how to divide and rule. Nevertheless, in sectors such as the oil refineries there is a tendency towards the development of class consciousness.

- Weakness in rural areas, where problems are many but democratic consciousness is more difficult to develop — given the link between pre-capitalist, kindred social relations, tribalism and regionalism. The autonomous organisation of women will be very difficult, unless the unemployment of young educated women begins to have an impact on the peasant workforce.

- The highly bureaucratic control of the unions and the tendency towards collaboration will not soon disappear.

But it seems that the state has understood the scale of the problems it has to face — thus the search for a consensus around the idea of a strong state. A highly repressive government is needed to push through, as demanded by the IMF and the World Bank, the quick dismantlement of the economically resistant state sector.

Without being statist, we have to struggle for the preservation of these state enterprises, with proposals of workers' control. The privatisation of these enterprises — the sell off to Western capital through their local hatchmen — will lead to massive layoffs, particularly among the unqualified workforce.

The privatisation of the healthcare and education systems will certainly profit a privileged minority, but it will also in all likelihood lead to their quick degeneration. We have to explain to the population, the users, why we need to preserve these gains. The rate of mortality and natal mortality, the progressive removal of children from the school system — these are important questions, particularly in the increasingly abandoned rural areas. In Brazzaville, the population has already seen through the conversion of their general hospital into a university hospital centre — nothing less than a privatisation of quality health services.

In spite of the promises of politicians, students are in a majority condemned to future unemployment. The plan to build a free trade zone is not going to solve the employment problem.

We are concerned by recent developments in Zaire, because we are neighbours with many ethnic groups in common, separated by the infamous borders inherited from colonialism — borders which the people often ignore, above all for material reasons. The bad rural policies of the two governments have led to the development of informal trade — for example, the commercialisation of Zairean staple foods in Congo, in both urban and rural areas. Women cross the absurd borders in order to give birth, since the closest maternity centre is often on the other side of the border. This is also true for certain schools.

The two neo-colonial States have often helped each other out, in spite of occasional friction. The first Republic of Congo-Brazzaville played an indirect role in the assassination of Lumumba, for example. Mulelé was handed over to Zairean President Mobutu; and Mobutu reciprocated with leaders of M-22, Ange Diawara and Ikoka who were subsequently executed. Under Sassou Nguesso, the Congolese and Zairean States increased their collaboration, leading to the arrest and expulsion from Congo of certain opponents of the Mobutu regime.

Democratisation in Zaire is crucial for the future of Black Africa. Unfortunately, imperialism is more aware of this than the African democratic movement — thus the flip-flopping of the imperialist West with respect to Tshishokedi.<sup>4</sup> He is caught between his liberal nationalism and the popular dynamic of resistance to Mobutu, which is accompanied by demands for social justice

that go well beyond the possibilities of economic liberalism.

We often wonder what Africa would be like with a dynamic of radical democratization unleashed in South Africa and Zaire (including Congo). To be sure, this would worry world capitalism, fearful of the extension of the dynamic.

In spite of the departure of French troops after the 1963 popular insurrection, France has remained a central player in Congo's internal political life. In spite of everything, Congo remained a member of neo-colonial continental institutions controlled by France in the Francophone zone.

The worst expression of French colonial control is the currency of the African Financial Community, the CFA franc — representing the dependence of the financial system of former French African colonies on the Bank of France. Economically, the 'Marxist-Leninist' party-state in Congo was more linked to France than to the USSR or China, in spite of the help that these countries brought.

In spite of the nationalisation of French holdings in the 1960s, the French state has always held the lion's share of the resource sector in Congo. The best deal for France is the legal pillage of oil by Elf-Aquitaine under the name Elf-Congo.

The dependence of the Congolese state on oil payments has made Elf a big player in Congo's political life, often leading to strange coincidences. Marien Ngourabi was assassinated in Brazzaville at the very moment when Prime Minister Henri Lopes, in France, was supposed to begin negotiations on changes to the oil agreements. The news of the assassination prevented the negotiations from continuing.

After the transition following the CNS, Prime Minister André Milongo survived an attempted coup d'Etat which followed his insistence that the CNS decision to audit Elf-Congo be executed — an audit that never took place. What's more, France supported and financed certain participants in the CNS, not hesitating to give them support over Radio France Internationale.

For its part, South African capital, always on the lookout for ways to fan out in the region, has been prowling around Congo. And oil interests have been sold to American-Libyan capital in order to pay long overdue salaries to state employees.

While reduced, however, the domination of the French state is not a thing of the past. The Lissouba regime seems to be resorting to the type of blackmail seen in the 'Marxist-Leninist' days: instead of challenging France's dominion with the Soviet threat, Lissouba is doing so with non-French capital. ★

4. Military strongman Mobutu Sese Seko does not recognise Etienne Tshishokedi, currently prime minister of Zaire.

## HOLLAND

THE Netherlands has recently seen its biggest youth upsurge since protests in 1988. Students, pupils, working and unemployed youth have been taking to the streets. But a demonstration on May 8 was brutally attacked by the police.

The Dutch government, keen to meet 'Maasricht' requirements, needs to reduce its financial deficit to 3% of Gross National Product. This will involve public expenditure being cut by 8 billion guilders (\$4.4 billion). The social-democratic Finance Minister has proudly described his budget as "the toughest since World War II".

The targets for these cuts are predictable:

- Youth under 21 will no longer receive any unemployment benefit.
- Youth will be robbed of subsidies for housing but rents will actually be on the rise.
- 50 Million guilders will be taken from public transport.
- Personal contributions to health care will be introduced.
- Public sector wages are to be frozen.

The May 8 demonstration in The Hague, demanding the withdrawal of the cuts programme, mobilised 35,000 youth. Eyewitness accounts claim that the police were looking for any kind of provocation.

Near the Parliament building the police split the demonstration in two. One half, isolated and with no way of escape, were attacked; 250 injured and 38 arrested.

The youth are seen as an easy scapegoat but these developments spell disaster for the whole of Dutch society. Even though all youth organisations have suffered setbacks in recent years protests are set to continue till September 21, when the government presents the definitive version of its cuts package.

New demonstrations and occupations are being prepared by students. Public sector strikes are currently in progress. And a nationwide strike of school youth has been announced for June 10. The latter is the initiative of Rebel, a youth organisation in solidarity with the Fourth International, in collaboration with the National Action Committee for Scholars. — **Barend de Voogd** ★



## USA

MORE than one thousand union activists participated in the seventh Labor Notes conference, held in Detroit, Michigan between April 23 and 25. Participants came from more than thirty American states and represented several local unions and a number of oppositional currents — and, in many cases, the leadership of large union federations.

Participants discussed their concrete experiences in resisting the employers' offensive and in the struggle for democratic and militant unions.

Since the last conference, in 1991, a reform-minded current won the national leadership of the Teamsters — one and a half million members strong — against the corrupt and decaying bureaucracy in power since the 1940s. The rank-and-file Teamsters for a Democratic Union tendency, which supported the new leadership team, continues its work to build a renewed union.

Continental and international workers' solidarity against the North American Free Trade Agreement was given the place of honour in several workshops and plenary sessions — with the participation of some one hundred unionists from English-Canada and Québec and about a dozen from Mexico. Others came from Japan, Brazil, Germany, France, Sweden, Britain and other countries.

However, recent initiatives for working class and progressive political action stole the show. The conference opened with an electrifying speech by Bernie Sanders, who was recently re-elected to Congress on a socialist platform, as a representative of the state of Vermont with 58% of votes cast — against the Democrats and the Republicans.

There are other independent political organisational efforts underway, for example that of Labor Party Advocates, supported by the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW), and the Campaign for a New Tomorrow who ran Black union activist Ron Daniels for president in 1992. — **François Moreau** ★

## TUNISIA

THE general secretary of the General Union of Tunisian Students (UGET), Naoufel Ziadi has been imprisoned. The government of Ben Ali has arrested him on trumped up charges of drug trafficking.

This arrest is part of a wave of repression that was unleashed more than two years ago, and has culminated in the effective establishment of a police state without precedent in the history of the country.

The arrest is a consequence of the government's irritation with the resistance it has encountered to its attempts reform the post-secondary education system — resistance from both students and the teaching staff.

Last month there was a widely-observed strike in this sector, and strikes and protests have spread across the country's universities.

After initial hesitations, the leadership of the UGET got involved in the protest wave; as a result, elections at its 21st congress sparked tremendous interest in the quickly radicalizing student population. The only way to defeat Ben Ali's policy is by strengthening the movement in Tunisia and broadening the international campaign in solidarity with victims of repression in Tunisia.

For the moment, all pressure must be brought to bear on Tunis to demand the immediate release of Naoufel Ziadi. ★



## BRITAIN

THE 3rd *Socialist Outlook* Summer School will take place from Saturday, August 28 to Friday, September 3.

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